



SSDA and Owens Valley Celebrate Successful Completion of CPUC Grant, Bringing Digital Equity to Rural Schools



The Small School Districts' Association (SSDA), in partnership with Owens Valley Unified School District and surrounding communities, proudly announces the successful completion of the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) Digital Divide Grant. This one-year initiative has significantly improved digital access for small and rural schools, marking a major step in closing the technology gap for students in some of California's most remote communities.

The "Rural But Not Disconnected" initiative was launched to address the urgent need for high-speed internet access in small and rural districts, where students often face limited connectivity at school, home, and while traveling. According to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), rural students were twice as likely as urban students to lack adequate technology for coursework during the pandemic.

Recognizing the importance of digital equity, SSDA worked to ensure students in rural districts have the same learning opportunities as their urban peers. A key achievement of the initiative was equipping school buses with Wi-Fi, allowing students to stay connected during long commutes—some exceeding 30 minutes each way. Additionally, new computers were provided to students, replacing outdated devices and enhancing engagement and instruction.



Owens Valley Superintendent Dr. Rosanne Lampariello Cameron reports that the Digital Divide Grant has made a significant, positive impact on the instructional program for the



district's students, from TK to grade 12. "We may be rural and remote, but thanks to the CPUC Digital Divide Grant funding, our students are CONNECTED! From the latest Chromebook technology to mobile hotspots to internet connectivity in our vans and buses, OVUSD students are able to access a wide variety of instructional tools, programs, and support...all made possible by this grant," said Dr. Rosanne Lampariello. "We are truly grateful to the California Public Utilities Commission and SSDA for this incredible opportunity to enhance our students' education."



Beyond the classroom, the initiative also addressed the need for parent engagement in digital learning. A remote training program and a comprehensive needs assessment were conducted by Copernicus Solutions to support families in the Owens Valley Community. This [assessment](#) encompassed conversations, surveys, and an on-site evaluation anchored on five key factors:

Internet Access, network infrastructure, devices, support, and training, navigating the new digital landscape.

The project has been especially impactful in supporting Native American communities, where internet access remains a challenge. In Owens Valley, where 21% of students identify as Native American, this initiative has helped bridge longstanding educational inequities by ensuring reliable connectivity and modern technology for all students.

"This program showcases SSDA's commitment to meeting the diverse needs of small and rural schools," said Karen Mix, Co-Director of CS4NorCal. The success of this initiative underscores the power of partnerships and the importance of continued investment in digital equity for all students.

Looking ahead, SSDA remains dedicated to advocating for small and rural schools, securing future funding, and ensuring these districts stay connected in an increasingly digital world.

Yuri Calderon, SSDA Executive Director, states, "The 'Rural But Not Disconnected' project has set a precedent for what is possible when schools, communities, and organizations collaborate to provide every student with the tools they need to succeed in the 21st century."