



UMB News

UMB, Comcast Bring Internet Access to West Baltimore

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The University of Maryland, Baltimore & Comcast to Provide Up To 1,000 Families in West Baltimore With Internet Service

UMB Partners with Comcast to Sponsor One Year of Internet Connectivity to Up to 1,000 Families from 14 Different Partner Schools in West Baltimore

BALTIMORE, MD. – In an effort to bridge the digital divide, the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) has partnered with Comcast to provide Internet service for up to 1,000 families from 14 different partner schools in West Baltimore for a period of one year.

This initiative began in June 2020 when the UMB Community COVID Recovery Task Force petitioned UMB President **Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS**, to bring Internet access to the students and neighbors in the surrounding West Baltimore communities. Jarrell was happy to approve the funds needed to provide this essential resource to up to 1,000 families using the Comcast Internet Essential program as a means to deliver Internet service.

[Internet Essentials](#) from Comcast brings affordable, high-speed internet, normally priced at \$9.95 per month, to low-income households. Through this sponsorship program, UMB will cover the cost of the service for 12 months so that community members can stay connected and students can have much needed access to online learning and other resources. And since Comcast is offering two months of free Internet Essentials service through the end of 2020, families who were not previously signed up for Internet Essentials will enjoy 14 months of Internet service.

About one-third of Baltimore City residents do not have access to broadband Internet in their homes. This has become particularly problematic over the last year due the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtual learning has made Internet access a necessity for students in order to stay connected to their peers and continue with their education.

“It’s so important that the students have an appropriate level of Internet access in their homes not just for their studies, but also to maintain a sense of normalcy,” says **Peter Murray, PhD**, vice president and chief information officer at UMB.

Jane Shaab, UMB's associate vice president for economic development and co-chair of the UMB Community COVID Recovery Task Force agrees, "This need was driving all of us from the start because we knew without Internet access many families in our community and their children would be left out," she says. "As an educational institution, UMB cares deeply about how people learn and what they learn, so connecting our neighbors with this vital service is a priority."

Since the end of September, UMB has been utilizing their community school coordinators to directly reach out to families from its 14 partner schools (see list of participating partner schools below).

So far, UMB and Comcast have identified around 600 families in need to Internet access and have set each of them up with a self-installation kit. With the self-installation kit, the families can safely set up an Internet router without having a Comcast representative enter their home in-person. In addition, Comcast has a direct customer service line for Internet Essentials that the families in this program can call if they need assistance with setting up their Internet service.

"We're proud to embark on this partnership with UMB to connect so many families in West Baltimore to high-speed Internet," said Misty Allen, vice president of government and regulatory affairs for Comcast's Beltway region. "For more than a decade, Comcast has been dedicated to bridging the digital divide in Baltimore and across the nation with our Internet Essentials program - which to date has connected millions of low-income families to the Internet."

Providing this Internet service has made an incredible difference for entire families. Not only do the students have readily available access to their schoolwork, but their parents also have readily available access to telework capabilities, electronic bills, job applications, and more.

Robert Jackson, who has an eight-year-old son at James McHenry Elementary Middle School, was able to utilize this Internet access to help his son stay connected with his teachers and even secure a new job for himself.

"Before I was using the hotspot on my phone or I was taking [my son] Raquan somewhere else with Wi-Fi to do his schoolwork," he says. "Now that we have Internet access, I was actually able to fill out a couple of job applications and I had a few interviews. Then finally, I did find a new job as the supervisor for housekeeping at Future Care. It feels great!"

Providing this essential service is also aiding the Baltimore City School System in their own effort to bridge the digital divide in Baltimore. There are around 85,000 students in the city's school system and through this initiative, UMB and Comcast have provided support to a significant number of those families in need of Internet access.

UMB hopes to continue expanding on this partnership with Comcast and is exploring opportunities to bring Internet access to senior citizens in the community, as well as extending the sponsorship beyond one year of coverage.

Participating Schools

1. Booker T. Washington Middle School
2. Charles Carroll Barrister
3. Eutaw-Marshburn Elementary School
4. Excel Academy at Francis M. Wood High School
5. Franklin Square Elementary/Middle School
6. Furman Templeton Preparatory Academy
7. George Washington Elementary School
8. Harlem Park Elementary/Middle School
9. Historic Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Elementary School

10. James McHenry Elementary/Middle School
11. Renaissance Academy
12. Southwest Baltimore Charter School
13. Steuart Hill Academic Academy
14. Vivien T. Thomas Medical Arts Academy

About the University of Maryland, Baltimore

Founded in 1807, the University of Maryland, Baltimore is Maryland's only public health, law, and human services university, dedicated to excellence in education, research, clinical care, and public service. UMB enrolls 6,700 students in six nationally ranked professional schools — medicine, law, dentistry, pharmacy, nursing, and social work — and an interdisciplinary Graduate School. The university provides more than \$40 million each year in uncompensated care to Maryland citizens, and receives more than \$667 million in extramural research funding annually. For more information about the University of Maryland, Baltimore visit www.umaryland.edu.

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