District 300 getting the hook-up for high-speed Internet service

By Jameel Naqvi | Daily Herald Staff

Community Unit District 300 this year will get a second Internet connection that district officials hope will improve the speed and reliability of Internet access at the district's schools.

District 300 will run a fiber-optic cable from the new Hampshire High School to Interstate 90, where the district can connect to a high-speed network run by Northern Illinois University.

Several towns, including Elgin, Hoffman Estates, Naperville and Schaumburg, also could connect to the network once it is up and running in the fall.

Eric Willard, District 300's technology director, described the benefits for staff and students tersely: "More reliability and more bandwidth."

District 300 now accesses the Internet through an AT&T connection at Dundee-Crown High School.

The problem with having only one access point is that if the Dundee-Crown connection is interrupted - for example, when power goes out at the school - the Internet goes down throughout the district.

And with the district storing more of its important records on servers, it can ill afford to abruptly lose Internet access, Willard says.

When the NIU network, called NIUnet, starts running in November, District 300 will be able to switch to the NIU connection if the Dundee-Crown access point fails.

Internet users in District 300 schools will also notice improved download speeds and faster-loading pages when NIUnet is online, Willard said.

Right now, the district is using almost all of its bandwidth - the capacity of its Internet connection.

"With so many users ... our bandwidth is somewhere in the 90-percent usage range," Willard said. "We're just using everything up."

The district is paying Kirby Cable Service $93,206 to bury the cable that will run from Hampshire High School to the tollway. Kirby submitted the lowest offer of the four firms that bid for the contract.

District 300 will also pay NIU to access its high-speed network.

Willard hopes the district will eventually have three or four points from which it can access the Internet. Multiple connections will not only boost reliability and speed, but will also improve data backup and recovery, Willard said.