



## A KAJEET SUCCESS STORY

# Farmington Municipal Schools

### LOST LEARNING TIME AND A DIGITAL DIVIDE

Farmington Municipal Schools (FMS) is a large public school district in northern New Mexico, situated 30 miles from the Colorado border. The district serves 21 public schools and a diverse population of 11,633 students – 54.9% of which are eligible for free and reduced meals.

To support their students in an increasingly digital age, FMS rolled out 1:1 programs in both their elementary (K-5) and secondary (6-12) schools a few years ago. High school students were able to take their school-issued Macbook Airs home with them, while elementary students used them while within the school building.

While this initiative was successful in supporting students who had access to the Internet at home, it caused the 12-15% of FMS' student body without home broadband connectivity to fall behind their classmates in an ever-growing "Homework Gap."

Furthermore, many Farmington students – including the 39% who live on Native Navajo lands – have lengthy commutes, averaging a 1-1.5 hours each way. Unable to get online homework done during this time, students had no option but to wait until they arrived home to begin their assignments – if that was even a possibility for them and their families.

Troubled by this inequity and lost learning time, Billy Huish, who has been the Transportation Director at Farmington Municipal Schools for the past 19 years, set out to research available solutions. Huish met Kajeet at the 2018 NAPT Conference, and upon learning about the Kajeet SmartBus™ solution, knew that he had "found the company that can provide Farmington Municipal Schools what we want." The WiFi solution, detailed administrator analytics, and robust filtering seemed to be a good fit – but according to Huish, it was "the attitude of the Kajeet folks, the professionalism and willingness to help us, it sold us."

### QUICK STATS



The district serves  
**11,633 students**



**54.9%** of their student base is **eligible for free or reduced meals**



Approx. **12% - 15%** of their students **do not have internet** at home



**39%** of their students have a **1 – 1.5 hour commute** to school

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## RESULTS AND POSITIVE RESPONSES

Farmington rolled out their Kajeet solution with 29 SmartBus™ routers in May of 2019. A few months into the program, Huish and Farmington's Technology Director together observed that students were racking up to 900 hours of learning time per week across all 29 buses equipped with the solution – making for a powerful testament to the need it met.

In addition to the insightful analytics, Huish reports that staff and administrators' responses to Farmington's program have been overwhelmingly positive from the initial steps of the program to post-launch. Farmington mechanics were able to install the the SmartBus™ routers onsite with "the greatest of ease."

Once active, Farmington bus drivers have reported fewer incident reports and calmer commutes, which they attribute to "students [being] busy" completing online schoolwork on their devices. Huish also shared that Title I Administrators are supportive of the program, as it is clear that the technology is providing a vital service to students in need.

Parents have benefited from the SmartBus™ program, too. Many of the students Farmington serves are from rural, farming families, so the ability to get their homework done on the school bus has proved invaluable in that it frees

up time for them to help out around the home in the evenings.

## CREATIVE APPLICATIONS

As many school districts' ingenuity has proven, there are ways to put school bus WiFi to work beyond connecting students in transit.

Huish, a retired city firefighter, is on the executive board of San Juan County's LEPC (Local Emergency Planning Committee). When onboarding with SmartBus™, he shared with the committee about the WiFi-equipped vehicles and offered up their services in case of an emergency meriting the help.

One day this past summer, a fellow LEPC member who works at San Juan Regional Medical Center called Huish and said that the hospital's Internet had gone down. He requested that Huish bring one of his WiFi-equipped buses and park it outside the building so that staff could use this connection.

Huish followed through, parking a bus directly outside the hospital's business offices. With the 300' WiFi range

## RESULTS



**29 buses equipped**  
with Kajeet SmartBus



**900 hours** of additional  
learning per week



Fewer incident reports  
and behavioral issues



More time for families  
at home

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that the SmartBus™ router provides, the hospital staff was able to connect their devices to this signal and continue essential processes and reports until onsite connectivity was restored.

Farmington has also put their connected fleet to work for emergency preparedness in schools, specifically for reunification efforts. The district's reunification site is currently the county fairgrounds, an expansive field without WiFi connectivity. Transporting several SmartBus™-equipped buses to the fairgrounds and parking them in strategic areas, armed with different connectivity passwords, is now a vital component of the Farmington's secure and efficient safety plan.

Huish encourages other districts to follow suit and offer up their school bus WiFi as a resource to their local emergency preparedness organizations, as "there are lots of [areas] that you could be helping with that... wouldn't even cross your mind."

### USES DURING COVID

While FMS shut its doors when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the U.S., it began welcoming K-5 and Special Education students back in measured ways in September 2020. These 4,000 K-5 students, who are now able to bring



devices home with them, have resumed connecting to the WiFi to complete their online assignments during daily bus commutes.

The district has explored the possibility of using SmartBus™ to create a community WiFi hotspot, as districts like Austin ISD and Beekmantown CSD have done, but have not yet put this use case into practice.

### LOOKING AHEAD

As Huish sees it, school bus WiFi will become a ubiquitous technology solution. Given the digital divide that the pandemic has exposed, as well as the opportunities it provides for increased learning time, he expects it to become mandatory equipment for all school buses within the next several years. He shares that "I truly feel like we are an extension of the classroom now," and expresses his hope that more funding sources will be made available to support these tech initiatives.

With a smile on his face, Huish says, "now that we've seen the success... I want to have it on all my buses."

"The attitude of the Kajeet folks... the professionalism, the willingness to help... I mean, it sold us."

Billy Huish, Transportation Director



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