

Public board testing faster internet for students

By Sarah Sobanski

Hastings Prince Edward District School Board is improving internet speeds for its students.

Board senior information and technology officer Kelvin MacQuarrie attended HPEDSB's January meeting to discuss the development of its broadband internet innovation centre in Belleville. Five other centres are being built across the province in North Bay, Guelph, Thunder Bay, St. Catharines and Toronto.

The Bellville centre, built in the board's W.R. Kirk building, will alleviate the need for area schools to reroute multiple times before connecting to the internet. This 'essentially direct' connection will allow for faster speeds, communications officer for the board Kerry Donnell explained.

'Hastings and Prince Edward [District School Board] was selected to be the host of this BIC for all of eastern Ontario,' she said. 'It is essentially a testing centre.'

The centres are 'strategically' based across the province to 'test them before they're rolled out to schools,' Donnell explained.

HPEDSB has been selected for a BIC to test for 'all the schools in eastern Ontario.'

Fourteen years ago the board was providing internet services to its students at five megabytes per second. Donnell said this connection was shared with each of its schools.

As internet technology became more advanced, the board moved to 10 mbps with all schools. It then jumped to 3,000 mbps through a partnership to keep the technology cost effective. The partnership included the Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic, Limestone District School Board, and Queen's University.

'Even though that was a significantly higher connection speed the way the internet signal got to a school wasn't direct... A school connected through to here at the education centre in Belleville where the signal then went through our web filters and our anti-virus servers to Queen's in Kingston. Then it was routed to Toronto and then that's where the final internet connectivity happened.'

She added, 'There was four hops before someone at the school was actually connected to the internet. It was much better than what we had, in terms of speed, but it wasn't very flexible' There were similar things happening across the province.'

Donnell said the Ministry of Education was aware of these connectivity issues and decided to provide support. The goals of the project are to 'assist school boards in providing an adequate level of connectivity to schools with a target bandwidth of one mbps per student or per staff member,' she said.

'Goal No. 2 is to provide affordable and sustainable connections to internet providers and the third, and this is their wording, is to uplift infrastructure where there's little or no internet service in order to provide equitable access to all students.'

The board's BIC is expected to be up and running in the coming months.

'Schools in eastern Ontario will be able to learn how they can set up their networks so they can provide environments for students and staff to connect to the internet safely and securely,' said Donnell.

Naloxone kits coming to public board secondary schools

HPEDSB and Hastings Prince Edward Public Health have partnered to bring Naloxone kits to area secondary schools.

According to public health, Naloxone 'can temporarily stop an overdose caused by opioid-like drugs, including heroin, morphine, fentanyl, methadone and codeine.'

Donnell said the kits would be kept in a secure location and that they were a 'proactive' measure.

'This is also something that's happening across the province,' she said. 'Staff will be trained on a voluntary basis.'

Donnell compared putting the kits in schools to putting defibrillators in schools. Other schools can [choose one of the top AED models for school use](#). A defibrillator was needed just last year at an evening event outside one of the board's elementary schools.

Having it in the school saved a life.

'If there is cause to use [the Naloxone kits] on anyone in the school then they are there,' said Donnell.