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\$13 million grant to help educators expand Utah Net service statewide

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SALT LAKE CITY — The Utah Education Network received one of the largest federal telecommunications grants of its kind Monday to extend broadband Internet service to dozens of public libraries, charter schools and Head Start centers across the state.

Rep. Jim Matheson, D-Utah, made the announcement, saying "economic growth is powered by the 21st century infrastructure that connects students and businesses to the global classroom and marketplace."

The \$13.4 million grant will allow the University of Utah to enhance and expand UEN — which already provides Internet service to more than 300 schools and other community anchor institutions — to provide fiber-based ethernet broadband services to 35 public libraries, 88 charter schools and seven Head Start centers, including a Head Start center that serves the Ute Indian Reservation.

Matheson said the grant will lead to the creation of an estimated 450 jobs, primarily with telecom providers, and will benefit 960,000 Utahns by the network's extended service, increasing connection speeds for children, students and teachers who regularly use the Internet at schools and institutions statewide.

"Money spent building this digital superhighway benefits every Utah family that has access to a computer at home, in a library or school — now and for years to come," he said.

The Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration, which awarded the grant to UEN, received more than 1,800 applications proposing projects totaling nearly \$19 billion during the first Broadband Technology Opportunities Program funding round. The department is currently awarding grants on a rolling basis, as part of the federal recovery act legislation passed by Congress last year.

"In today's society, if you don't have regular access to high-speed Internet, you don't have access to all the educational and employment opportunities it provides," Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information and NTIA Administrator Lawrence E. Strickling said in a prepared statement released Monday. "Fast, reliable Internet connections can help Americans gain job training and skills, open doors for small businesses, and give students the opportunity to explore vast libraries and archives from their local school or library. Projects like the grant announced today are laying the foundation for strong, sustainable economic growth for years to come."

Including the grant announced Monday, the telecommunications administration has awarded 31 grants totaling more than \$610 million, in addition to \$97 million in mapping and planning grants to 51 states and territories.

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