

# Network Essentials for Superintendents

Upgrade your network for digital learning

**UNDERSTAND.**

**PLAN.**

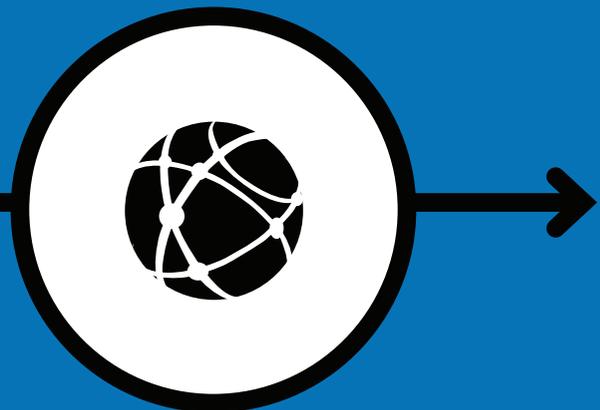
**PROCURE.**



**Education**  
SUPERHIGHWAY

# “ How can I improve my network? ”

As a district leader, you can help most in the planning and implementation of a network upgrade by prioritizing it among other district projects and ensuring that it aligns with your district's educational and technology goals. Your district network upgrade plan should serve as a clear guide for purchasing and management decisions related to your network infrastructure.



# “What qualities should my network have?”

1. Fast enough to meet your educational goals
2. Cost-effective
3. Maintainable over time

“The driver for our technology plan is a clear instructional vision for how it’s going to get used in the classroom. We have a strong vision for grades 4-12 that our students will migrate to project- and problem-based learning. Kids can use these devices to conduct research, be critical users, and produce something.”

*Rosanna Mucetti, Assistant Superintendent  
San Leandro USD, CA*

“Our superintendent was vital in communicating the infrastructure funding needs to our community and to the public and working with the school board on how to frame a referendum question that would be passed. Through surveys and listening sessions with the community, staff and students, the district identified the most important needs for student learning.”

*Bob Boyd, Director of Technology  
Kettle Moraine SD, WI*

**UNDERSTAND.**

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**PROCURE.**

# First, understand your network.



Internet Service Provider

Internet Connection



District Office

Wide Area Network



School

Local Area Network



School

Local Area Network



School

Local Area Network

## Typical school district network.

### Internet Connection.

The network connection to an Internet Service Provider (ISP) that provides connectivity to the broader Internet

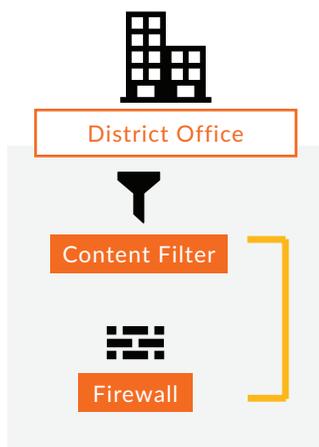
### Wide Area Network.

The network connections between district locations, including the school campuses, district offices, and any support buildings

### Local Area Network.

The network connections within a school or district building, including both wired connections and the equipment used to provide Wi-Fi service

# A closer look.



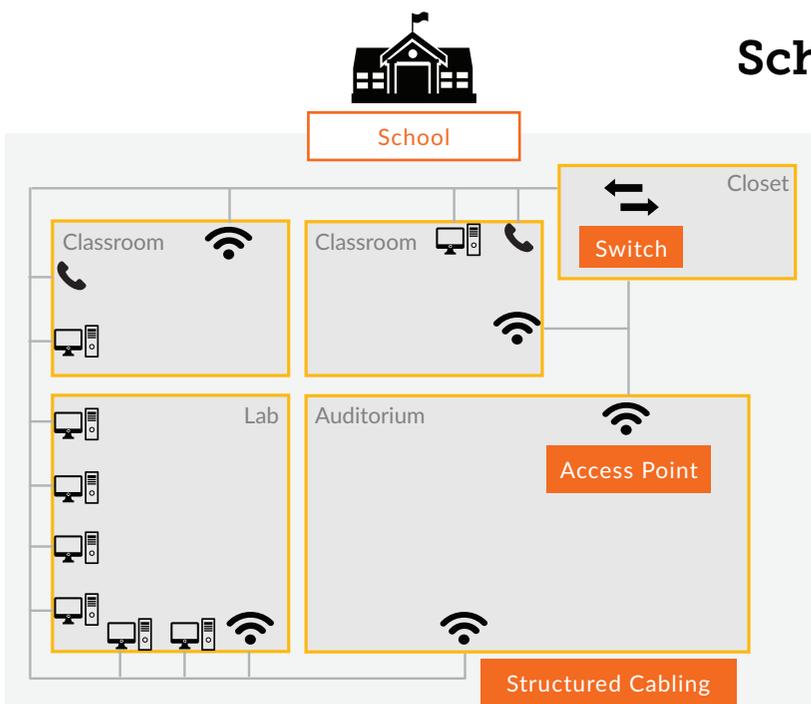
## District core equipment.

