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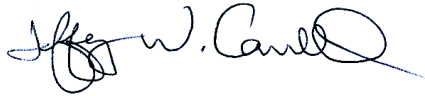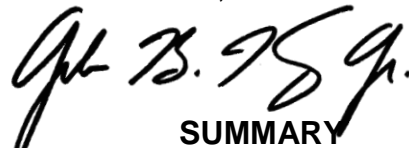
TO: Cultural Education Committee

FROM: Jeffrey Cannell

SUBJECT: Update on Broadband Deployment in Public Libraries

DATE: October 10, 2014

AUTHORIZATION(S):

SUMMARY

Issue for Discussion

The state of broadband deployment in New York's educational system with emphasis on broadband adoption and use in public libraries.

Reason(s) for Consideration

For information.

Background Information

In light of the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) recent notices regarding modifications to the federal regulations governing the Universal Service Corporation (E-Rate), the new state law enabling BOCES to broker broadband services, and other proposed initiatives to increase broadband awareness and adoption we are providing an update on broadband deployment in public libraries.

The state's schools and libraries have grown to be important community partners in the delivery of flexible and robust broadband services. These services provide secure, reliable, frequently available, non-commercial and monitored access to online services on which communities and users depend. These services include access to:

- e-government resources (for filing taxes and connecting to social services)
- employment services (including help with resumes and making/filing job applications)
- training (learning new skills on-line and increased digital literacy and fluency)
- distance learning (including teleconferencing services now offered by libraries)
- medical services (including tele-medicine)
- educational services (including on-line assessment)

- information and knowledge services (including full text books, periodicals, government publications, etc.)

Annual report public library data indicates that each year more New Yorkers are taking advantage of such services at their local libraries. 2013 annual report data indicates approximately 49,000 formal program sessions concerning one or more of the above services, with over 257,000 participants. A recently completed three-year federal broadband grant awarded to the Department reported over 770,000 hours of digital literacy instruction in the above services with over 715,000 participants.

The needs are even greater than the existing infrastructure will support. President Obama and FCC Chairman Wheeler have announced ambitious plans to invest an additional $2 billion to grow broadband capacity. New York libraries are planning to be able to move quickly to capitalize on potential new capacity and to expand upon past federal and state initiatives which have enabled expansion of broadband capacity and programming.

There are still 35 public library buildings (3%) in New York State that do not have the equivalent access to a T-1 line, including the lack of wireless services, largely due to geographic and financial challenges and the lack of broadband vendor availability. Many of these libraries are in Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Chautauqua, Cattaraugus, Delaware and Otsego counties. In approving the Statewide Learning Technology Plan in February 2010, the Board of Regents set 100Mbps as the speed threshold for broadband and reaffirmed that target in December 2012 for the State's public libraries. 2013 annual report public library data indicates four percent of the State's 1063 public library buildings have achieved the 100Mbps standard and 46% of public library buildings have less than 10Mbps.