



Cisco's Global Education group is actively engaged in the work of transforming education systems to meet the needs of 21st century learners, educators, and organizations. This transformation will require a shift in the way teachers teach, leaders lead, and students learn.

# Educator Brief

## Engaging Partners to Increase Digital Equity in Low-Income Communities

### Hattiesburg Public School District

LOCATION: Hattiesburg, Mississippi  
NUMBER OF SCHOOLS: 9  
NUMBER OF STUDENTS: ±4,400

GRADES: Pre-K through 12  
SCHOOL STRUCTURE: Urban  
PERCENT OF STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH: 92



#### The Objective

Since nearly 92 percent of students within the Hattiesburg Public School District in Mississippi are eligible for free or reduced lunch, district leaders wanted to improve student performance by increasing access to basic digital literacy tools such as computers and the Internet in students' homes and within the community.

#### The Process

As a participant in the Cisco® 21st Century Schools Initiative (21S), the Hattiesburg Public School District turned to nonprofit organization and Cisco partner One Economy Corporation for help. The district and One Economy took the following steps to improve digital equity among students and within the Hattiesburg community:

- Identified community needs using extensive demographic research, including focus groups with low-income community members
- Developed a program, known as a digital inclusion blueprint, for bringing technology into the community
- Implemented an affordable PC program for district staff, students, and families, who were given the opportunity to buy an affordable desktop or laptop computer preloaded with software
- Worked with a local credit union to develop a loan program allowing families to put down as little as \$50 and pay the balance at reasonable terms and interest rates
- Organized a community open house at a district high school to educate community members about the program and give them the opportunity to order affordable PCs

- Promoted the program to community members and the local media and encouraged attendance with a drawing for a free computer
- Developed procedures to ensure the program became self-sustaining, such as bulk ordering for schools and districts, online ordering for community members, downloadable promotional materials, customizable online newsletters for schools, and periodic online training for staff

#### The Outcome

The district's affordable PC program continues to help move community members into the economic mainstream. More than 250 community members attended the first open house, and parents were able to place orders there or through the district anytime during the school year. More than 100 families have taken advantage of the low pricing and purchased their first computer.

#### Lesson Learned

Leaders at Hattiesburg Public School District helped ensure a successful partnership by selecting a partner that shared their objective of increasing community access to basic digital literacy tools. By pooling their resources and focusing on their respective strengths, the district and One Economy were able to efficiently work toward their common goal. Through this experience, the district learned that schools and community organizations must take ownership of the development process to deliver sustainable programs.

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