### Content Filter.

Only allows access to web content consistent with district policy

### Firewall.

Stops unauthorized access to your network from the Internet



## School local area network.

### Switch.

Connects all cables together to form a single network

### Structured Cabling.

Cables in walls connecting classrooms to the switch

### Access Point.

Allows wireless devices to connect to the school's network

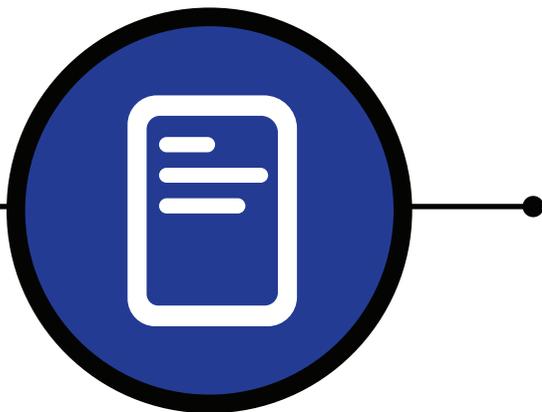
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# Then, plan your network upgrade.

Determining the amount of bandwidth you need should be based on your district's learning goals and the technology you plan to use to support your goals. It can be difficult to arrive at an exact bandwidth number, but often a simple back-of-the-envelope estimate is enough to plan your upgrade. Your upgrade plan should include an estimate of your bandwidth needs for two to three years, as well as options for increasing bandwidth within that time frame.



## What should I include in my upgrade plan?

1. **Tools.** A thorough list of software and online learning tools you plan to use\*
2. **Bandwidth.** A determination of the bandwidth you need based on the tools list
3. **Budget.** A budget to build and maintain your new network

\* Many of your teachers likely use software above and beyond what your district has purchased, so consider developing a survey to get a sense of additional software teachers use on the network.

# How much bandwidth do I need?

The two main drivers of how much network bandwidth you need are:

1. How many user devices you have\*
2. How much the devices will be used

\* Counting the number of district-owned devices should be straightforward, but keep in mind that if your district has a "BYOD" policy or guest network, many students, teachers, and visitors will bring one or more devices of their own to your network.

## What are your learning goals?

### Individual Classroom Technology Use

- Basic network infrastructure for the school is in place; additional classroom use is typically approved by staff and curriculum development.
- Sufficient infrastructure and devices exist to facilitate basic and media-rich assessments or classroom use, but not all classrooms at the same time.

### Everyday 1:1 Campus-wide Technology Use

- Technology is widely available; most students interact with a computing device most school days.
- All teachers have basic digital literacy.
- Digital curriculum, but not necessarily rich media, is a major part of one or more subject areas.
- Teachers and students expect the Internet to be available when they need it.

### Media-rich Blended Learning Technology Use

- Every student has a technology-enabled learning experience during the school day.
- Video and other rich media are used as a crucial part of the everyday learning experience.
- Instruction would not be productive if the Internet were unavailable for a day.

