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In the final months of the school year, Penn Manor School District's (Lancaster Co.) Internet capacity was maxing out. "As we were just going about our business of education, we would see things like online testing tools and Study Island slow down to the point that it would be very frustrating," said technology director Charlie Reisinger. "We were blocking a lot of video not because we wanted to, but because we had to."

All that's about to change, as the district transitions to a nonprofit broadband network that will give it 10 times more bandwidth. Penn Manor is one of a growing number of local schools and universities connecting to the Pennsylvania Research and Education Network, known as PennREN. The [1,800-mile high speed fiber optic network](#) that spans the state was built with almost \$100 million from 2010 federal stimulus money. It is a project of the Keystone Initiative for Network Based Education and Research (KINBER), a nonprofit membership organization of education, research, health care and other institutions.

Franklin & Marshall College was the first Lancaster County institution to connect to PennREN in 2013. In the past year, Millersville University, Lancaster Country Day School and Penn Manor also connected, according to Leslie Amoros, a KINBER spokeswoman. Hempfield is slated to connect this summer, and Harrisburg Area Community College and Thaddeus Stevens also are working on it, Amoros said. PennREN runs directly through Lancaster County, entering from the east along Route 30, going through the city and Millersville, and then north along the Susquehanna River to Columbia, where it branches westward into York and northward to Hershey and Harrisburg.

To connect to the network, organizations pay a \$10,000 KINBER membership fee, as well as Internet usage fees. Accessing the Internet through PennREN is cheaper for members because KINBER negotiates bulk prices with commercial providers. Penn Manor looked at joining KINBER as its contract with Comcast ended this year, according to Reisinger. The district sought proposals from multiple companies to expand its bandwidth. Comcast offered the second lowest bid, but "they flat out could not match PennREN's pricing," said Reisinger.

Penn Manor previously paid about \$2,200 per month for bandwidth of 100 megabits per second, according to Reisinger. Its total costs to KINBER will be about \$4,100 per month. Its bandwidth will be boosted to 1,000 megabits (or 1 gigabit) per second. That's a ten-fold increase in bandwidth for less than twice the price. Cost isn't the only factor in connecting to PennREN, though. To access the network, a school or other institution must be able to connect its own cables to one of the anchor sites, such as Franklin & Marshall College or Millersville University. Having Millersville as an access point was key for neighboring Penn Manor. The district already had fiber cables connecting to the university because of a technology partnership 15 years ago. "Our last connection to get onto the PennREN network was mostly built, so our last mile problem was simple to solve," said Reisinger.

Lancaster Country Day and Hempfield School District didn't have that convenience. Those schools must pay to use third-party fiber connections between their campuses and F&M. Hempfield doesn't plan to ditch its existing Internet service once connected to PennREN. Adding the PennREN connection will help avoid major issues if their main network has outages, said technology director Mike Graham. That will become increasingly important as the district launches a one-to-one computing program this fall, he said. In that program, all fourth-graders will receive district-issued iPads for schoolwork. (Several county

[Pennsylvania's 'structural deficit' at \\$1.2 billion](#)

[Philadelphia Inquirer On two fronts, Wolf gives in to get back](#)

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[Pittsburgh Tribune-Review Republican senator to run against AG Kane; GOP House member ponders bid](#)

districts, including Penn Manor, already have one-to-one computing in multiple grades.) "So much of what we do is dependent on the Internet connection. Our board ... wanted some additional options," said Graham.

At Lancaster Country Day School, neither price nor technical factors were the main driver for connecting to PennREN in May. "We did save money, but not a great deal, approximately \$1,200 per year," said Mike Schmelder, technology director for the 620-student private school. "The main reason for choosing PennREN is the idea of connecting to other institutions who are also on the network."

To hold a video conference with a university researcher in Pittsburgh, for instance, high school classes could connect directly via PennREN, rather than through the Internet. That makes for a faster connection and avoids using external bandwidth. Reisinger also said he's excited about collaboration possibilities. "I'll really be watching and asking questions ... now that we're on the same network, what can we do? With the bandwidth problem solved, the limits are truly just our imagination." PennREN currently connects schools, universities, libraries, government offices, health care providers and other groups at about 80 locations across the state, Amoros said. – *Lancaster Intelligencer-Journal*

Leaders of the Florida Legislature agreed to a nearly \$80 billion state budget loaded with new projects late Monday, clearing the way for lawmakers to end months of squabbling and adjourn their special session Friday.

Although Gov. Rick Scott's top priorities of record education funding and \$673 million in tax cuts were trimmed by lawmakers to offset federal funding cuts to hospitals, Scott said he was pleased with the \$400 million tax-cut plan that got final legislative approval Monday. "Giving Floridians back more of the money they earn in tax cuts is the best thing we can do to keep Florida's economy growing. **Cutting Florida's cell phone and TV tax is particularly important because it will save money for Florida families who pay a cell phone, satellite or cable TV bill,**" Scott stated in a news release. Scott was scheduled to return to Tallahassee from a three-day economic development trip to Paris late Monday.

