



# NEWS

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**Dec. 18, 2020**

## **County's Public WiFi Expands with New SMC Park and Connect Sites**

*Students and community can walk, ride or drive to free internet hotspots*

**Redwood City-** The County of San Mateo is expanding its SMC Public WiFi network with the planned opening of four SMC Park and Connect locations, allowing the public to walk, ride, or drive to selected parking lots and connect to the internet at no cost.

The first SMC Park and Connect parking lot site is the SportsHouse sports complex at 3151 Edison Way, Redwood City, which went live on November 20, 2020. Two other Park and Connect sites — Hoover Elementary School located at 701 Charter St., Redwood City, and East Palo Alto City Hall located at 2415 University Avenue— went live today. A fourth site, Pescadero High School at 360 Butano Cutoff in Pescadero, will go live by the end of the year.

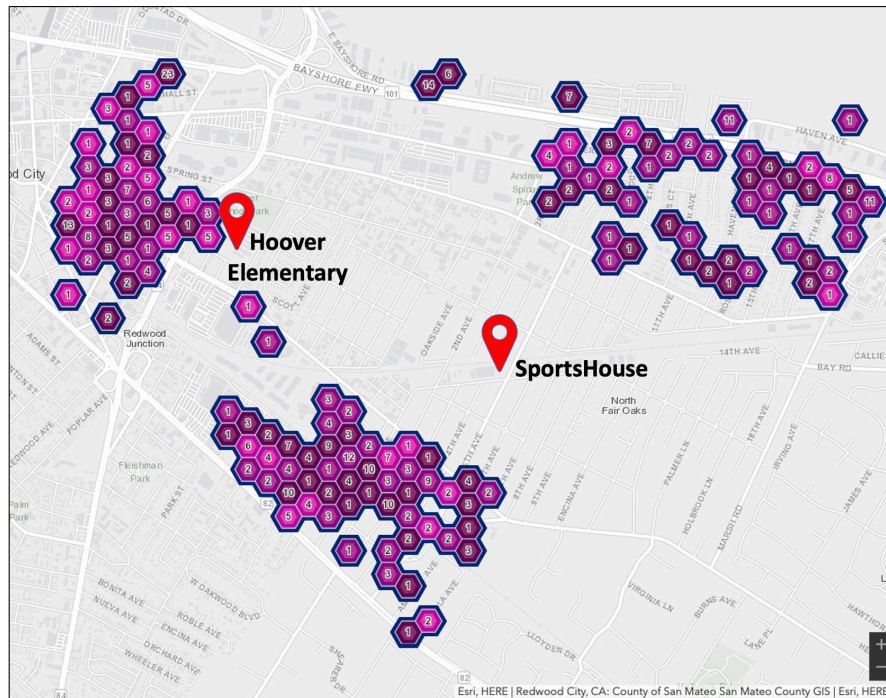
These SMC Park and Connect sites serve the public and students from the Ravenswood City School District, the Redwood City Elementary School District, the Sequoia Union School District and the La Honda Pescadero Unified School District.

"This initiative could not have come at a better time," said Redwood City School District Superintendent Dr. John Baker. "All of our students currently have the need to connect with their teachers online. The SMC Public WiFi Park and Connect sites create a new way for students and their families to access the internet. We appreciate the County's support of our students and their learning."

The Park and Connect sites are a unique addition to the SMC Public WiFi network because they are specifically placed at accessible sites near large numbers of students who have reported connectivity issues at home. The East Palo Alto City Hall Park and Connect is sited near 216 K-12 students with reported connectivity issues, while the SportsHouse and Hoover Elementary Park and Connect sites are surrounded by 456 K-12 students who share similar challenges getting online.

"SportsHouse is excited to be a location for this innovative project," said SportsHouse Operations Director Brian Wood. "We love being located in the North Fair Oaks Neighborhood of Redwood City and helping the community in any way we can. We are committed to building community through sports and recreation, and by partnering with the County to provide connectivity at our facility, we are able to continue building onto our commitment of helping our community."