#### Moderate Bandwidth

1 Access Point per 1.5 Classrooms  
 100 Kbps per student Internet bandwidth

#### High Bandwidth

1.2 Access Points per Classroom  
 1 Mbps per student Internet bandwidth

#### Very High Bandwidth

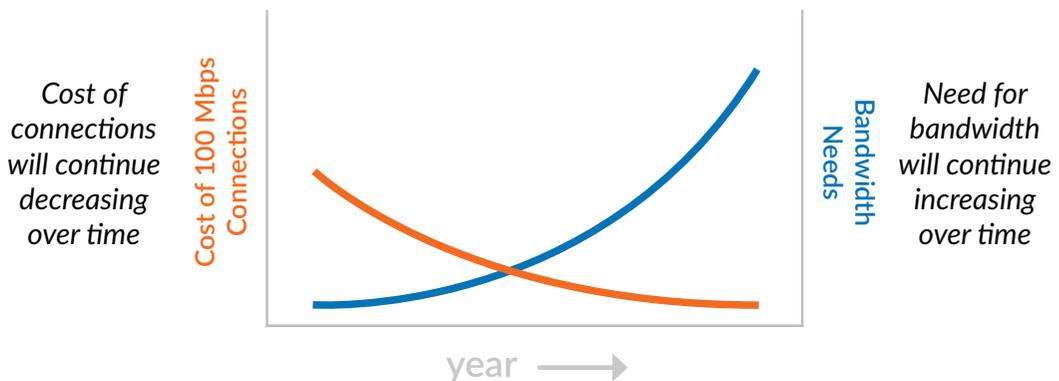
1.2 Access Points per Classroom  
 1+ Mbps per student Internet bandwidth

# Upgrade on a timeline that's best for you.

Upgrades can be done all at once, or the work and costs can be spread over time. Consider which approach best matches your goals, resources, and budget process. There is nothing wrong with upgrading many parts of your network at once if that's what it takes to meet your learning objectives, but it can be more cost-effective and easier to budget upgrades spread out over time.

## How should I plan for bandwidth growth?

We recommend *planning* for five years, but *purchasing* for the upcoming two to three years. Trying to “future-proof” your network to last five or more years is usually not cost-effective, since both bandwidth needs and pricing change rapidly.



# Customize your needs.

## **Match your WAN bandwidth to your Internet bandwidth.**

Your total wide area network (WAN) bandwidth across all buildings should be at least equivalent to your Internet bandwidth; WAN may need to be much more depending on applications that may be running just on the WAN but not on the Internet outside your district network, like network-enabled security cameras.

## **Cloud-based computing affects bandwidth needs.**

If your district is shifting to cloud-based applications and storage (applications and storage on the Internet rather than on a local server), this may accelerate the growth of your Internet and WAN bandwidth needs. All network traffic will flow locally through the WAN as well as out through the Internet connection.

### **How should I plan for online assessments?**

If your district's plan over the next three years focuses on deploying enough technology for online assessments, your bandwidth and Wi-Fi needs will depend on:

1. Where assessments will be administered (e.g., gymnasium, computer labs)
2. The number of students expected to take assessments simultaneously

Your team must first figure out the logistical plan for assessment, and the network plan will follow. We recommend, however, that your network plan and investment cover what is needed for digital learning, not only online assessments.

# Assemble your team and manage expectations.

To build a good upgrade plan, you need the right team in place. Make sure you assemble a cross-functional team that includes:

1. Technical expertise
2. Instructional input
3. Business coordination

If you don't have the right expertise in-house, consider external resources from your education service agency or local consultants.

## How do I build support for network investment?

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Since the costs and tradeoffs around building school networks are not obvious to most people, you should communicate early and often to all stakeholder groups for feedback, buy-in, and support, just like any other significant district project. Include your vision and plan for the network in your overall technology plan.

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We meet once a month with the presidents of the PTA. We share with them what's going on with technology, and they go back and meet with the parent groups at their schools. They've been a great sounding board for us.”

*Matt Miller, Superintendent  
Mentor Public Schools, OH*

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# Finally, procure your network.

Having a reliable network that supports your learning goals must be balanced with the cost to build and maintain that network. Network costs break down into one-time expenses and recurring expenses, so you must consider both when determining what you can afford. The sources of upgrade funds and how they may be spent will drive how you divide the funds between the two expense categories.

