

The City of Little Rock is rolling out new initiatives to make access to online learning easier for students should schools pivot to remote learning because of a coronavirus outbreak. Mayor Frank Scott Jr. announced several projects at a news conference today (Thurs) including plans to convert five community centers to offer broadband internet access to students. Dr. Jay Barth, Little Rock's chief education officer, said the city will distribute 1-thousand portable WiFi hot spots to students in both the Little Rock and Pulaski County Special school districts.

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"...be fully prepared."

Little Rock School Superintendent Mike Poore said the district has also purchased 25-hundred hot spots on its own, and is looking to procure 1-thousand more. The city is also partnering with the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences to offer a free, 24/7 service for Arkansans dealing with mental health and substance abuse issues. Dr. Rick Smith, director of the U-A-M-S Psychiatric Research Institute, said recent studies show more than 28% of the population are experiencing depressive symptoms, a more than three-fold increase from before the pandemic.

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"...other traumatic conditions."

The service, called A-R Connect, is available by calling (501) 526-3563 or emailing arconnect@uams.edu. Dr. Chris Jones, executive director of the Arkansas Regional Innovation Hub, said his organization will also offer free online classes in both English and Spanish for parents to learn digital literacy skills.