

Bridging the Homework Gap

Schools and school districts have done incredible work to stay connected with their students during the school closures this past year. Education Superhighway estimates that

Between July 2020 and March 2021, schools and school districts nationwide connected over 3 million students

—more than all the new customers internet service providers connected in 2019.¹

Even with the pandemic finally retreating and life returning to normal, some of the lessons learned from our school closures are going to inform our processes and practices moving forward. Lessons about connectivity and remote learning are going to be especially important to consider as we move toward normalcy. Schools already have plans to continue to offer hybrid learning and online courses as part of their curriculum,² so students will still rely on their home internet connections for some portion of their education.

Moreover, even if we return to school full-time and safely in the fall, there might still be school closures: just since April, four New Mexico public schools were closed for 14 days. These closures are especially disruptive if students lack sufficient broadband internet access at home.

Broadband is not just for remote learning: It is a vital piece of an equitable and quality education strategy for every student.

Students will continue to struggle at school if they are unable to access the internet to complete homework or participate in online learning.

The nature and approach to education has changed dramatically, now that having a home internet connection is as crucial as running water and electricity for students. Students need this technology to stay connected to school and to complete assignments that increasingly rely on web searches and shared virtual spaces. And those students who do not have these resources invariably fall behind. This so-called “Homework Gap” will continue to affect educational outcomes if broadband isn’t available to every student.

¹Herold, B, “Millions of Students Got Free Internet for Remote Learning. How Long Will It Last?,” Education Week, March 10, 2021
²Hirsch, R and Varn, J, “Broadband Access For Success In Postsecondary Education,” National Governors Association, April 7, 2021

We also must acknowledge that typical internet service in rural areas is often insufficient for more than one user to stream content at the same time.³ In situations where more than one student—or even more than one family—share an internet connection, everyone experiences such issues as lagging video or dropped connections.

It is vital to every school's reopening roadmap to identify students at risk of being left behind once full-time, in-person school begins in the fall. By working collaboratively with your school district and the New Mexico Public Education Department, it is possible to

Build on your hard work over the past year to close the homework gap even further.

The FCC is currently offering two programs that you and your students can take advantage of this summer to begin to bridge this gap. And NM Student Connect is here to help:

Emergency Broadband Benefit

The EBB provides a temporary discount of up to \$50 per month towards broadband service for eligible households, and up to \$75 per month for eligible households located on Tribal lands. The EBB is limited to one discounted monthly service plan per household and will continue until funds are expended or until six months after the declared end to the COVID-19 health emergency. Students in your district may be eligible for this program. We've developed a **Toolkit** of resources you can use to educate your students about this program.



Emergency Connectivity Fund

The Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) is a companion to the long-standing E-Rate program. ECF is a \$7.17 billion program that will help schools close the Homework Gap by providing funding for devices and broadband connectivity purchases for off-campus use by students and school staff in need. More information on the ECF can be found on the FCC's website at: www.fcc.gov/emergency-connectivity-fund.



Contact NM Student Connect 1-888-723-4505

We're here to help you and your students navigate these options. Representatives available 7 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday-Friday and 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday MST. Assistance is available in Spanish and Diné.

³Lai, J and Widmar, N, "Revisiting the Digital Divide in the COVID-19 Era," Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy, vol 43, Issue 1, pp. 458-464