

Their destiny our legacy

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Imagine for a moment—classrooms from different high schools in South Texas connected, interacting live online, collaborating, exploring, and learning in the 21st century. Now imagine a group of them on a field trip to witness a rocket launch at the SpaceX site at Boca Chica. Back in their classrooms they connect and continue to explore their experience of a rocket roaring into space.

Wait, this is merely an image because the infrastructure to deliver robust live content require optic speed connection to the internet. At what speed does a high schools today connect to the internet.

For example, the internet connection speed for many schools is poor, come test time every one dreads it because the connection is so slow that it logs students off and attempts to log back in fail. The system then counts the test as incomplete.

The days of text books and chalkboards are passing away—we have in our hands access to the world in a few key strokes, with the swipe on a screen. We are living in a period of remarkable leaps in technology. Students graduating this school year were in grade school when the iPad was introduced.

Now in the time of coronavirus the internet is in sharp focus. Schools are closed and students are asked to learn from home.

U.S. Census data projections, for 2020, place the population in Hidalgo County to surpass one million people, and the RGV to top 1.5 million.

This Texas is also among the most troubled by poverty. It has lived last in the opportunity line, ranks low in post graduate options, on to first place in the wrong places.

No matter, this Texas region has two essentials ready on-hand to connect high schools to the internet at super speed.

The first essential are the people, the go of the entrepreneur, they make opportunity happen, create options to progress, believe in the next generation, and proud of its unique Texas heritage.

The second essential are fiber optic lines to the internet. Some cities are already investing in fiber optic infrastructure as essential to the economy, to health and safety.

What about schools, at what speed does a high school today in RGV connect to the internet? I hear grumbles about slow speed, and how even emails suffer—Now imagine a classroom connected live to other classrooms collaborating. Forget about it.

What is missing? Fiber lines, some of which exist near many high schools. UT-RGV, for instance, is part a fiber optic ring—166 miles of fiber lines which encircle the Valley. An investment like some cities are making.

It comes down to that public schools need optic speed connection to the internet. The other option is to fall further behind.

Is there an expiration date to join the 21st century?

Since 2014 successive groups of South Texas Youth Congress members continue the work to bring super speed internet to their schools. Their first effort became iSol. Reflected in HB3467. Fiscal Note.

In 2017 a second iSol bill proposal was submitted. Reflected in HB3813, Fiscal Note.

In 2019 STYC members met several times, worked on plans to promote iSol. They also decided to develop a new proposal concerning school safety. Known as Life Skills. HB1640. Fiscal Note.

Different groups of STYC members in turn roll out three separate bill proposals. Each driven by them—The process is their organizer and teacher.

One thing I have picked up from them is that they don't like being left behind. They want opportunities that meet up to their potential.

As a former STYC president commented (2016):

I am told that I am a “Twenty First Century Learners.” But I don't feel like one. My high school, like many others, finds it difficult to meet the goals and promise we are required to achieve. It is not their fault. I have wonderful teachers who work to prepare us. In my mind the twenty first century means having the resources that match up to the expectations we are asked to meet.

For many after high school options narrow in post graduate studies, especially for students wishing to be close to home. Many leave, few return.

Thank you STYC members for the many stories that tell what is possible.