



DATELINE – Thursday, May 21, 2020

FORMAL PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE PUBLICATION

TAKE THE TEST and SHARE THE LINK <https://expressoptimizer.net/public/>

Koochiching and Itasca County in partnership with the Range Association of Municipalities & Schools (RAMS) is pleased to announce the formal public kickoff of a crowdsourcing project covering the entire areas of both counties. This broadband speed testing initiative is being conducted by GEO Partners, LLC during a time when more people are at home per the Governor’s “Stay at Home” directive. This includes over 10,000 students (K-12) as well as parents required to work from home and thus should provide the most comprehensive, accurate accumulation of actual broadband speeds ever conducted in these counties while demand on the system is highest.

The data collected via a one minute speed test can be conducted from any device connected to your broadband signal including cell phones and will result in **statistically valid data** and mapping. This data will then enable any locale in Koochiching or Itasca County to utilize the validated information for a broadband expansion project and seek grant funding from the FCC, USDA or Border to Border state program. We anticipate a higher than normal volume of participation, partially because of all the students who are struggling to stay connected to their E Learning while living in rural areas in the county. Collecting data from cabin owners across our lake enhanced counties will also be vitally important data.

Representative Rob Ecklund a Koochiching County resident and the chief author of a bill for broadband funding praised both Itasca and Koochiching County boards for their support of this project as he knows all too well how living without quality high speed broadband makes life more challenging. Representative Sandy Layman from Itasca County took the speed test this morning and expressed how simple and quick the test was. “My results were interesting as my download speed was almost half as much as the upload speed, so I will take the test again”, she stated.

School districts in both counties have already been contacted and asked to send a message to their students to “Take the Test” and help jumpstart these projects. Both counties will ask county employees to participate; local businesses and social media will play an important role in getting the message out throughout both counties. Koochiching Technology Initiative and Blandin Broadband will both play important roles in keeping the momentum going as the speed tests will likely run for 8 to 12 weeks.

RAMS, as an organization has been a strong advocate for broadband expansion across Northeastern Minnesota. RAMS’ and the Commissioners of your counties, recognize that high speed quality broadband is a critical utility to economic development, education, business and virtual healthcare. RAMS is grateful

for the partnership with Koochiching & Itasca County on this project and encourages everyone to TAKE THE TEST and SHARE THE LINK <https://expressoptimizer.net/public/> TAKE IT NOW! **Your participation is important and no personal information will be collected.**

Maps of the County speed tests will be accessible on the RAMS website:

<https://expressoptimizer.net/projects/Koochiching/speedtestmap.php>

<https://expressoptimizer.net/projects/Itasca/speedtestmap.php>

For further comment Steve Giorgi – RAMS Executive Director is available via email or by phone

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