The Digital Divide and Education During COVID-19

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When school is virtual, the internet connects students to more than just instruction.

- Relationships with peers
- Relationships with teachers
- School updates and communication
- Special education services and supports
- Social and emotional learning

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What does the digital divide look like for students during COVID-19 school closures, and how might students be impacted?
What are the RAND American Educator Panels?

The American Teacher Panel and American School Leader Panel consist of teachers and school leaders across the United States who have agreed to respond to periodic surveys on education issues of national import.
Panels provide a **rapid understanding** of COVID-19 effects

Which Parents Need the Most Support While K-12 Schools and Child Care Centers Are Physically Closed?

Teaching and Leading Through a Pandemic

Key Findings from the American Educator Panels Spring 2020 COVID-19 Surveys
A large number of teachers nationally participated in two surveys about instruction during COVID-19.

**American Instructional Resources Survey**
- May-June 2020
- 6,000 respondents

**COVID-19 and the State of K-12 Schools Survey**
- April-May 2020
- 1,000 respondents
Students in poor and high percentage-minority schools lacked internet at home

% of Teachers Estimating That All or Nearly All Students Had Internet

Source: Stelitano, Doan, Woo, Diliberti, Kaufman & Henry (September 2020)
Home internet access varied widely by state

Source: Stelitano, Doan, Woo, Diliberti, Kaufman & Henry (September 2020)
Teachers couldn’t contact all their students

% of Teachers Who Could Contact All or Nearly All Their Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Suburban</th>
<th>Town &amp; Rural</th>
<th>Majority students of color</th>
<th>Majority white</th>
<th>High poverty</th>
<th>Low poverty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>65%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hamilton, Kaufman, and Diliberti (June 2020)
Better internet access meant more assignment completion

Source: Doan et al. (September 2020)
Materials and supports for distance learning were inequitably distributed across states

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMPD State</th>
<th>Digital Device</th>
<th>Hotspot for Internet Access</th>
<th>Information about how to access free or discounted internet</th>
<th>Data from commonsensemedia.org*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RI</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WI</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NM</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>71%</td>
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<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TN</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Chandra et al. (2020); Doan et al. (September 2020)
Providing digital devices was helpful—but not sufficient—for assignment completion.
Even with internet access, students’ learning experiences were likely limited by remote instruction.

- **88%** of teachers were unable to cover most of the intended curriculum.
- **20%** said instruction was all or mostly review (less than 1/3 said content was mostly or all new).
- **17%** of teachers provided no feedback on students’ work.

Source: Hamilton, Kaufman, and Diliberti (June 2020)
• Students access to the internet at home is not equitable, and students in high-poverty, high percentage-minority, and town or rural schools are most impacted.

• Without internet access, students miss out on more than just instruction.

• Access to digital devices is helpful but insufficient for connecting students to virtual learning.

• State context and policies shape access to the internet and technology, but availability of high-speed internet is a bottleneck.

• Teachers delivering virtual instruction likely require different training, resources, and possibly instructional materials to better approximate the quality of learning experiences students would be receiving in person.
Questions?

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