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East Baton Rouge Parish Housing Authority and EBR Schools Partner for “Tech Ready” as Schools Embrace Virtual Learning

East Baton Rouge Parish Housing Authority (EBRPHA) and the East Baton Rouge Parish School System are working together to ensure that students residing in EBRPHA communities are equipped with the necessary computer learning essentials. Virtual learning began on August 10 in East Baton Rouge Parish. “We are passionate about the educational support for our EBRPHA children,” said EBRPHA CEO J. Wesley Daniels, Jr.

EBRPHA’s “ACCESS” strategy provides access and resources to families for education, economic opportunities and health and wellness. The housing agency’s focus on education led its team to determine if families were “Tech Ready”, an intense effort by the East Baton Rouge Parish Technology Department and school leaders.

EBRPHA has nearly 700 students attending East Baton Rouge Parish schools and an additional 4,400 families with children that participate in the Housing Choice Voucher program. “Our team worked in partnership with the school system to formulate collaborative solutions to ensure our children are provided the proper education. We are thankful for the support and commitment by East Baton Rouge Parish School System to work with us to remove red tape and organizational silos,” said Daniels.

In support of creating new virtual learning environments, EBRPHA worked with the school system to provide:

- **Communication** – EBRPHA informed its 5,400+ families about the Chromebook and tablet availability.

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- **Chromebook/Tablet Distribution** – EBR Schools allowed EBRPHA to pick up the devices from the schools and efficiently distribute Chromebooks, tablets and wi-fi hotspots to residents at EBRPHA communities. This addressed the transportation and communication challenges experienced by families. EBRPHA had the resources, manpower and central pick up locations to facilitate distribution.
- **Broadband access**
 - Long-term solution – In partnership with an internet service provider, EBRPHA will execute a contract to provide free, permanent broadband access to families residing in 10 EBRPHA communities. Installation is estimated to begin within the next 45-60 days.
 - Short-term – EBRPHA is assisting with distribution of wi-fi hotspots provided by EBR Schools to families.
- **Supplemental equipment** – EBRPHA has purchased 685 laptop bags, headphones, mouse and mouse pads to supplement the efforts of EBR schools and support the virtual learning experience for the children residing in EBRPHA communities. **Distribution will occur on Saturday, August 22.**
- **Technical support** – EBRPHA is working with Baton Rouge Community College (BRCC) to provide technical support (equipment and software) for children residing in EBRPHA communities. The details and logistics are currently being discussed and forthcoming.

“We knew that data would drive our solutions and tactical strategy to provide our families and students with educational access,” said Daniels.

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EBRPHA and the East Baton Rouge Parish School System initiated its partnership by sharing data and reconciling students rolls. In support of this effort, EBRPHA property managers conducted “door-to-door” device and broadband assessments. As a result, most of the students in the EBRPHA communities are in possession of EBR School issued Chromebooks and tablets.

The next challenge, Daniels added, is broadband access because either 1) parents do not have broadband access or 2) parents are using their mobile phones as Wi-Fi hotspots for digital access which is slowed significantly if there are multiple children working at one time. The proceeding efforts, he feels should be focused on distribution of hotspots.

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