## ONE-TIME EXPENSES

- Equipment purchases
- Installation of wired connections to classrooms
- Equipment closet accessories
- Fiber WAN / Internet installation

## RECURRING EXPENSES

- Monthly broadband fees
- Licenses for network devices
- Managed services
- Maintenance and support

# How does my pricing compare?

Our research has shown that school districts across the country pay vastly different prices for similar broadband services. Simply understanding how your pricing compares to your neighbor's and to your state's benchmarks can help you reduce expenses and achieve average or better-than-average pricing. Price transparency will help your team negotiate better pricing and understand how much of their limited time and resources should be allocated to that endeavor.

## What funding sources should I consider?

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1. Your normal operating budget
2. One-time capital sources (e.g., bonds)
3. The federal E-rate program (offers subsidies for network equipment and services)
4. External funding options (e.g., state telecommunications funds, private philanthropy)

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We were able to really keep our budget flat—or in the past three years actually reduced it. We've been able to do more with less money just by shopping around, not taking the first price, or staying with what we have.

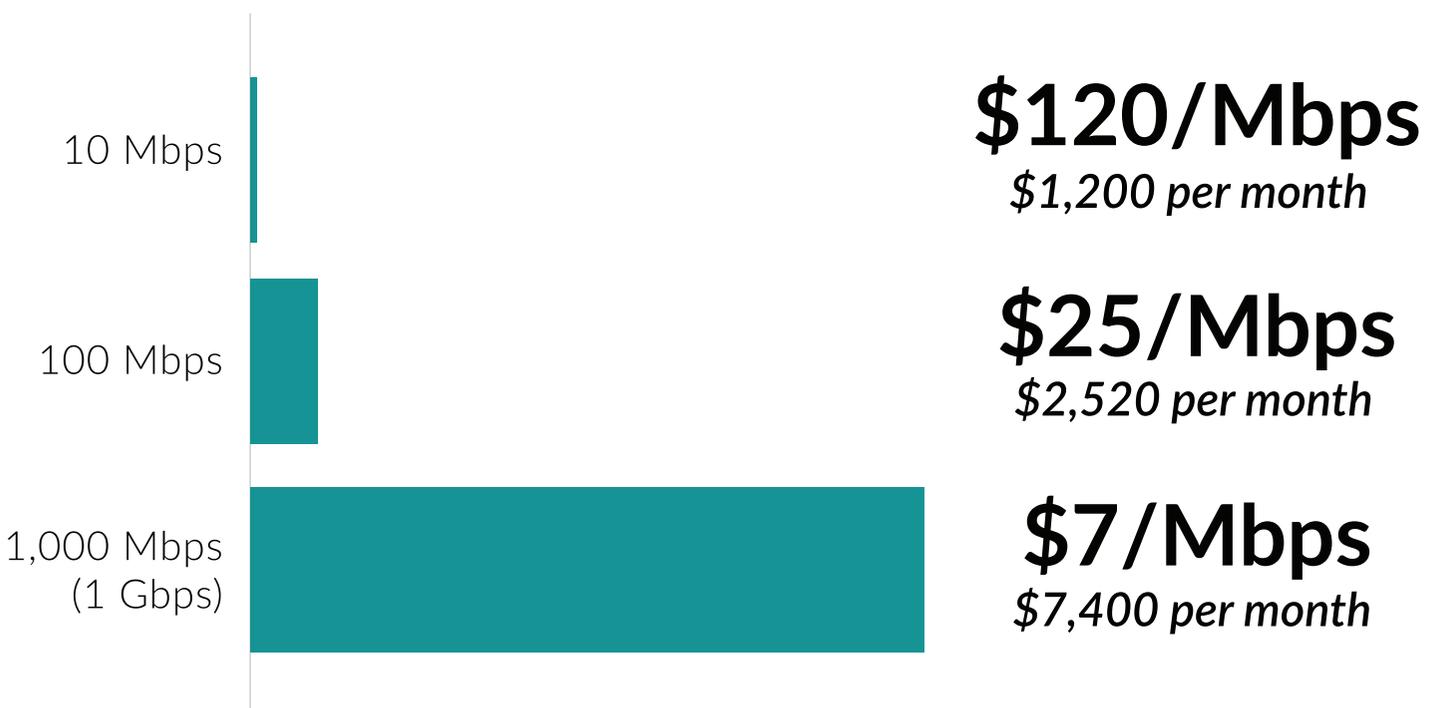
*Joseph Kuzo, Director of Technology  
Quakertown Community SD, PA*

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# The cost of higher speeds.

