

Addressing the Digital Divide for Home-Based Learning During COVID-19

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Home-based learning requires students to access the internet via a working internet-enabled device. When schools can't provide loaner devices to take home, many students face a challenge to their learning. In fact, nearly one in five students between kindergarten and 12th grade do not have computers or speedy web connections, and according to the Pew Research Center, this "[digital divide](#)" disproportionately plagues low-income families and people of color.

It's by no means a new problem, but as schools pivot to home-based learning in the midst of COVID-19, the problem of inequitable access to working internet and internet-enabled devices is even more acute.

The KIPP Foundation has compiled a helpful list of overall [COVID-19 Resources](#) related to internet and device access, and below, we've highlighted a few specific options for districts and schools to consider.

Help students gain access to free and low-cost broad band internet.

Many broadband companies took a COVID-19 Connectivity [Pledge](#), which has resulted in more free and low-cost broadband access options. Here are a few key opportunities to share with families:

PROVIDER	COST	DETAILS
Comcast	Free for 60 days	Internet Essentials Free to New Customers : New customers will receive 60 days of complimentary Internet Essentials service, which is normally available to all qualified low-income households for \$9.95/month. Additionally, for all new and existing Internet Essentials customers, the speed of the program's Internet service was increased to 25 Mbps downstream and 3 Mbps upstream.
	Free	Xfinity hotspots across the country will be available to anyone who needs them—including non-subscribers. For a map of Xfinity WiFi hotspots, visit www.xfinity.com/wifi .
Charter Communications	Free for 60 days	New customers in households with K-12 and/or college students can get 60 days free at any service level up to 100 Mbps. To enroll call 1-844-488-8395. Installation fees will be waived for new student households.
Mediacom	\$9.95/month if eligible	Click to sign up.
Cox	Free for 60 days, continued at \$9.95/month for eligible families	Connect2Compete program details. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective Monday, March 16, they're providing limited-time, first two months free of Connect2Compete service, \$9.95/month thereafter Also offering resources for discounted, refurbished equipment through our association with PCs for People, and a Learn from Home toolkit for schools, including instructions on how to fast-track eligible students without internet access
AT&T	Low cost for eligible families	Access program details. Eligible limited income households, can receive the maximum internet speed available at their address, for \$5-10/month.
EveryoneOn	Free or low cost for families	EveryoneOn created a tool kit for K-12 districts and schools across the country to learn about low-cost internet programs that can be shared with students and families.

Loan district or school-owned internet-enabled devices

If your school or district already operates under a 1:1 model, where every student has access to a personal computer, you should allow students to take those devices home. If your school or district has a bulk supply or internet-enabled devices available, follow some key steps to loan them out in an orderly, thoughtful, supportive fashion:

1. **School leaders, reach out.** Ask and collect information from families about whether their student needs a device.
2. **School staff, organize devices.** Code each device (if not already coded by district) with a unique ID number, and pre-load any educational materials needed for student learning.
3. **School leader, design and schedule a distribution process that makes sense for families.** It's a good idea to schedule it to coincide with meal pick-ups or library book loan times, or hand-outs of other materials such as paper and pencil packets, etc.
4. **Volunteers or school staff, hand and keep track of devices.** Use a system for documenting which devices (by code), were loaned to which child. And be sure to take necessary precautions. Be vigilant about protective measures for their health and the health of students and their families.
5. **School leader, create and communicate a collection plan.** Determine how you'll collect devices (even if you don't know when just yet), and communicate it to families promptly—ideally at the time of distribution or shortly thereafter.

Work with a third-party provider to get students the devices they need.

If your school or district does not have enough devices for each child to learn at home, consider partnering with a business or who is making low-cost devices available to students who need them.

- [PCs for People](#) provides affordable computers and low-cost internet eligible individuals and nonprofits.
- [T-Mobile's EpowerED 2.0 program](#) aims to narrow America's digital divide by providing wireless devices and service plans to eligible schools and their students.

Or, partner with a community organization or local business to acquire more devices through direct philanthropy.

- Some libraries make laptops available for loan to students and other members of their communities. For example, [Brooklyn Public Library \(BPL\)](#) is a proud partner in New York City Connected Communities (NYC-CC).
- Set up a donation fund or leverage a local education fund that might already exist to collect funds and use them to purchase devices.
- Identify local business or funders to see if they are willing to donate devices. For instance, in Atlanta, [Power My Learning](#) is the local branch of a national nonprofit that could provide devices. And in Houston, [Comp-U-Dopt](#) gave away laptops to school-age children.