

Our family was fortunate to enjoy a quiet vacation this summer with our kids and one set of grandparents. It was in many ways a Mayberry meets Norman Rockwell type of outing in cabins at one of our state parks. It was the type of vacation I remember from my childhood with a serene Western Oklahoma setting that had more green than brown thanks to our record rainfall. I seldom “disconnect” when I am away and that is as much habit as necessity. I always have a cell phone or iPad nearby and when things get really serious and I’m away, you might see a laptop appear. On this trip we went to the lodge in order to check in and get keys to our cabins. We got directions on how to reach our cabin and were off on our adventure. Upon arrival, we were pleasantly surprised to find our cabin clean and well appointed including satellite television. Soon, I glanced at my phone and to my horror, realized we had NO cell service. For the next 72 hours, I existed without cell service. Not long ago that meant no phone calls which was a modest sacrifice when “roughing it.” Now, such a sacrifice includes doing without internet access. More on that later.

On President Obama’s recent trip to Oklahoma, one of his stops was at Durant High School. While there, he met with some students to discuss technology access. While it may seem that every child now has a smartphone, their ability to use it as a tool for learning is something our society must continue to embrace. In education, we talk about how children are now part of an instant society. When questions arise, we no longer consult the encyclopedia; instead we use the Internet for an immediate answer. If we need tomorrow’s forecast, your favorite weatherman has an app and radar is at your fingertips. Improving access to this technology in education has been a goal of recent Presidents from EITHER political party. We heard of Kelsey who can only get cell coverage by standing on a rock or by a window sill in her family home. The plan introduced by the President will extend many of the options for Internet connectivity beyond schools to homes of children otherwise unable to afford the service.

Last week, we had a power outage that affected among other things, our network servers. Fortunately, Summer School had ended so students weren’t impacted but this took away our phone and Internet service within the school district. That might seem like little more than an inconvenience but it is actually a much bigger deal. All of our financial and academic records were suddenly unavailable. As we received word that the outage would last until at least the evening, it became apparent to me that our offices could not function (there are only so many closets you can clean out) and our staff was essentially without anything to do. In the early afternoon, I made the decision to close our offices for the remainder of the day.

The Internet is no longer a novelty; it has become an integral part of the basic function of most businesses and is much more than a tool for people to kill time. The challenge for our students is making this tool accessible away from school and teaching digital citizenship so the tools extend beyond Facebook and Twitter. A family goal should be internet access in each home and hopefully as the program is rolled out, it will eliminate a divide between haves and have not’s with regard to family budgets or geography. I survived a few days of being disconnected while on vacation but I don’t want any of our

children to ever feel disconnected in their education regardless of their families' ability to afford internet service or the location of their home.