

Technology Department
February 2018

Possible network improvements

Several RFP's have been submitted to USAC/E-rate for potential bids for upgrading the underground network infrastructure. The closing with USAC/FCC was February 22. We will run these through a rubric, compare with what funding options may be available from USAC and a remote chance with the State of Montana and move forward next fiscal year if any of the proposals benefit the school district.

E-rate and telephone costs

As we have made you aware, e-rate for telephone costs have been no friend to the district. We will soon be entering the 10% 2018-19 reimbursement year for our landlines including voice and fax and what tidbits are left for cellular. Compared to the "good 'ole days" of 90% reimbursements in 2014-15 and before, the added financial burden will be \$75,000-\$80,000 per year. There is one option that could net a savings of \$1450 per month (\$17,500 per year) on our land lines but could potentially mean occasional busy signals calling in or difficulty getting a line to dial out on as we would be eliminating 23 of our existing voice lines that are currently shared by Elementary, KW, Vina, Middle and High School campuses. Our concern would be making sure we had lines to call out on. This is assisted by the use of cell phones in an emergency as around 95% of our buildings have some coverage inside of them.

Cell phones

I have been reworking some of our cell phones and the plans they are on to save the district money. Already some phones have had their service terminated with Verizon Wireless and now using Tracfone service that ironically runs on the same Verizon network. This is making sense for low use phones such as our school nurses and the phones on standby in the transportation department. When we moved our transportation phones to the lowest cost service available to include texting, our district cost went from \$277 per year to \$450 per year we could achieve on the government plans available to us. Migrating those phones to Tracfones, having the same quality of service using Verizon towers, using the same phones we already had goes from \$450 per year down to \$130 per year saving \$320 per year per phone. The nurses have had the older flip phones and no texting so their annual cost will reduce from \$277 to \$130 per year saving \$147 per year for our 3 school nurses.

Going forward we will continue to look at other phones, their use and move them to alternative plans if they provide the same level of service with lower costs for the district.

Web Site and ADA Compliance

Coming soon will be a new site for the district. Look for future board reports to inform your about R.A.N.C.H. as guiding principles for the redesigned website. All design elements will come together so that anyone with a disability such as limited vision/blindness, mobility preventing use of a mouse device or hearing impaired individual will have the same opportunity to view and consume the same as any individual without some of these disabilities.

It has taken a bit more time than anticipated as several school districts/schools are implementing changes and reviewing current sites/practices so that we can avoid our phone call and complaints from the Office of Civil Rights (OCR). Also complicating the process is defining exactly what does being accessible mean. The good news we are able to be methodical in implementation rather than having plans of improvements like some districts in Montana and around the country are under.