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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ECISD announces ground-breaking partnership to provide Internet for students

Ector County, Tx – Ector County Independent School District (ECISD) along with the Permian Strategic Partnership (PSP) and Chiefs for Change is proud to launch an innovative new partnership with the aerospace company SpaceX to expand Internet capacity in Ector County. Ector County ISD is the first school district in the United States to work with SpaceX in harnessing its Starlink satellite constellation to deliver high-speed, low-latency Internet access for ECISD students.

The project will initially provide free Internet service to 45 families in the Pleasant Farms area of south Ector County. The school district will identify the families and facilitate delivery of the necessary equipment to those homes. The service will be active early in 2021. As the network capabilities continue to grow, it will expand to serve an additional 90 Ector County families.

“This innovative partnership represents bold and unprecedented action for our school district and our community,” said ECISD Superintendent of Schools Dr. Scott Muri. “Our research clearly indicates the lack of broadband access is a crisis in Ector County. In collaboration with SpaceX, we are providing space-based Internet service to students and families that have few, if any, options. The partners with us share our vision for equity and access for all students. Today, we take a giant leap forward in closing the digital divide that exists within our community.”

When COVID-19 forced the closure of school buildings last spring, it really brought to the forefront just how large the digital divide is in Ector County. As ECISD leaders dove into surveys of teachers, students and families, they found some 39% of families have limited to no Internet access. The SpaceX Starlink satellite technology will provide high-speed, low-latency broadband internet to an area where that type of access is not currently available or affordable.

“Superintendent Scott Muri and the team in Ector County are pursuing some of the most innovative plans in the country to meet the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic and redesign schools for 21st-century learning,” said Chiefs for Change CEO Mike Magee. “Given Dr. Muri’s creative and forward-looking approach, it’s only natural that he would partner with SpaceX and use satellites to get students the home Wi-Fi they wouldn’t otherwise have. We are proud that he is a member of Chiefs for Change and are pleased to provide \$150,000 for this and other internet connectivity projects in the district.”

A national call is being made for federal action to end the digital divide. Our state and national leaders like Texas Representative Brooks Landgraf and U.S. Senator John Cornyn have taken up the torch to push for ubiquitous broadband internet for all, using Ector County ISD as a case study. Additionally, national PTA President Leslie Boggs testified before Congress about this critical need and referenced ECISD as an exemplar working to find innovative and permanent solutions.

This project with SpaceX is bringing together a unique combination of partners. The Permian Strategic Partnership is a regional coalition of oil and gas industry leaders. Chiefs for Change is a national non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring all children receive an excellent education. Both are supporting this project, which all parties hope will become a prototype for many more like it throughout the country.

“The PSP knows that access to broadband is essential for the success of our region,” said PSP Chief Executive Officer Tracee Bentley. “Unfortunately, there are too many people who lack this access, particularly school children, and it’s critical that we support and facilitate opportunities like this to help make that access a reality across the Permian Basin. We commend Ector County ISD for taking a leading role in addressing this challenge, and are proud to partner with them in this effort. We are hopeful this program will be replicated throughout the Basin, and look forward to future broadband partnerships.”

“We are thrilled to have this opportunity to work with committed partners like the PSP and Chiefs for Change, as well as SpaceX and its next generation Internet solution to provide service for our families,” said Dr. Muri. “Closing the digital divide in our community is a key element in our District’s strategic plan. Ector County ISD is determined to lead this effort because we believe this is a moral imperative and simply the right work to do for our students.”

About Chiefs for Change

Chiefs for Change is a bipartisan network of diverse state and district education chiefs dedicated to preparing all students for today’s world and tomorrow’s through deeply committed leadership. Chiefs for Change advocates for policies and practices that are making a difference today for students, and builds a pipeline of talented, diverse Future Chiefs ready to lead major school systems.

About Permian Strategic Partnership

The Permian Strategic Partnership is a coalition of 20 leading Permian Basin energy companies who joined together to work in partnership with leaders across the region’s communities to address current and future challenges to the responsible development of the vast oil and natural gas resources of the Permian Basin in the states of New Mexico and Texas. The PSP member companies are: Apache, BPX Energy, Chevron, Cimarex, Concho, ConocoPhillips, Devon, Diamondback, Endeavor, EOG Resources, Halliburton, Occidental, Ovintiv, Parsley Energy, Pioneer, Plains All American, Schlumberger, Shell, WPX Energy and XTO Energy. For more information, visit www.permianpartnership.org.

About SpaceX, Starlink

SpaceX designs, manufactures and launches the world’s most technologically advanced rockets and spacecraft for missions to Earth orbit and ultimately to carry humans to Mars and other destinations in the solar system. Earlier this year, SpaceX was the first commercial company in history to transport NASA astronauts to the International Space Station and return them safely back home to Earth. SpaceX is also working on Starlink, a space-based internet system which will deliver high-speed broadband to locations where access has been unreliable, expensive, or completely unavailable. Starlink is targeting service in the Northern U.S. and Canada in 2020, rapidly expanding to near global coverage of the populated world by 2021.

For more information about this release contact ECISD Communications at 432-456-9019.