When purchasing Internet access, buying higher bandwidth connections usually results in drastically lower prices per megabit. Evaluate the price of different speed options compared to your bandwidth needs (based on your learning goals). This will help you make the right tradeoff between getting the most speed per dollar and keeping overall costs down.

Monthly Cost for Internet Access  
 (2013 Lit Fiber Averages)



Source: "Connecting America's Students: Opportunities for Action." EducationSuperHighway, April 2014

# Who should I buy from?

## What are my options for managing my network?

It's easy to focus on an upgrade project as a once-every-few-years event, but your plan needs to include the staff time or outside help to keep the network functioning and reliable. Depending on your district's size and the technical resources available, you should consider all of the options for effectively managing the network, including cloud-based management features, consultants, vendor value-added services, and in-house staff.



## Internet Connection and Wide Area Network.

Both the ISP and WAN connections are most often purchased from a service provider like an area telephone or cable company. There are also companies that specialize in institutional-grade fiber connections, and if one or more of them serves your area, it is likely you'll get better pricing.

## Local Area Network.

Most LAN costs are non-recurring equipment costs. There are many vendors and products to choose from, so having a good handle on your technical, physical, and operational needs will give you the flexibility to pick the best solutions. For example, if your classrooms need updated wiring, that will likely be your biggest expense. But, creative problem solving can greatly reduce labor costs — such as rearranging technology resources around shared walls to limit the number of walls that need to be opened.

# How do I get the best deal?

1

**Design a competitive purchasing process.** It can help you determine which suppliers are best able to deliver a quality network. Having reference costs from your peers and at least three different vendor RFP bids will help your team negotiate the best price.

2

**Coordinate your technical and business teams.** A close working relationship throughout the procurement process will avoid miscommunications and increase your chances of being able to take advantage of a great deal.

3

**Hold suppliers accountable.** Support your team by helping to ensure that suppliers deliver as expected, by removing internal barriers, and by keeping all stakeholders on the same page.

4

**Leverage expertise, but control the outcome.** Many suppliers will have more expertise in their specialty area than your team. One of your challenges is to include suppliers in your process enough to gain the benefit of that expertise while making sure that your team maintains ownership of decisions.

5

**Manage risks actively.** Make sure your team meets regularly to assess and address potential project risks. For example, if you might add new online learning tools that require more bandwidth, make sure your Internet access and WAN contracts include a provision to increase bandwidth during the contract for a pre-negotiated fee.

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The more people you get competing for you as a customer, the better. Don't just post an RFP; put it on your website, talk to local media. Be very vocal about it. In the end it's going to save you big bucks.

