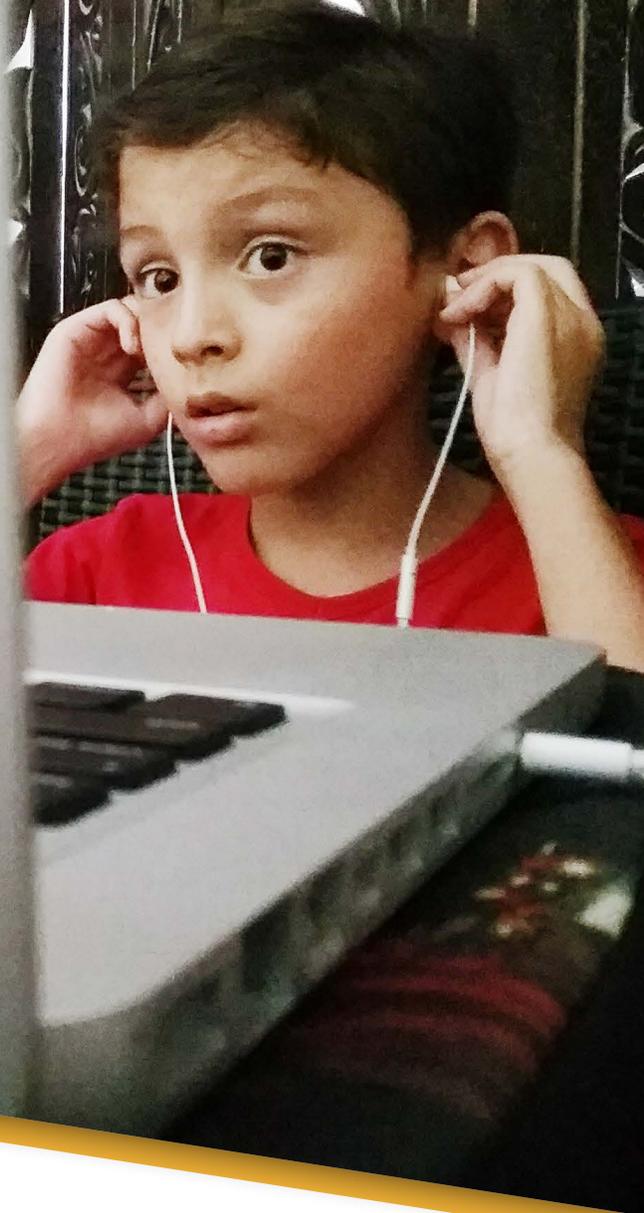


From Crisis to Opportunity: Recovering California's Commitment to Equity



Digital Equity

The Challenge: The digital and technology resource divide is not a new phenomenon facing school-aged children of color and children experiencing poverty. A recent study found that, nationally, [around 17% of children](#) are unable to complete their homework due to limited internet access.¹ This “digital divide” and often resulting “homework gap” mirrors trends in California, where [about 1 in 5 school-aged children](#) lack access to the internet at home.² These [numbers grow](#)³ for the state’s most vulnerable children: students of color, low-income students, [English Learners](#),⁴ [students with disabilities](#),⁵ and homeless youth.

The equity implications of these gaps have been brought into sharper focus in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. EdTrust-West’s parent poll revealed at the start of school closures, [38 percent of low-income families and 29 percent of families of color](#)⁶ were concerned about access to distance learning because they don’t have reliable internet at home. Parents also cited concern about access to technology – 50 percent of low-income and 42 percent of families of color lack sufficient devices at home to access distance learning. Educators and policymakers across the state must quickly re-envision education given the likely necessity of distance – and increasingly online – learning as school returns in the fall.



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Opportunities for Increasing Digital Equity

For the Governor, State Leaders, and California Department of Education:

- 1. Provide every student access to adequate technology and connectivity**
 - **Pass Senate Bill 1130** and push the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to implement and expand the California Advanced Services Fund (CASF) program to encourage deployment of 21st century-ready communications.
 - **Administer a survey to LEAs to map regions with persistent “gaps” and redistribute available devices** to regions with continued need, similar to mapping tools created during the power shutoffs.
- 2. Ensure all students have access to distance learning regardless of economic, racial, cultural background, language, or unique learning needs**
 - **Require LEAs to report data on distance learning, disaggregated by student group**, (i.e. the percent of hot spots and computers given out, percent of students who were chronically absent during the initial closures, number of instructional minutes per school, access to the full curriculum) and steps leaders have taken to bridge the digital divide for all students in the return to school.
 - **Require the delayed 2020-21 LCAP include distance learning/digital divide outcomes**, and add metrics to the LCFF conditions of learning priorities that evaluates access to technology and implementation of distance learning.
- 3. Ensure students have access to synchronous learning opportunities that prioritize social emotional learning. If students are unable to access synchronous learning, provide equitable access to asynchronous learning opportunities.**
 - **Evaluate distance learning plans to understand better and track implementation** (i.e. [Minnesota distance learning plan review](#)⁷) and include measures such as:
 - Student access to adequate devices and connectivity
 - Daily attendance, access to the full curriculum, and instructional minutes per student
 - The rigor of course offerings and balance of synchronous to asynchronous learning
 - Learning supports for English Learners and students with disabilities

