

Wilber-Clatonia Public Schools

900 South Franklin St.
P.O. Box 487
Wilber, Nebraska 68465



To Whom it May Concern:

I am Raymond Collins, Superintendent of the Wilber-Clatonia Public Schools. Our system provides educational services for students in and around the village of Clatonia, Nebraska. This letter is in support of a project to bring Fiber Broadband Infrastructure to Clatonia, notably:

Service provider: Nextlink

Project Name: Nextlink Clatonia Fiber Project

Description of Proposed Project Area: Fiber in Clatonia

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During the COVID 19 Pandemic our school system was forced to send students and staff home for an extended period of time. We were tasked with providing education opportunities to students typically using on-line learning options. We struggled to be effective in this task due to slow speeds, lack of sufficient bandwidth and in some cases lack of access to internet services either due to none being available or due to financial reasons. The School District provided devices to use however we encountered challenges notably when several students living in the same home or area needed to be on-line at the same time to ZOOM with teachers. They either were unable to connect or would freeze and require a re-start. The apparent reason was slow speed caused by poor infrastructure or the sheer volume of people needing on-line at the same time (including parents working from home).

We also found that some 20% of our students (120) did not have access to internet at all either due to the cost or lack of a connection sufficient enough in their specific area.

These challenges continued in 2021 and beyond for those students who have utilized our mental health services via telehealth and for those students who have needed to stay at home for extended periods of time due to exposure or illness or out of an abundance of caution. Our experience with on-line learning was so bad that we have stopped offering it as an option.

Even today the struggle continues as more and more educational materials are coming out in an on-line format and the lack of adequate infrastructure and access due to availability or financial hardship causes us to carefully consider the purchase and use of on-line educational resources. This could hamper our students ability to live and work in an increasingly tech filled world. Ultimately this could limit their ability to compete for economic viable jobs and keep people from moving into our area to live or work. For all of the above reasons I am firmly in support of any project the will improve rural broadband and high quality internet connections in our area.

Raymond D Collins, Superintendent
Wilber-Clatonia Public Schools

February 21, 2023