The SMC Park and Connect sites at the SportsHouse and Hoover Elementary locations were established quickly through the innovative use of Commscope Rapid Deployment Units (RDUs). RDUs are portable internet access stations that can be towed to a specified location and provide connectivity in a short amount of time. RDUs are used at festivals, events, or in emergency response circumstances where internet access is needed on a temporary basis. The RDU's capabilities allow the County to provide SMC Public WiFi to a community quickly, while longer lead-time traditional wireless network systems are planned and installed.



*Exhibit. The County of San Mateo's data-driven mapping approach identified the areas within Redwood City where unconnected students reside. Each hexagon represents a group of students with reported connectivity issues. The SportsHouse and Hoover Elementary sites were selected as a central location for the surrounding students to be able to connect.*

“Kaizen’s Digital Direct analytics tools mapped where best to install these innovative Park and Connect locations in neighborhoods where there is a high concentration of students in need. This model provides students and the community with free internet access in a safe nearby location,” said Dao Jensen, CEO of Kaizen Technology Partners.

The community of Pescadero will also benefit from the Park and Connect site at Pescadero High School. The rural location and geographic terrain of the Pescadero community leaves residents with limited broadband infrastructure and few internet access options. By providing the students and community with a free and accessible site to connect to the internet, their rural location becomes less of a barrier to online access and digital equity.

“There are no easy answers to overcoming the geographic and financial challenges of bringing internet to Pescadero and the south coast areas of the county. Innovative approaches like the Park and Connect are creative examples of our continuing commitment to closing this digital divide for our students, families and businesses in our community,” said District 3 Supervisor Don Horsley. “I am confident that San Mateo County is dedicated to bringing a more robust connectivity to our Coastside.”

“I thank our community partners at the County of San Mateo for continuing to creatively problem-solve the digital divide on the South Coast,” said La Honda Pescadero Unified School District Superintendent Amy Wooliever. “The Park and Connect site for the Pescadero community provides valuable connectivity to an area lacking in basic internet infrastructure. Pescadero students can utilize the Park and Connect for learning after hours and our local students and other community members now have reliable, 24-hour access to free WiFi.”

The SMC Park and Connect program signifies another milestone in the County’s Digital Inclusion initiative under its COVID-19 response efforts funded using a portion of the \$6.3 million in funds received from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act grant. The initiative began in August by providing [650 qualifying students](#) in the Ravenswood City Elementary and La Honda-Pescadero Unified School Districts with T-Mobile hotspots and Comcast Internet Essentials connections. The response continued with the installation of nearly 70 SMC Public WiFi access points across the Woodland Park Communities in East Palo Alto, providing SMC Public WiFi to 223 K-12 students with reported connectivity issues and the 4,000+ other residents who call Woodland Park home.

“There are a lot of different challenges that result in a lack of connectivity across our county,” said San Mateo County Chief Information Officer Jon Walton. “Traditional approaches do not always work, and in this case, we had to think creatively to provide ways for the community to get online.”

The Digital Inclusion Initiative is supported by public private partnerships composed of the County of San Mateo, the San Mateo County Office of Education, school districts including Ravenswood City, Redwood City Elementary, the Sequoia Union and the La Honda Pescadero Unified School District, property owners including SportHouse, technology service providers including Kaizen Technology Partners, Strategy of Things, SmartWave Technologies, and telecommunications service provider Comcast.

“Today’s launch of the three Park and Connect locations in Redwood City and East Palo Alto shows us what is possible when the school districts, the cities, community members and the County partner together. This innovative approach to bring internet service to our most vulnerable communities is a huge win for the students and their families who depend on the internet for school, work, and daily necessities,” said Board of Supervisors President Warren Slocum whose District 4 includes the sites in Redwood City and East Palo Alto.

The SMC Park and Connect sites are also a continuation of the [SMC Public WiFi Project](#) which provides free public WiFi to over 100 locations in the County. An interactive map of these locations

can be accessed [here](#). The SMC Public WiFi Project's mission is to bring connectivity to underserved communities, support educational opportunities for students, spur local economic development, and provide greater access to County services.

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