*Will Kerr, Director of Technology  
Reynoldsburg City Schools, OH*

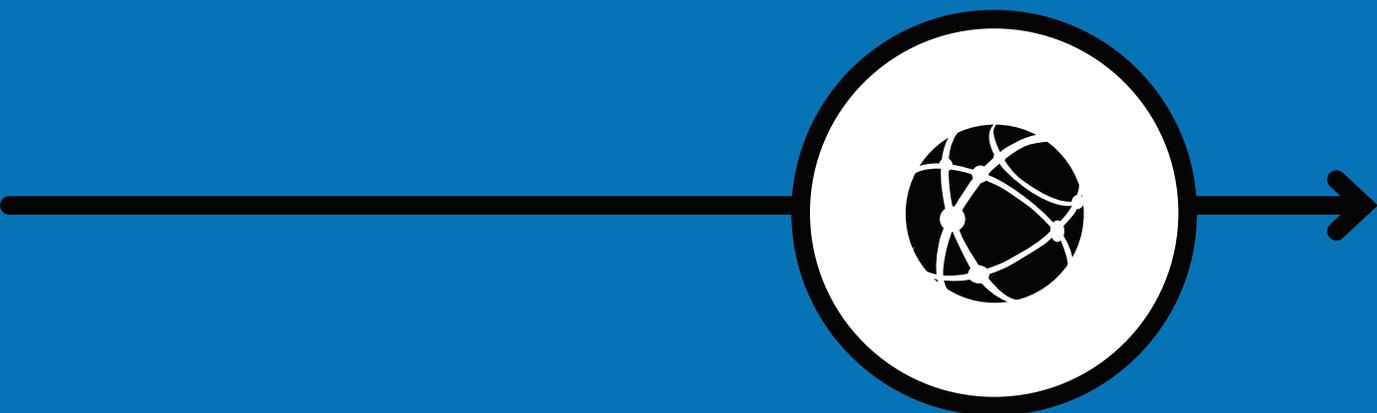
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# Where do I go from here?

If you need additional help as you plan a network upgrade, there are resources available.

EducationSuperHighway is constantly working on new resources to ensure that every school has reliable, high-capacity Internet access. Check [www.educationsuperhighway.org](http://www.educationsuperhighway.org) for the latest tools.

For additional upgrade guidance, apply for EducationSuperHighway's District Network Upgrade Coaching program.



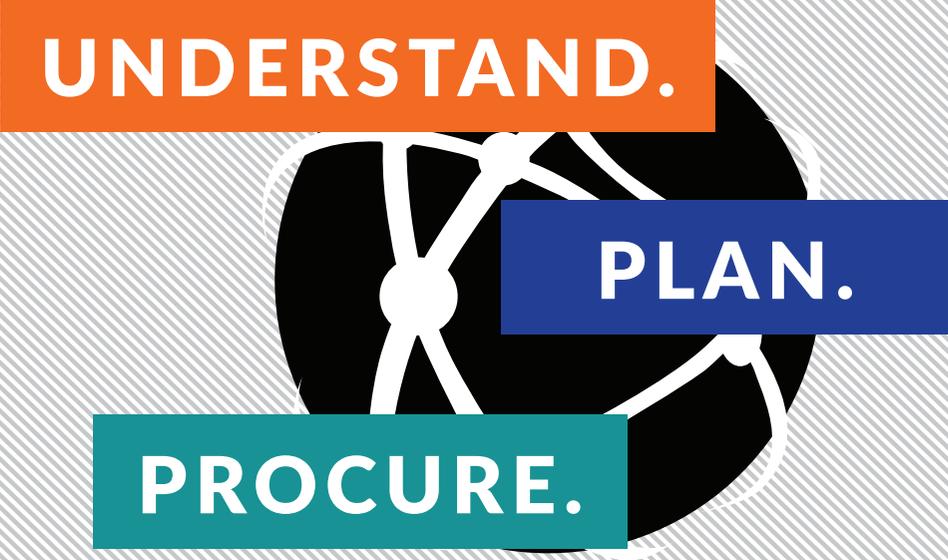
## About EducationSuperHighway

EducationSuperHighway is the leading non-profit focused on upgrading the Internet infrastructure in America's K-12 public schools. We believe that digital learning represents an unprecedented opportunity to provide every student with equal access to educational opportunity and that every school requires high-speed broadband to make that opportunity a reality.

EducationSuperHighway's data-driven programs help accelerate upgrades in America's schools. We work to raise awareness of the school connectivity gap, provide technical and procurement expertise to states and districts, and advocate on behalf of students to influence policy decisions. Our work has helped shape President Obama's ConnectED initiative and served as a catalyst for modernization of the Federal Communications Commission's E-rate program.

Contact us at [info@educationsuperhighway.org](mailto:info@educationsuperhighway.org)  
Visit us at [www.educationsuperhighway.org](http://www.educationsuperhighway.org)  
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**UNDERSTAND.**

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A small investment of time from district leaders can yield a big impact on the way students and teachers leverage technology to improve learning opportunities.

This guide will assist district leaders in understanding, planning, and procuring the network essentials that create a strong foundation for digital learning.