

The Homework Gap: Policy Solutions for Keeping Students Connected

Understanding the E-Rate

BACKGROUND

An estimated 15-16 million students lack *reliable* internet access at home, and 17% of all students have no access at all to an internet connection outside of school.

During the era of Covid-19 not only does lack of connectivity inhibit learning of basic educational requirements, but this gap makes relationships with friends, mentors, family and educators more challenging. It also limits the ability of students to participate in activities like project-based and work-based learning, which we know increases student engagement and connects learning to long-term education and career goals. In short, the connectivity gap, or the Homework Gap, leaves millions of students disconnected from school, work opportunities and support networks with no path forward.

To tackle this issue members of Congress have introduced the Emergency Educational Connections Act of 2020 ([S. 3690/H.R. 6563](#)), which advocates are pushing to be included in the next stimulus bill. Through the Senate's legislation, \$4 billion would be appropriated to the Federal Communications Commission E-Rate program specifically to address the homework gap. Schools and libraries would then use those funds to ensure access to internet for youth, educators, and library patrons.

WHAT IS THE E-RATE

PROGRAM?

The E-Rate program, authorized under the U.S. Telecommunications Act of 1996, focused on connecting all schools and libraries to the internet. This goal has since shifted to ensure schools and libraries have ample bandwidth to meet educational needs of students and library patrons. Through this program, schools and libraries are provided with funds to support ongoing broadband/ internet and Wi-Fi/internal connections. This federal program has been extremely successful over the last two decades, increasing internet connection in classrooms from 14% in 1998 to almost 100% today.

More information on the E-Rate program [can be found here](#).

To support efforts to increase funding for the E-Rate contact your legislator or consider [signing on to the AASA School Superintendent's letter](#) to legislators.

CONNECTIVITY IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

Access to the internet has been an issue since prior to the pandemic, however as schools and many institutions turn to digital settings to provide programming, access to internet has a renewed sense of urgency. For many young people, technology is the sole conduit to their learning. For those with limited or no access, it is tantamount to locking them out of school entirely.

Approximately 1 in 5 parents with a school age child at home say their child will not be able to complete school work because they don't have access to a computer or must use public WiFi. Furthermore, roughly 6-in-10 (59%) parents with lower incomes said it's likely their children will face at least one digital obstacle to completing their schoolwork.

