STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS CONCERNING HOTSPOTS AND INTERNET
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Eligibility

1. **Do I qualify for a free hotspot or internet service?**

   The State of South Carolina is using federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding to support internet services for student households through December 2020, under a program administered by the S.C. Office of Regulatory Staff (ORS).

   The state and federal laws have eligibility requirements:

   - The household must have a student in public or private K-12 school, or in higher education in South Carolina; AND
   - The household **does not** have internet; AND
   - Internet service for that household **was not** in the district's budget on March 27, 2020; AND
   - Internet is necessary as a response to COVID-19; AND
   - Household income is at or below 250% of federal poverty.

   ORS will issue only one hotspot per household.

   Wired internet service can also be funded under this program. For a listing of the vendors with contracts to provide wired service through the program, please see the ORS website.

2. **We qualify. How do I get a hotspot or wired service?**

   ORS is coordinating internet and hotspot orders through the public school districts, public charter schools, private schools, and higher education institutions. Families that believe they qualify should contact the school or district.

   You can find contact information for the South Carolina public school districts at https://ed.sc.gov/districts-schools/schools/school-directory/

If you are not sure of the proper person to contact in your district, please email Hotspots@ed.sc.gov with the name of your district, stating you need to make contact related to ordering internet or hotspots, and we will respond with the contact information we have related to the program.

3. O**ur household is eligible, but I missed my district's deadline for applying for a hotspot or internet. What do I do now?**

Although the ORS program had a deadline for districts to place orders, the ORS is still willing to take later orders from districts, subject to availability of equipment and funding for the program. As to hotspots, please know that the vendors prepare the equipment with added content filtering software and device management. Because of that addition, the vendors are taking two to four weeks to ship orders. In addition, other states are also having issues related to home internet for distance learning, and high demand is causing equipment inventories to decline. Therefore, even if your district places a late order for you, fulfillment of that order depends upon inventory and funding, and delivery may take a month.

4. **I am home schooling my child. Are we eligible for a hotspot?**

The state law authorizing internet for student households specifically mentions students enrolled in public and private school. It does not mention home schooling. Therefore, home schooled students are not covered in this program.

5. **We have internet, but the service is not sufficient for online learning by multiple students. Are we eligible for a hotspot?**

The laws authorizing this program are only for households that do not have internet at all.

Other Programs

6. **Our household is not eligible for the ORS Hotspot and Internet Program. What other options do we have for low-cost internet for online learning?**

Your School: Some public school districts are assisting families in obtaining internet service for online learning. We recommend that families first ask their district whether they have such a program. (Please note that a district is not required to use its funding for this purpose, and has many competing priorities for the use of these funds.)

Your Library: Some county libraries have instituted programs allowing students to check out Kajeet internet hotspots as they would a library book. Please check with your local library to determine whether it participates in that program and has hotspots available. For general information, please see https://guides.statelibrary.sc.gov/accesssc

Low-cost Options: Some internet service providers are offering low cost internet to some families under some conditions. Offers vary by vendor for the service area, cost,

data caps, and eligibility requirements. You can find a listing of these vendors at www.everyoneon.org.

AT&T Access, $10.00/month (plus tax) for eligible households.

Comcast XFinity Internet Essentials, $9.95/month (plus tax). Households in certain federal programs, including VA Pension, may be qualified.

Cox Connect2Compete, $9.95/month (plus tax) for eligible households.

Spectrum Internet Assist, $14.99/month (plus tax). Eligible households include those in the National School Lunch Program through Community Eligibility.

Other providers also have special programs in response to COVID-19. Please check with the service providers in your area to determine whether it is offering such a program and whether you may be eligible.

Service in 2021

7. We have a hotspot in the ORS program, but the service ends in December. What do we do then?

The federal legislation currently only authorizes use of those funds through December 2020. Therefore, unless Congress changes the law or extends that authorization, the ORS program will end in December.

Public school districts have other federal funding for response to COVID-19 that has longer authorization periods. Some districts are reviewing whether to provide home internet services with that federal funding. Please check with your school district to determine if that is an option. Please note, however, that school districts are not required to use this funding for providing home internet, and there are many competing priorities for use of funding.

Some private schools are also receiving federal funding for response to COVID-19. Please check with your school to determine how it is using those funds and whether home internet service is available through the school.

Internet Not Available

8. We received a free hotspot from the district, but it isn't working well for online learning. What can we do?

The ORS is willing to work with districts to try other vendors' devices or wired internet to assist families in getting good internet service. When you received the device, you should have gotten information from your district on how to seek assistance. The district can then contact ORS for options for your household.

9. **There is neither wired internet nor cellular service in our area. How do we get internet for our student to engage in online learning?**

   The state legislation also authorizes ORS to use federal funding to plan internet expansion in South Carolina. ORS is mapping internet availability, and funding infrastructure to support the public health emergency and distance learning. For information on this program, and to view maps that might indicate whether your home is in a priority area, please go to https://ors.sc.gov/broadband/south-carolina-broadband-infrastructure-program

   For students who cannot get internet in the home, there are free internet options available in the community in some school parking lots, at churches, in libraries, and on school bus routes. The websites wifimap.io and wifispc.com offer information on — and maps of — free community internet.