Much of the tax cuts will come from a \$207 million reduction in the tax on cable, phone and satellite television services. The average consumer spending \$100 per month will save \$20.70 over 12 months. Others include a 10-day sales tax holiday on back-to-school items starting Aug. 7, a sales tax exemption on agriculture machinery, a one-year sales tax break on textbooks, a sales tax exemption on gun club memberships, a tax break for military members importing vehicles from overseas and a \$60,000 cap on the sales tax paid on boat repairs.

Lawmakers are required to pass a balanced budget each year. The current fiscal year ends June 30, and Scott must sign a budget before then to avoid a partial government shutdown. – **Read the entire article in the [Orlando Sentinel](#)**

Sony Corp. began selling PlayStation Vue, its cloud-based TV service, to customers in Los Angeles and San Francisco on Monday, expanding into two key West Coast markets. With Los Angeles, Vue is now available in four of the five largest U.S. cities. The package, starting at \$49.99 a month, is also available in Chicago, New York and Philadelphia -- only Houston is missing. The product features more than 50 channels of live television, including three major broadcast networks and most popular cable channels. A major holdout is Walt Disney Co., and its ABC, ESPN and ABC Family.

The expansion of Vue, announced in Los Angeles Monday at the E3 video-game conference by Sony Computer Entertainment Chief Executive Officer Andrew House, is central to the company's effort to turn the PlayStation console into a multi-purpose entertainment hub. It is competing with traditional cable-TV providers such as Comcast Corp., as well as online-only entrants like Dish Network Corp.'s Sling TV and Verizon Communications Inc.'s Custom TV.

Sony sees an opportunity to exploit the more than 35 million Internet-connected PlayStations in the U.S. Their owners already use them to watch videos on Netflix or Hulu and listen to music, according to Sony. "That's more touch points than even Comcast has in terms of set-top boxes," said Dwayne Benefield, a Sony vice president who heads the Vue effort. "The one thing missing was live TV." People who signed up for Vue are watching more TV, Benefield said. He wouldn't give specifics on Vue usage. The company was surprised by how high engagement was, Benefield said. "That's why we're looking to roll out quickly," he said.

Vue offers more channels than Sling TV, a \$20-a-month package that includes ESPN. Verizon in late April began selling Custom TV, which starts at \$55 a month for 45 channels plus a choice of two specialized sets like sports or news. Vue's two more expensive packages include a handful of regional sports channels, movies and other choices. None of them exceed 100 channels. "We don't want them to

get lost in the guide,” said Vue’s head of product, Dan Myers. “In a matter of 6 to 10 seconds I can see everything that’s on TV.”

In July, PlayStation owners will be able to subscribe to the coming online-only version of CBS Corp.’s Showtime, either as part of Vue or a la carte. That is one of several services created by traditional TV networks in response to the popularity of Netflix, Hulu and Amazon. PlayStation is the single largest distributor of most of those subscription services, Benefield said, which is why Vue tries to satisfy customers with a clean interface and large library of on-demand content.

With the click of a button -- the equivalent of a Facebook like -- the Vue will record all future episodes of a show in a cloud DVR, so users don’t have to spend time searching or scheduling recordings. Vue also recommends shows based on past viewing habits, a feature available on Netflix. “Our audience won’t be content or happy with a service that largely looks like the old,” Myers said. “They engage a lot with those other streaming video services, and the reason they do is because that’s an engaging experience. We want to make that this service as well.” – **Bloomberg**

Verizon Communications Inc. has no desire to sell the Huffington Post or buy Dish Network Corp., Chief Financial Officer Fran Shammo said at a Wall Street Journal conference Monday. Verizon agreed last month to pay \$4.4 billion for AOL Inc., which owns several media properties including the Huffington Post and TechCrunch. The carrier has said its main interest in the deal was AOL’s digital advertising technology, which it plans to incorporate into a mobile-first video service launching later this year. But Mr. Shammo said Verizon likes all of AOL’s portfolio and wants to keep it together.

Mr. Shammo also said the company has no interest in acquiring Dish Network Corp. Dish is currently in talks to merge with T-Mobile US Inc., according to people familiar with the matter. Some observers have speculated Verizon might swoop in and try to buy Dish to get hold of the satellite broadcaster’s huge stores of wireless spectrum. But Mr. Shammo said if Verizon wanted more spectrum, it could have bought it at a recent government auction. When asked if Verizon had any interest in Dish, Mr. Shammo said, “My answer is going to be one word: No.”

To be sure, Verizon has changed its mind in the past. Earlier this year, Chief Executive Lowell McAdam said the carrier wasn’t looking to buy AOL after rumors surfaced the companies were in talks. While filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission indicate the companies at the time were only talking about possible partnerships, Mr. McAdam apparently later changed his mind, and a deal was announced in May. – **Wall Street Journal**



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