



## We need affordable Internet, and now is the time to act

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(Photo: Robert Hopwood/The Desert Sun )

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A Coachella Valley High School student used his school-issued iPad in his special education class to help set up a recycling project for fellow students. His world opened up, his teacher said. But when Eli went home, he had no high-speed Internet connection to do his homework.

In May, the Coachella Valley Unified School District successfully completed a districtwide rollout of iPads to 20,000 pre-K-12 students in 23 schools. But too many of our students, such as Eli, are left in the digital dark after they leave school. It's like going home without the necessary textbook.

I am traveling to Washington, D.C., this week to represent Coachella Valley Unified School District as one of the newest members of the [Digital Promise League of Innovative Schools](#) — just one of 57 districts in the nation selected by Digital Promise to represent the successful integration of technology in the learning process. Digital Promise is an independent, bipartisan nonprofit authorized by Congress.

I will be honored to report that 67 percent of voters in one of California's poorest school districts passed the 2012 bond measure that allowed us to distribute the iPads, making Coachella Valley USD one of the first school districts in the nation to complete a full iPad rollout to every student from preschool through high school.

But when I meet U.S. Department of Education leaders at the White House and the Federal Communications Commission, which is reviewing the proposed Comcast-Time Warner Cable (TWC) merger, I also will deliver this message: We need to make affordable Internet available to all low-income households so our entire community, whether they live in trailer parks or migrant worker housing, can thrive and our students can have all of the tools needed to thrive.

The proposed deal for Comcast to acquire TWC is the "ballgame" for anyone who really cares about improving the quality of life for millions of Californians and for the 20,000 students in our school district, 80 percent of whom live in poverty.

I am joining Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, Los Angeles County officials, former California Superintendent of Public Instruction Delaine Eastin and more than four dozen leading nonprofit organizations from around California to ask the FCC to closely review the proposed Comcast-TWC deal. Should the FCC approve the merger, we are urging FCC to hold Comcast accountable for expanding and improving its affordable broadband offer, called Internet Essentials for families with students on free-or-reduced lunch, which was proposed by Comcast to secure approval of its purchase of NBC Universal in 2010.

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In 3.5 years, Comcast has reached just 14 percent of the eligible households (46,273 out of more than 313,000 eligible households in California). In what classroom is 14 percent a passing grade?

TWC, the largest Internet service provider in Coachella Valley, launched a similar pilot program. By any measure, that program was and is not successful. According to the California Emerging Technology Fund, TWC enrolled just 1,200 families nationally in 500 schools. Comcast has said it will extend Internet Essentials to new customers it acquires under the TWC deal. But the performance of Comcast on Internet Essentials in the recent past is not reassuring. For years, TWC has refused to extend service in many of Coachella Valley's rural enclaves.

Now is the time to hold Comcast accountable and call upon the FCC to require the following:

- Expand Internet Essentials to include all low-income households (especially people with disabilities, seniors and returning vets).
- Set performance standards (reach 45 percent of eligible households in 2 years — which would be about 500,000 households in California).
- Capitalize an independent fund to support community organizations to help reach the new performance standard.
- Establish a national oversight committee to ensure performance.
- Offer stand-alone Internet service.

The five members of the FCC (all appointed by the president) have the fate of 30 percent of the nation's residents in their hands with the authority to make an immediate transforming difference in our communities. The voters have done their part by giving our students the latest devices, now we need affordable Internet in the Coachella Valley.

Darryl S. Adams is superintendent of Coachella Valley Unified School District . Email him He can be reached at drdarrylsadams@gmail.com



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