



NEWS

January 6, 2021

County of San Mateo Continues Digital Inclusion Initiative by Expanding and Improving SMC Public WiFi

Latest Digital Inclusion Initiative milestone adds 13 new outdoor locations

Redwood City - The County of San Mateo continues building on its Digital Inclusion Initiative with the launch of 13 new SMC Public WiFi locations at outdoor and SMC Park and Connect sites across the county. The newly expanded SMC Public WiFi locations include:

- Daly City – Daly City Community Center, Doelger Senior Center, Lincoln Community Center and Midway Village
- Brisbane – Brisbane Community Pool
- South SF – Magnolia Senior Center, South San Francisco City Hall, Miller Avenue Public Parking Garage, South San Francisco Adult Probation Office, and Orange Memorial Park
- San Mateo – Health and Human Services-WIC and San Mateo Medical Center

The County has also partnered with the Peninsula Library System and San Mateo County Libraries to extend their existing library public WiFi networks for outdoor internet access at 12 sites. This allows library patrons, students and the public to use WiFi networks even when the libraries are closed.

The San Mateo County Digital Inclusion Initiative accelerates the availability of free wireless internet access to students and the public in response to the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The latest SMC Public WiFi sites were strategically selected based on data provided by the County's 23 public school districts identifying areas within the county where students had reported connectivity issues at home.

The latest expansion of SMC Public WiFi and library public WiFi networks provide free wireless internet access to approximately 1,428 K-12 students who had reported connectivity issues at home and live within a half-mile radius of the 25 locations, along with all the other residents who reside near these sites.

“The digital divide in Daly City existed before the pandemic and has only grown more important with COVID-related school closures. We are thrilled to partner with the County on the new, public WiFi that will be available outside many of our facilities for use by students and our wider community. It’s essential that we provide this free public internet so that all our community can remain connected to information, services and each other during the pandemic,” said Daly City Mayor Juslyn Manalo.

These new sites were funded using a portion of the \$6.3 million CARES Act dollars allocated by the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors to address the digital divide and challenges COVID-19 created for K-12 students and school staff who had to quickly shift to online learning.

“When the schools had to close due to COVID-19, it had a measurable impact on many children in our community who did not have internet service at home. It not only put them at risk of falling behind in school, but in the many opportunities to come later in life. We made a real difference today with the latest expansion to the SMC Public WiFi network, and I’m looking forward to continuing this success by providing more in our community with access to the internet,” said District Two Supervisor Carole Groom.

District Five Supervisor David Canepa shared a very similar perspective on the importance of and need for connectivity in the present day.

“The internet is heavily integrated into the learning process of students today. When COVID-19 struck our community, many students and their families fell behind because they didn’t have internet service at home. Today’s expansion of the SMC Public WiFi network eases the impact and is one of many steps we are taking to bring internet access to everyone.”

Despite the wide geographic spread and large number of the new SMC Public WiFi locations and libraries, the latest expansion, from start to finish, was completed in two months to support the second half of the school year starting in January 2021.

The aggressive schedule was made possible by a broad coalition of public, education, community and industry partners collaborating together in new and innovative ways. These partners included the County of San Mateo, the San Mateo County Office of Education, school districts, the San Mateo County Libraries and the Peninsula Library System, cities, and technology service providers including Kaizen Technology Partners, IT Management, SmartWave Technologies, Sabro, Eaton & Associates, and Strategy of Things.

“Access to the internet is a necessity in modern society and the pandemic has made clear that it’s time to treat the Internet as a utility just like water and electricity,” said District One Supervisor Dave Pine. “The successful expansion of SMC Public WiFi is a step in the

right direction in ensuring that all members of our community have access to the Internet and the countless opportunities it affords them.”

“We were challenged to get these sites launched before students start classes in January,” said County Chief Information Officer Jon Walton. “To do this, we created a new playbook for public, education and industry collaboration, and in the process, set a new benchmark for future successful projects.”

Since its start in August 2020, the Digital Inclusion Initiative has facilitated internet access for students across San Mateo County. The initiative has subsidized in home internet services and mobile internet hotspots to 650 students, established two communitywide SMC Public WiFi locations in Redwood City and East Palo Alto, and established multiple Park and Connect Sites. These earlier efforts have connected over 1,000 students from four school districts.

“We are thrilled with the expansion of the Digital Inclusion Initiative and its continued progress in equipping underserved students and local communities. What emerged from working side-by-side with district leaders, policymakers and other private sector vendors was a vision for a new model to provide Direct Digital Services (DDS) to communities across San Mateo County. We look forward to building upon the foundation we've collaboratively developed and implemented, which ensures the County is future-ready for 2021 and beyond. Ultimately, the initiative has the potential expand into a broad array of easy-to-use digital products, platforms, and portals for enhanced access to critical services. This will accelerate the County's recovery and firmly enshrine San Mateo as a lightning rod for next-generation digital leadership in California," said Dao Jensen, CEO of Kaizen Technology Partners.

The latest SMC Public WiFi sites are a continuation of the [SMC Public WiFi Project](#) which has brought free public WiFi to over 100 locations across the County. An interactive map of these locations can be accessed [here](#). The SMC Public WiFi Project's mission is to bring connectivity to underserved communities, support educational opportunities for students, spur local economic development, and provide greater access to County services.

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