

Discount Internet service, computers offered for poor families in Broward

Comcast is offering the discounts around the country for families with a child who qualifies for the National Free Lunch program.

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Students in Broward County public schools who qualify for the federal free school lunch program will also have the chance to buy a computer and home Internet access for a reduced price.

On Wednesday, Broward School District officials and executives with Comcast announced details of a partnership aimed at closing the “digital divide” faced by many low-income students who don’t have home access to a computer or the internet. The launched the same program in Miami-Dade last month and will also be offered in Palm Beach County and 4,000 other districts throughout the country.

Part of Comcast’s merger earlier this year with NBC Universal was a requirement to offer discount computers and Internet to low-income households.

“We know we live in a digital world, and our students learn best when they’re connected to that digital world,” said School Board member Patricia Good, whose district covers Pembroke Pines and Miramar.

To qualify for the Internet Essentials program, families must qualify for the National Free Lunch program. Those students will receive notices at the start of the school year. Students will also receive a voucher to purchase a computer for less than \$150 and be eligible to sign up for a high speed internet service plan that costs \$9.95 a month, plus tax.

“We see how much of a game changer that can be for so many families,” said Spero Canton, spokesman for Comcast’s Florida east coast region.

While Comcast covers most of Broward County, it is not available in some areas, including parts of northern Broward.

About 116,000 of the district’s 234,000 students are eligible for the program, according to district officials. Interim Superintendent Donnie Carter said he hopes the program makes it easier for kids to access virtual learning tools, and for parents to check their children’s grades online.

“The point that we need to talk about is the necessity for all of students to have access to technology to compete with those who already have access to it,” Carter said.

Read more: <http://www.miamiherald.com/2011/08/17/2363515/discount-internet-service-computers.html#ixzz1VOBZDJM6>