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ACA Connects and EducationSuperHighway today announced they are partnering in support of the "K-12 Bridge to Broadband" initiative to connect students with online learning. Under this program, broadband service providers help school districts and states identify students that lack broadband at home and then supply these connections.

"The K-12 Bridge to Broadband program is a great opportunity for ACA Connects members to support students, schools, and their communities. We are honored to join with EducationSuperHighway in this initiative," said ACA Connects President and CEO Matthew M. Polka. "Broadband is essential for students, and never has this been truer than during the COVID-19 emergency. Without robust broadband connectivity for online learning, students who need to learn from home will be left behind, and that is simply unacceptable. The K-12 Bridge to Broadband program is targeted at addressing this problem, and our members are well-positioned to help. In communities across America, they have deployed high-performance networks that can deliver broadband service to students in need."

Providers that participate in the program agree to follow a set of core principles, which include creating a "sponsored service" offering that schools can purchase on behalf of students; working with schools to identify unserved student homes; standardizing eligibility; facilitating enrollment; and abiding by privacy protections. "EducationSuperHighway is excited to partner with ACA Connects on the K-12 Bridge to Broadband program," said EducationSuperHighway CEO Evan Marwell. "Meeting the connectivity needs of students will take broadband providers of all sizes and in all areas, including the community-based providers that make up ACA Connects' membership. We are thrilled to have them on board."

ACA Connects announced that Armstrong and Atlantic Broadband are among its member companies participating in the initiative. – **ACA Connects news release**

Comcast said Tuesday that it will give \$10,000 grants, make free commercials, and offer other support to small businesses hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic.

The Philadelphia media giant said it plans to help thousands of businesses over the next three years, especially Black-owned firms that have suffered the most during the crisis. The company noted that the number of Black business owners in the U.S. [plummeted 41%](#) from February to April, according to a study from the National Bureau of Economic Research. By comparison, overall small business ownership dropped 22% during the same period.

The support from Comcast comes as local government and business leaders have pushed for supporting diverse businesses to help [fuel an economic recovery](#). Even before the pandemic, there were huge racial disparities in business ownership in Philadelphia, with far fewer businesses owned by people of color, according to recent research from [Pew Charitable Trusts](#) and [the Center City District](#). Meanwhile, the number of small businesses open in the Philadelphia region was [down 24%](#) from January to September, according to the research group Opportunity Insights.

Starting Tuesday, Black-owned small businesses can apply for marketing, technology support, and equipment from Comcast. That includes free production of a 30-second commercial, a 90-day media campaign, and marketing consulting from Effectv, Comcast's ad sales division. The company also promised to give firms equipment and free internet, voice and cybersecurity services for up to a year.

Comcast said it will also award grants of up to \$10,000 each for small and diverse businesses. The company didn't disclose how many firms would receive grants or how much the initiative would cost the company, saying only

that “thousands” of firms would receive support. “We see and know firsthand how vital small businesses are in powering economic growth, recovery and innovation,” said Teresa Ward-Maupin, senior vice president for digital and customer experience at Comcast Business. “Now more than ever, driving awareness and maintaining a strong digital presence are crucial for these businesses to succeed.”

A second wave of the program will open up eligibility to include indigenous and other people of color. Eligible firms can apply at ComcastRISE.com. Businesses must be based in the U.S., at least 51% Black-owned and operated, and in business for at least a year to qualify. In addition, all small businesses can sign up for free marketing insights and resources, the company said. The support for small businesses is part of a larger [\\$100 million initiative that Comcast launched](#) in June to combat racial injustice.

– *Philadelphia Inquirer*

With three weeks to go before the Nov. 3 election, more than 2.6 million registered voters have applied for a mail-in ballot in Pennsylvania, a battleground state hotly contested by President Donald Trump and Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden.

Of those applicants as of Tuesday, more than 1.7 million are registered Democrats and about 641,000 are registered Republicans, a three-to-one ratio, according to state data. Another 284,000 ballots were requested by independent or third-party voters. All but about 70,000 have been mailed to voters, according to state data. Allegheny County has reported that more than 20 ballots with the wrong races were sent to voters, but the county on Tuesday did not have a figure for the total number.

Of all the ballots mailed out, more than 437,000 have been returned by voters. Democrats also dominate in that category, with 338,000 ballots returned, versus 64,000 by Republicans. In 2016, 6.1 million voters in Pennsylvania cast ballots, with fewer than 300,000 of those cast by mail. Mailing back ballots is not the only option for returning them.

More than 20 counties have informed the state elections bureau that they are maintaining sites to hand-in ballots, such as drop boxes or satellite election offices. Filled-out ballots can also be brought by hand to county election offices. In the meantime, partisan lawsuits over Pennsylvania’s poll-watching restrictions, the deadline to receive mail-in ballots and counting mail-in ballots where a voter’s signature may not match are pending in state and federal courts.

At the same time, closed-door talks between Gov. Tom Wolf, a Democrat, and Republican lawmakers are stalled over the question of whether to let counties get a head start on processing mail-in ballots before Election Day. The top priority of counties is to get the ability to process mail-in ballots before Election Day — called pre-canvassing — as they face the prospect of digging into 3 million envelopes or more when polls open on Nov. 3. Processing ballots before Election Day would speed up the vote count and give it more public credibility, county officials say, warning that a presidential election result otherwise could hang in limbo for days on a drawn-out vote count in Pennsylvania. – *Associated Press*



127 State Street, Harrisburg, PA 17101
717-214-2000 (f) 717-214-2020

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