



North East Carolina Preparatory School distributes mobile hotspots to **keep classrooms connected for remote learning**

Distance learning is more than a logistical challenge.

William J. (Joe) Etheridge, executive director of North East Carolina Preparatory School (NECP), has been in education for more than 40 years, and for the last five years has been fully dedicated to improving NECP's academic achievement record. Mr. Etheridge stated, "We're very proud of the fact that for the last three years 100% of our graduating seniors were accepted into a two- or four-year institution." The need to adopt a remote learning solution fundamentally changed his game plan, but he was unwilling to sacrifice his students' potential or success.

Almost all schools have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in some way, requiring a sudden implementation of remote learning technology. But schools have unique needs and challenges: large vs. small, rural vs. urban, etc. NECP is one of those rural schools, with over 75% of students in need of a way to access the internet or risk being unable to participate in remote learning, which would cause them to fall behind.

When COVID-19 became a public health issue, the school closed. Like many school districts, NECP didn't have time to prepare or create any kind of strategic digital solution for remote learning. So, the teachers prepared paper homework

“The board wanted us to offer competitive internet provider options. I will unequivocally say that U.S. Cellular, by far, provided the best service for us because they delivered hundreds of hotspot devices, that were good to go right out of the box, literally overnight.”

— William J. (Joe) Etheridge,
Executive Director of NECP



packets for the students to continue learning. With a hybrid approach anticipated for the fall, NECP had to pivot once again as they decided it was best to proceed with a 100% virtual plan, all with little time before the school year was to begin. This created a situation of unprecedented urgency, and Mr. Etheridge suddenly had to find a distance learning solution, which included finding several hundred hotspots for the students, essentially overnight.

Bigger Need Than Anticipated

Like almost all schools quickly pivoting to remote learning solutions, NECP had little time to prepare, but they didn't anticipate how great a need there would be for getting their students connected. They obtained 200 mobile hotspots from a well-known service provider that they planned to distribute over a three-day period. However, they quickly realized that the demand exceeded the amount of available hotspots and were faced with a need for 300 more hotspots – by the next day.

The school had already organized a three-day pickup window with their students, so inability to deliver the promised hotspots would mean many disappointed and frustrated parents and kids – disrupting, and potentially delaying, the remote learning plan and start of school.

And worse, NECP was informed that the original telecom service provider could not immediately deliver the extra

hotspots that were needed. So, Mr. Etheridge called his local U.S. Cellular® business representative, who was able to arrange the delivery of the hotspots the next day. U.S. Cellular's commitment to their solution and service was the critical support that NECP needed in order to come through with the commitment they had made to the community.

It quickly became apparent that the U.S. Cellular hotspots were much easier to distribute. The devices the other service provider offered required the NECP IT director to prep each device before distribution, which demanded more time and attention, further complicating an already-challenging scenario. The U.S. Cellular hotspots were ready to go, right out of the box – for a quick and easy pickup for students and their families when they arrived.

“Parents on social media are singing our praises because the remote learning experience for our students is so much better than what kids are getting in other school systems.”

– William J. (Joe) Etheridge,
Executive Director of NECP



Customer Profile

Business Type:

- Rural, Public K-12 Charter School

School Size:

- 955 students, 75 teachers

Location:

- Tarboro, Edgecombe County, North Carolina

Challenges With Remote Learning:

- School largely serving rural area
- Rapid implementation
- High percentage of students without access to the internet

U.S. Cellular Solutions:

- Easy-to-use hotspots
- Reliable network that works in rural areas
- Support from local experts

Favorite Features:

- Dedication to client service

Results:

- Over 200 hotspots distributed
- Successful launch of remote learning program
- Learning continuity for students
- Relieved parents

“When I saw the difference in customer service between the other carrier and U.S. Cellular, I told my IT director to stop passing out the other carrier’s devices and start giving parents these U.S. Cellular devices because they provided better customer service when we needed them at the last minute.”

– William J. (Joe) Etheridge,
Executive Director of NECP



In an effort to do everything possible to best support the school, the U.S. Cellular representative went to the school in person to field any questions or concerns that might arise during the distribution plan. Once that phase was complete, Mr. Etheridge was able to consistently reach the representative when the school needed him. The representative acted quickly, and was dedicated to providing Mr. Etheridge, teachers and the students’ families with the peace of mind that they’d have access to the connectivity they needed and that this would be another successful school year at NECP, despite the crisis of a global pandemic.

A True Commitment to Education

Mr. Etheridge and NECP are deeply committed to improving the educational opportunities for the children in their school. For example, they identified ways to address the unforeseen expenses of implementing a 100% remote learning solution, and they were able to find creative approaches to financially

support this endeavor, such as using grant money and lowering other routine costs for a now-empty school. Now, they hope other districts can see their working model and mirror the successful approach.

NECP students, because of dedicated administration, hotspots and U.S. Cellular, have access to a working remote learning solution. And because of the support that U.S. Cellular provided, NECP plans to continue using the hotspots to strengthen the school’s remote learning programs as they move into the future, by offering tutoring and additional summer learning programs.

To see how U.S. Cellular can help the schools in your district,
call 866-616-5587 or visit [uscellular.com/business/remotelearning](https://www.uscellular.com/business/remotelearning)

U.S. Cellular has extensive experience supporting schools and offers remote learning solutions powered by a nationwide, fast and reliable network. Our team of local Business Solutions Experts is working in your community already and can help successfully support your distance learning programs.