

Provide Emergency Funding to Close Digital Divide's Homework Gap



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COVID-19 has shone a spotlight on a specific aspect of the digital divide known as the homework gap—the inability to do schoolwork at home due to lack of internet access. Nationwide, as many as 16 million students are affected—roughly 1 in 3. A disproportionate share of those students are African American, Hispanic or Indigenous; come from low-income households; or live in rural areas.

WHY ACTION IS NEEDED

- ▶ While educators are working toward safely reopening schools, it has become abundantly clear that most students will need to be **online for at least part of the school year**.
- ▶ Specific, targeted funds are needed to help students who do not have internet access at home—due to lack of internet service, devices, or both—or they will be shut out of virtual classrooms and **denied full access to public education**.

MOST VULNERABLE HIT HARDEST

- ▶ According to a recent [Common Sense Media report](#), based on 2018 data:
 - **37 percent** of rural students and **21 percent** of urban students lack home internet access
 - **35 percent** of Native American students, **30 percent** of African American students, and **26 percent** of Hispanic students have inadequate internet access at home
- ▶ According to a recent [Alliance for Excellent Education analysis](#) with similar findings:
 - **1 in 3** African American, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native families do not have high-speed home internet
 - **1 in 3 families** earning \$25,000-\$50,000 do not have high-speed home internet

WHAT EDUCATORS WANT

- ▶ Support inclusion of the Homework Gap provisions of the **HEROES Act 2.0 (H.R. 925)** in the next COVID-19 emergency package. Passed by the U.S. House in September, HEROES 2.0 appropriates \$12 billion in one-time emergency funds for the E-rate Program, administered by the Federal Communications Commission, to help schools procure and distribute Wi-Fi hotspots, connected devices, and other technology.
- ▶ Using E-Rate is the best approach because:
 - E-Rate is established, trusted, can distribute funds quickly and efficiently, and is **preferred by schools**
 - E-Rate guardrails ensure **equitable distribution of funds** (based on percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, with priority given to schools serving the students in greatest need)
 - Narrowly tailored adjustments could ensure **funds are used as intended**—to close the homework gap during the coronavirus crisis