Background/Purpose:

The Buffalo Public Schools (BPS) has made the health and safety of our students, faculty, staff and community our top priority. To that end and in light of recent state of emergency declarations by state and local officials due to COVID-19, large-scale social interactions are limited and our schools are closed until April 20, 2020.

To ensure that children and families have access to as many learning and social-emotional wellness resources as possible, the BPS has implemented a number of instructional plans and wellness supports to provide continuity for our students.

As COVID-19 is an ever changing and evolving situation, the district understands that there could potentially be a need and an opportunity to expand technology and digital access to learning and wellness for students. The purpose of this plan is to outline the needs that are paramount to ensuring technology availability and equity along with adequate resources to support instructional and social-emotional wellness continuity to the students of the Buffalo Public School district.

Strategic Vendor Partners (to be selected in compliance with State procurement law and District policy) may include: Sprint, Verizon, Dell, Apple, Texas Instruments (TI), Toshiba, HarpData, AIS, Clever, Schoology, Workplace by Facebook, and Pearson

Proposed Solutions:

Computer Devices

- **Students** – During the COVID-19 school closure, grades 9-12 were allowed to sign devices out and take them home for continued learning. Over 7,500 devices were distributed to high school students to provide digital continuity of education during the closure. **After we have pressure tested the grades 9-12 computer device distribution and take home process, the district will expand computer devices for take home to include students in grades 3-8.** Additionally, through the Smart Schools emergency funding request, the overall inventory for student devices will be augmented to be able to refresh and provide replacement computers when necessary to ensure there is no instructional down time. Additionally, for grades K-2, the district will request emergency funding for upgraded tablets loaded with educational games and activities for continued learning **along with tools parents can use to monitor their child’s online activity and screen time.**

- **Teachers** – The district will request emergency allocation from the state via the Smart Schools funding to refresh and upgrade computer devices for teachers to enhance remote delivery of instruction. Upgraded computers would include camera and microphone functionality to provide increased effectiveness in collaboration between teachers and students and more opportunities for innovative instruction and learning.

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• **Employees**– All non-instructional staff may require digital remote capabilities for daily operations and collaboration. Through the Smart Schools emergency funding request, the overall inventory for employee devices will be augmented to be able to refresh and provide devices for use and replacement when necessary to ensure there is no operational down time that could impact the district’s support to teachers and students.

• **Parents** – The BPS uses a variety of communication tools to ensure continuity of learning. These tools include text/telephone via School Messenger, district email, video conferencing, social media platforms, the District website, Infinite Campus Parent Portal, and Schoology, our learning management system. The district also provides language access support for families who speak a language other than English. All teachers and school leaders have access to an application called Talking Points which is used to communicate with families in their preferred language.

**Mobile Hot-Spots**

The BPS recognizes there is a digital divide within our parent and family community. In an effort to bridge that divide and provide another option for internet access at home, the district will:

• Distribute additional parent and teacher surveys which will be used to ascertain the precise need to close the digital gap for home internet access for students and teachers. Initial data regarding the necessity for a mobile hot-spot was obtained from grades 9-12 when devices were distributed upon closure of schools. The aforementioned additional surveys will be distributed through the district’s call and email system in order to obtain more information.

• Procure mobile hot-spots to be made available throughout the BPS student community and if necessary, teacher population based survey results and pending requested emergency Smart Schools funding. The district is securing 2,000 hot-spots in an effort to bridge the digital divide for 9-12 student households.

**Cell Phones**

The district will ensure staff has the technology to facilitate effective internal and external communication for instructional continuity. Cell phones may be distributed to additional staff as indicated by survey results.

**Software Applications**

Instructional applications and online course materials to facilitate remote learning along with technology support to more effectively collaborate and communicate is being researched and will be implemented as survey results indicate pending requested emergency Smart Schools funding.

Other tools the district will use as part of the emergency funding request include:

• Additional video conference tools/licensing to complement the use of computer cameras and microphones for innovative instruction and learning. This feature allows teachers to hold live classroom video sessions which includes the ability to blend students into smaller groups, share documents into white boards, and engage in live collaboration with one another.

• **Monitoring tool for K-2 students’ parents to effectively supervise their child’s online activity and screen time usage.**

• Clever Goals which allows teachers and administrators to obtain progress reports for tracking students’ progress goals.

• Evaluation/data analytics software(s) to monitor the usage and efficacy of the student learning applications and teacher instructional applications.

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• Gaggle (Google) which provides students with communication programs and functionality along with filters and monitoring options that are designed specifically for the classroom setting.
• Additional wireless equipment, licenses and other enterprise chat and technical support solutions to interface and expand remote support for students, families, and staff.
• ERP system (MUNIS) upgrades for employee self-service, online requisition process, online extracurricular activity, and content management thereby streamlining processes to allow school based staff more capacity to focus additional time on instruction.

Technical Support Resources for Teachers, Students, and Families

The district will develop a robust technical support structure for remote instructional continuity that includes:

• Developing virtual office hours and encouraging student participation from the BPS Student Technology Leadership Program (STLP) into the support structure for remote student device support.
• Developing virtual office hours with increased instructional and technical resources to help support school based staff with troubleshooting issues and implementing innovative ideas and solutions.

Current Costs:

For school year 2019-2020, the BPS has committed $11,867,258 for the maintenance of computer devices, learning resources, data center upgrades to support the 1:1 device expansion, and technical support for teachers, students and families through Board approvals of general fund, grants, and Smart Schools’ funds. In 2017, Smart Schools funded $21 million to implement the district’s 1:1 classroom technology initiative as part of the New Education Bargain. There has been no refresh of devices or establishment of replacement spares since the completion of that initiative during the 2019-2020 school year.

Estimated New Costs:

In order to implement and execute a robust instructional continuity plan with innovative technology, additional funding of $9,126,807 is required to support the aforementioned areas of computing devices for K-12 students and BPS staff (refresh and inventory), mobile hotspots, cell phones, software applications, and increased technical support equipment and resources.

Summary:

The BPS is committed to supporting the continuity of education through innovative technology solutions and support during the COVID-19 crisis. We are in constant communication with our students and families and with our school based staff to support and address their ongoing issues and needs. Through the district’s digital citizenship program, students are made aware of guidelines for the responsible use of technology and best practices to minimize excessive screen time. Further, there is continual thought partnering between Curriculum and Instruction, the Office of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Initiatives, Information Technology, and all BPS Executive Team Members regarding innovative technology solutions and ideas to facilitate the expansion of instructional continuity throughout this very challenging time for us all.

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