

MEMBER CENTER: [CREATE ACCOUNT](#) | [LOGIN](#)

[LIVE TV](#)

[FOLLOW US](#) [ALERTS](#) [WATCH](#)

[CONTESTS](#) [ADVERTISE](#) [CONTACT US](#) [APPS](#)



### Digging Deeper: Poor internet access putting rural students at disadvantage

By [Hunter Saenz](#) [CONNECT](#)  
Posted: Jun 07, 2017 2:42 PM CDT  
Updated: Jun 08, 2017 10:47 PM CDT

SPRING GREEN/RICHLAND CENTER (WKOW) – Access to broadband internet in rural areas has been a problem for many people across Wisconsin. It affects every day tasks. But for many Wisconsin students living outside the cities and towns, not having access to high-speed internet at home is putting them at a disadvantage in the classroom, according to school officials.

The school year is over for students in Wisconsin, but a challenge many of them will still face next year is far from over.

"It's very slow," said Kristina Higgins as she described her internet access at home.

She's an incoming senior at River Valley High School in Spring Green in Sauk County. Higgins lives on the outskirts of Spring Green, just down the road from Plains. But although she's just miles out from the town, her access to internet is quite limited.

"It can be frustrating. So it makes for some long nights," Higgins added.

She uses the school's internet every chance she gets and even studies at the public library until it closes at 7p.m. Higgins knows she has to manage her time because when she gets home, her time is limited when it comes to using the World Wide Web.

"Even with some other kids in my class, they're already way ahead of me at physics because they've been able to go through the PowerPoints that just won't load," Higgins explained in frustration.

Many families living in rural communities get their internet access provided by a satellite dish. It's an expensive option that many say is poor quality. Some families are forced to pay upwards of \$150 a month for internet alone.

"Those families really struggle even accessing high-speed internet if they can afford it," said Tom Wermuth, the River Valley School District's superintendent. "That's also a huge problem as well."

Another problem for Higgins is she's also battling her own family members for internet access at home. Her siblings also have to use the internet for their studies as well as her mother who is going back to school for her Bachelor's degree.

"There's a lot of, I have a project due tomorrow, so your project due Wednesday can wait. You have to disconnect for a couple of minutes," Higgins said as she explained the way her family plans its use of internet.

It's also a problem Higgins's classmate, Caleb Radtke, has to face. The slow-speed internet at his house means he's forced to sacrifice sleep just to get his homework done before class the day it's due.

"I'll just stop and then I'll just try to come to school early the next morning and just go to the library," he said.

Wermuth says it's a challenge several student face across the district.

"33 percent of our families have a difficult time accessing high-speed internet at home," he said as he explained the frustrating reality students are facing. "Our ZIP code shouldn't dictate the kind of education experiences that students have."

But Wermuth says, it often does.

"Some families have access to just a wide array of information classes. And other families don't," Wermuth added.

The problem extends to other areas too. In Richland Center, incoming senior Sterling Kleist shares the burden.

"It's a bit of a pain," he said. "There's a lot of nights where I just want to pull my hair out because I can't get done what I need to do to keep my grades up."

Some nights, Kleist and others in rural areas are forced to go to extremes. Many of them have to drive to town just to hook up to Wi-fi in a business parking lot.

"It's a pain to have to, at 10:30, 11-o'clock at night, drive all the way out to get into town and then hook everything up so that I can do my work which I should've been doing an hour before," Kleist added.

Federal officials are funding more than \$800-million into the state over the next nine years to offset the costs for providers to spread internet access across the hills and valleys.

But many living in the area, say the relief can't come soon enough.

"Unless we can provide equal access to the internet, some students will be at a disadvantage in our country," Wermuth added.

### Can't Find Something?

Search  60

WKOW 27  
5777 Tokay Blvd, Madison, WI 53719  
News: 608-278-7272 or [news@wkow.com](mailto:news@wkow.com)  
[Careers](#) [Advertise with us](#) [Advertiser Services](#)  
[FCC Public File](#) [EEO Report](#) [Closed Captioning Contact](#)

[NEWS](#) [WEATHER](#) [SPORTS](#) [THINGS TO DO](#) [SLIDESHOWS](#) [VIDEO](#) [WHAT'S ON](#)

All content © Copyright 2010 - 2017 WKOW Television. All Rights Reserved. For more information on this site, please visit our [Privacy Policy](#), [Terms of Service](#) and [Ad Choices](#)