



Issue Brief: Elementary, Charter School Internet Upgrades

SUMMARY

As of the beginning of the 2008 General Session, one-half of the approximately 500 elementary schools and 4 of the 58 charter schools were equipped with high-speed internet connectivity. The Utah Education Network (UEN) was funded by the Legislature in the 2008 General Session with \$1,200,000 (\$500,000 one-time) in Uniform School Funds to assist local school districts with upgrades. This brief outlines the progress of the elementary and charter school upgrades.

SCHOOL CONNECTIVITY UPGRADE PROJECT

Prior to FY 2009, local school districts have been charged with the sole responsibility of providing network connections to elementary schools. Charter schools have also had this individual responsibility. Due to the high costs involved, about half of the elementary schools (roughly 251 of 501 schools) and 54 of the 58 charter schools were connected through copper T-1 lines. These lines do not create near the capacity or reliability needed by schools to support the intensive technology required by recent instructional content improvements. In particular, they do not support the move toward online testing and data collection for provision of assessment.

UEN has most often been able to secure bids for connecting elementary schools that were far lower priced than those received by the districts. This is in large part due to UEN's building the network backbone and developing long-term contracts for better pricing with local telecommunications providers.

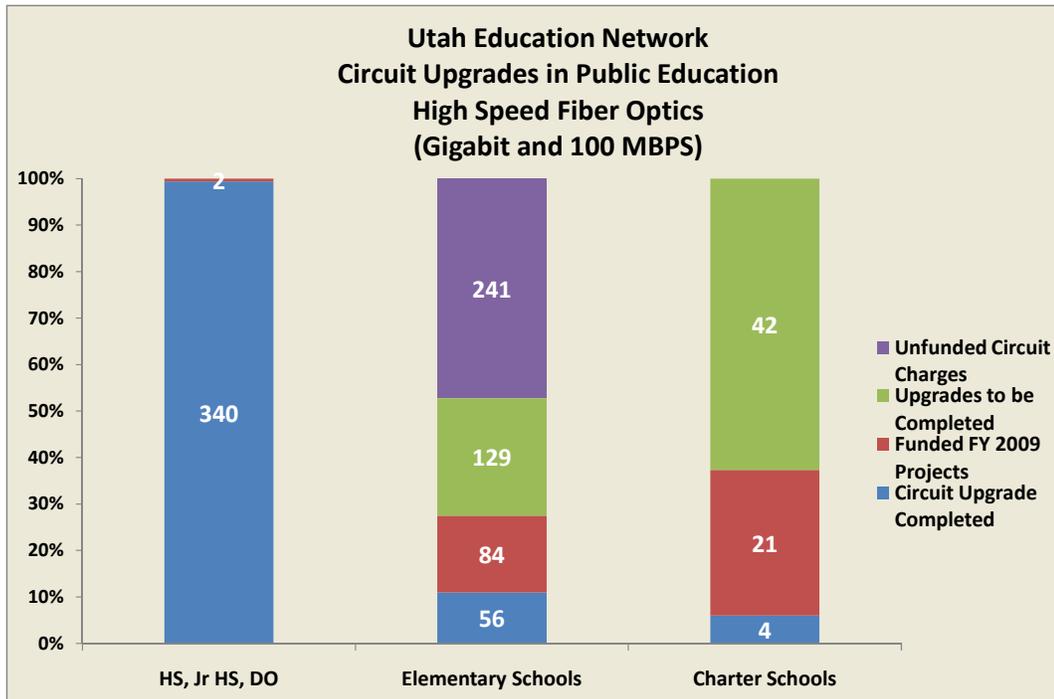
In the 2008 General Session, UEN sought funding from the Legislature to assist the remaining elementary and charter schools in developing their online connectivity. The Legislature provided funding for UEN of \$500,000 one-time and \$700,000 ongoing Uniform School Funds to complete the upgrades. Projections showed that the process would need to occur over a three-year roll out period, wherein all schools would be upgraded with the same or similar levels of Internet capacity.

For FY 2009, UEN intended with their budget request to upgrade approximately 150 elementary schools and 20 charter schools. With approval of the Legislature in the 2008 General Session, UEN was also able to leverage \$1.4 million federal E-Rate funds to apply to the projects. These matching funds bring a two-to-one ratio of federal to state dollars.

However, reductions taken in the 2008 Special Session (\$500,000 from the Elementary and Charter School Upgrade Initiative) and those being considered for a further FY 2009 supplemental bill (\$908,100 net reduction for UEN – see UEN budget brief for GS 2009), are having impacts on the project and upgrades are currently being delayed or suspended. In total, the ongoing reduction for UEN may cut into all funds that were proposed for the connectivity upgrades in FY 2009 and thereafter. An additional loss of \$400,000 to \$1.0 million Federal E-Rate dollars is likely due to ongoing reductions.

The following page contains a chart on the upgrades that have taken place, those that are in the process, others in planning stages, and, finally, schools not yet funded for upgrades. In light of recent budget shortfalls, work has been done by UEN with the local school districts to see what levels of funding they could further contribute to keep the project on track. An update will be provided by UEN as to the most recent communications and funding situations for districts.

The table below shows the progress of the Elementary and Charter School Connectivity Upgrades as funded by the Legislature in the 2008 General Session:



Source: Utah Education Network, January 2009