For School, District, and County Office of Education Leaders:

- 1. Provide every student access to adequate technology and connectivity**
 - **Conduct a needs assessment** with parents and families to evaluate distance learning and continued gaps in access (like [Pajaro Valley Unified School District did](#)⁸).
 - **Work across local public and private sectors to secure 1:1 devices and low/no-cost broadband access** for students and families (as [Oakland Unified did](#)) while advocating to state leaders for a 1:1 match commitment.
 - **Invest in technology and software supports for English Learners** and appoint a technology liaison to work with families of English Learners on an ongoing basis.
- 2. Ensure every student has access to distance learning regardless of economic, racial, cultural background, language, or unique learning needs**
 - **Create a digital divide and distance learning action plan** that outlines how to engage students in online learning and ensure:
 - All students have access to the devices and reliable high-speed internet they need to participate in distance learning fully
 - Students with disabilities and English Learners who need specialized instruction (IEP interventions and ELD instruction), related services, and other supports during school closures receive adequate support
 - Learning loss is measured, and that schools target in-person curriculum and supports to the most affected students
 - School leaders and teachers receive targeted professional development on the return to school
- 3. Whenever possible, ensure that students have access to synchronous learning opportunities that prioritize social emotional learning. If students are unable to access synchronous learning, provide equitable access to asynchronous learning opportunities.**
 - **Create an online multi-lingual learning portal** where all students can access asynchronous content and curriculum (like [San Antonio Independent School District has done](#)).
 - **Dedicate professional development time**⁹ **before the start of the fall semester to roll out hybrid distance/in-person learning plans** and prepare teachers to implement the distance learning action plan.

¹ Monica Anderson and Andrew Perrin, “Nearly one-in-five teens can’t always finish their homework because of the digital divide,” *Fact Tank*, Pew Research Center, October 26, 2018 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/10/26/nearly-one-in-five-teens-cant-always-finish-their-homework-because-of-the-digital-divide/>

² <https://www.ppic.org/blog/how-californias-digital-divide-affects-students/>

³ Lara Fishbane and Adie Tomer, “As classes move online during COVID-19, what are disconnected students to do?” *The Avenue*, Brookings, March 20, 2020 <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2020/03/20/as-classes-move-online-during-covid-19-what-are-disconnected-students-to-do/>

⁴ Corey Mitchell, “English-Learners May Be Left Behind as Remote Learning Becomes ‘New Normal’” *EducationWeek*, March 17, 2020 http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/learning-the-language/2020/03/coronavirus_english_learners_digital_divide.html

⁵ Kaylan Blesha, “Schools that go ‘remote’ for coronavirus must keep serving students with disabilities. Can any really do it?” *ChalkBeat*, March 12, 2020 <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2020/3/12/21178761/schools-that-go-remote-for-coronavirus-must-keep-serving-students-with-disabilities-can-any-really-d>

⁶ The Education Trust - West, “Poll Results Show California Parents Very Concerned About Children Falling Behind During School Closures,” March 2020 <https://west.edtrust.org/ca-parent-poll-covid-19-and-school-closures/>

⁷ Krista Kaput, “Minnesota Distance Learning Plans by the Numbers,” *EdAllies*, April 28, 2020 <https://edalliesmn.org/blog/minnesota-distance-learning-plans-by-the-numbers/>

⁸ Priyanka Kaura and Hannah Melincoe, “COVID-19 Crisis Response in Pajaro Valley Started with Listening to Families,” *PACE*, May 2020 <https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/covid-19-crisis-response-pajaro-valley-started-listening-families>

⁹ David Saleh Rauf, “How Districts are Helping Teachers get Better at Tech Under Corona Virus,” *Education Week*, April 22, 2020 <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/04/22/how-districts-are-helping-teachers-get-better.html>



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