

Author: Hadli Krog
Minneota High School

Broadband internet allows users to have access to information through the worldwide web which uses high-speed and efficient technology. Broadband internet is a vital part of everyone's life and improves lives of those in rural areas. Since COVID – 19, there has been a growing number of people who work from home which requires reliable internet. *The US. News* states, "In 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, 5.7% of working Americans were working from home. But that percentage grew to 17.9% in just two years, reflecting an increase of almost 19 million workers"(usnews.com). The number of people working from home is growing along with the number of individuals being homeschooled. Since the pandemic, many parents have decided to homeschool their children which means reliable internet in rural areas is a necessity to getting a proper education. *The Pine County News* says "Minnesota has seen a 39% increase in homeschooled students since the 2017-'18 school year, traditional snow days have been replaced with E-learning days or online learning days, which are essentially, regular classes held on a video chat. To attend your classes and to complete homework, you need quality internet. Not only are there growing numbers of online workers and homeschooled individuals, but more and more students in high school and college are taking their courses online, which again, requires high-speed internet.

Broadband internet can improve the lives of many, but it does come with some challenges. A clear connection can be difficult due to the number of trees and obstructions surrounding the rural locations. The number of devices connected at one time can cause delay in service. There are also many power outages due to the weather which causes this type of internet to be essentially useless. One of the most challenging aspects of broadband is that it can be expensive for rural families.

Policies should be established at all levels of the government that allow internet connectivity to be affordable and accessible to everyone. *Minnesota Reformer* states "More than 150,000 Minnesota households don't have access to high-speed broadband internet, a longstanding disparity that experts say is even more troubling now that residents are asked to stay home from work" (minnesotareformer.com). Many people do not have landlines anymore, which means they rely more on their mobile cell phones. This requires a strong internet connection. Rural communities are already limited on the availability of ambulatory services which means a policy needs to be put in place that every rural community has access to strong, high-speed internet connection in case of an emergency. The safety of the public should be the number one priority. This can be supported by strong broadband internet access to everyone, no matter the location.