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Joint Press Release

Orange County Public Schools Receives Telecommunication Grant

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Orange County Public Schools is pleased to announce its receipt of a fiber optics project grant from the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC). USAC is a federal agency that provides assistance to schools and libraries for telecommunication costs. In the past, the school division has received grant funds for projects such as internet connectivity and wired and wireless network replacement. When first made aware of the ability to use grant funds for fiber projects, school administrators approached the county government to determine interest in collaborating in a joint project to increase bandwidth throughout the county.

Mrs. Sherrie Page, Board Chair, shared her excitement about the project and her gratitude for the work staff members have done to make this possible. "I appreciate how hard Darrell Hatfield, his staff, and the division administration have worked to obtain this funding. And, I am glad we were able to extend this partnership to the County in order to increase broadband services to the community." After months of detailed work, the receipt of news of the grant award was met with both excitement and relief. Mr. Hatfield, Director of Technology, stated, "I'm very excited about this project because it removes the current bandwidth limitation for students and staff and will allow us to prepare for future online/network instructional activities." The partnership with the County means that instructional programs and services will extend beyond the school walls to reach more homes in Orange than ever before.

The Orange County Broadband Authority (OCBbA) congratulates Orange County Public Schools for receiving the grant which will assuredly advance the learning environment. This fiber optics network will serve as a catalyst for implementing the OCBbA's *Rural Broadband Initiative*. The overarching goal of this long-term project is to provide Orange County's residents and businesses currently not served by broadband with affordable, reliable high-speed broadband. Mr. Jim White, OCBbA Chairman, said, "We thank the School Board and Superintendent Dr. Brenda Tanner for allowing us to partner on this project and look forward to realizing the many wide-ranging benefits which will come to our community as we move forward." Mr. Mark Johnson, OCBbA Vice Chairman added "The fiber optics network project coupled with our *Rural Broadband Initiative* will be transformative for Orange County in any number of ways including education, economic development, public safety, and healthcare."

In partnership with Orange County Public Schools, the OCBbA will begin implementation of the *Rural Broadband Initiative* in the coming year. While affordable, reliable high-speed broadband is urgently needed now in the unserved areas of Orange County, it should take several years for this project to be realized given the complexity of the technology used and the resources required.

For more information contact Darrell Hatfield, Director of Technology, OCPS, at 540-661-4550 (dhatfield@occs-va.org) or Bryan David, County Administrator, OCBbA, at 540-672-3313 (bdavid@orangecountyva.gov).

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