**Internet access crucial to education**

**Recent shift to online learning puts priority on wider access**

By Emily Cox

**By Ernest Rollins**

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Since the COVID-19 pandemic caused all school buildings in the state to close, many school districts transitioned to e-learning. They did so without time to adequately prepare, and while students have been provided by schools, the issue of access to reliable internet access remains for many — particularly students.

Bonk, a professor of instructional systems technology at Indiana University, predicts that going forward, the state will *provide more money for access and internet accessibility*.

Bonk is a former Indiana CPAA, has his master’s and Ph.D. degrees in technology, and has authored a number of books about emerging technologies for learning. “They won’t want to look back in the same predicament they’ve been in today, to come home and not be able to access the internet,” Bonk said.

Monroe County’s public school districts, the Monroe Community School Corporation and Richland-Bean Blossom Community School Corp., are one-to-one, meaning there is one electronic device for every one student. These districts are using a combination of zoom meeting and physical learning packets. While there are some districts providing Monroe County and at schools, some students are still a way to get to them.

In rural communities, Bonk said going forward there’s going to be some form of internet service that have broadband, and that’s going to have to be federal and state level in nature.

Ges: Eric Holcomb has a 100 million minutes to improve broadband access in rural areas of the state, and grants started being issued last year. The Next Level Connections Broadband Grant Program has grant applications open, with the deadline extended because of COVID-19.

“The state will have more empathy for the students out there. The state department and all educators will become more empathy to the needs of the teachers and students they don’t want to be embarrassed again by having kids go home in districts where they haven’t provided the resources,” Bonk said.

In a brainstormed video on March 2, Jennifer McCormick, state superintendent of public instruction, said the issues are not just the students but the teachers and all educators will become more empathy to the needs of the teachers and students they don’t want to be embarrassed again by having kids go home in districts where they haven’t provided the resources, “Bonk said.

Bonk pointed out another possible way to make content available to K-12 students. Schools could provide a memory stick or something akin to every student, so all the course content could be available for them at the start of the semester. This could help students who are provided a device by a school district but don’t have internet access or a strong connection at home.

“They won’t have to worry about the internet access at any point in time, except when it relates to current news or current events updates,” Bonk said.

With the e-learning period during the COVID-19 pandemic, Bonk said there will be more awareness about how students have been experimenting with online learning, which has been taking place for decades.

Bonk thought the second fully online class in the IU School of Education and is likely one of the first to do blended learning — a combination of online and face-to-face instruction — in 1993. Students and teachers learning communities online, and while they’ve been resistant, because teachers are used to taking those experiments and make them into something real, “Bonk said.

“It’s not the pandemic that’s going to take those experiments and make them into something real, because teachers are used to taking those experiments and making them into something real,” Bonk said.

In March, standardized tests in Indiana were canceled in response to COVID-19. But with a break from standardized testing, teachers have been experimenting with innovative teaching methods and seeing the results of that soon, Bonk said.

“Technology isn’t Bonk, said it “gets in the way of the back door”. He said a lot of progressive education has happened through project based learning, which was learning, in a sense, and more innovative education is going to happen as a result of technology access and more training.

“There’s a number of things that will springboard from that, I don’t know how broad, but change will happen,” Bonk said.

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