

ALLO Gives Alternative High School a Digital Future

Bay High, a Lincoln, Nebraska, alternative school, enhances digital inclusion in the classroom and at home with ALLO's gigabit fiber connectivity service.

By Sean Buckley / *Broadband Communities*

Fiber-based broadband enables consumers to access more entertainment and work from home – but it's also essential for education. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was no shortage of stories about students who did not have broadband at home. They trekked to libraries, restaurants or parking lots to access Wi-Fi to complete homework assignments.

ALLO Communications is helping break down digital divides in education. It provides gigabit internet to Bay High, an alternative high school in Lincoln, Nebraska, that began as an after-school program called The Bay.

The initial focus was to provide skateboarders with a safe indoor place. But after The Bay's skateboarding facility was created, several kids started causing trouble downtown. Mike Smith, co-founder and co-executive director of The Bay, encouraged the teens to do something good for the community, so they started handing out socks to homeless people, which became a national trend among skateboarders. (Socks are one of the most needed items at homeless shelters because many homeless people walk several miles each day; spending considerable time on their feet causes socks to wear out quickly.)

The Bay, a Rabble Mill program, has grown into a larger nonprofit organization. Rabble Mill provides out-of-school engagement and workforce development in addition to alternative education. Its annual report says the organization "specifically targets the youth our communities have long failed to effectively reach – those who have been marginalized due to race, ethnicity, identity, geography, and/or interest. To do it, we lean into Rabble Mill's Core Values: *Make It Fun.*" The Bay and Bay High use games, experiential learning, and teambuilding activities connected to topics and activities students are naturally interested in.

Bay High's alternative learning process helps students develop the skills that enable them to find careers directly out of high school or to attend college. The school prioritizes equipping students with a path to entrepreneurship, emerging technology and content creation – all rooted in the creative disciplines of skateboarding, music, fashion and digital art.

According to its website, the school's goal is to "create upward mobility with a coursework specifically designed for kids, juniors, and seniors in high school [who] see the world differently, and currently aren't well served by the standard public school curriculum." Classes began at Bay High in August 2022.

ALLO'S ROLE

For the next decade, ALLO Communications is donating 1 Gbps of connectivity to The Bay and Bay High. Through the Affordable Care Program, the service provider works with the school to help students' families access free internet at home so they can do homework and stay connected.

Brad Moline, CEO of ALLO, helped to secure the funds needed to start The Bay. He says that COVID-19 highlighted the disparity in connectivity. "I was disappointed in society that we got to COVID-19 and did not have learning solutions," he says. "ALLO is working on various connectivity options, one being technology to largely eliminate the digital divide in metro areas and towns."



Brad Moline

Fiber-based broadband has been a savior for people who can access ALLO's service. Having already built a fiber network, ALLO was able to help residents in the areas it serves continue to function when many people were forced to work or attend school from home. "Our communities performed well because everyone had fiber," Moline says. "Coming out of it, our people can work anywhere now."

USING EXCESS WI-FI BANDWIDTH

Moline's realization about the ways connectivity supports better education led him on a mission to achieve two things: do more for schools by bringing them different connectivity services and work with various vendors and education partners.



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ALLO has partnered with EDGE Nebraska City (a nonprofit organization focused on literacy, parent engagement and connecting students to their community), The National Science Foundation, the University of Nebraska, Lincoln Public Schools and Calix to create shared Wi-Fi connectivity for students.

The provider offers free Wi-Fi routers to customers as part of its service – an arrangement that benefits ALLO too. “We can use any excess bandwidth beyond what a person is purchasing,” Moline says. “We have the quality of experience (QoE) guarantees on their bandwidth speeds, but we should be able to have an educational Wi-Fi network too.”

Using Calix’s Wi-Fi routing technology, which includes 16 different service set identifiers (SSIDs), existing customers can access a connection across the ALLO Wi-Fi footprint, including local schools, government offices and businesses.

“Users can now roam freely across the ALLO footprint where they see Wi-Fi,” Moline says. “A student can do homework from any location.”

Even in low-income areas, ALLO has a relatively high market share in the low 30s. Moline says if low-income students live in multiple-dwelling-unit buildings, “they are going to be able to see another router and make it work.”

FIND YOUR GRIND

When Smith expanded The Bay from an indoor skateboarding park into a coffee shop and teaching facilities with the launch of Bay High, he worked with Moline and other sources to raise \$3 million.

“He started to teach kids some responsibility,” Moline says. “The next step was to see if we could create an alternative school. He called me, and I provided some seed funding and got some large corporations behind it.”

Lincoln Public Schools then agreed to have an alternative school accredited at The Bay’s location in a low-income area. The vision was to create an alternative school for kids that don’t fit into the typical learning methods.

“Bay High is focused on helping kids who learn differently,” Moline says. “You could have an introverted kid who does not play football or is in the band but likes to skateboard and could go down the wrong path with the wrong influences.”



What has driven Moline to support Bay High's alternative method to learning is Mike Smith's catchphrase: "Find your grind."

"Someone may have a passion for music or another creative pursuit, but it probably won't be the way he or she will make a living," Moline says. "The question for students is, what will they do to pay the bills? They have great ideas, so they might be part of a group doing camera footage or digital advertising."

He adds, "After the eight-to-five work days are complete, these kids can do what they are passionate about. Over time, what they want to do could be their grind."

DRIVING BANDWIDTH, JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Providing 10 Gbps bandwidth to the school is only part of the equation. ALLO is also helping to devise different

school curricula. This could help students create paths to college or to enter the workforce.

"The idea is that students could go to a community college or four-year college such as The University of Nebraska-Lincoln," Moline says. "These kids could also come work for ALLO."

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Bay's relationship with ALLO reflects how broadband, particularly fiber-based broadband, has implications for improving society.

Kevin Morgan, CMO of Clearfield, which supplies network connectivity platforms for ALLO, says that the fiber connectivity creates "a social good."

"The work ALLO is doing with The Bay is one example of that," he says. "ALLO is using the fiber network that's already there."

Besides working with The Bay, ALLO has donated bandwidth to other

area organizations in Lincoln. It has provided a minimum of a gigabit to 80 nonprofit organizations. By only charging them for voice services or other services, ALLO can still break even.

"This allows the nonprofit organizations to use the money they raise to help a variety of groups, which is part of our social responsibility," Moline says. 🌱



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