

Equity and the Digital Divide

Using data to understand issues of equity and the effects of the digital divide.

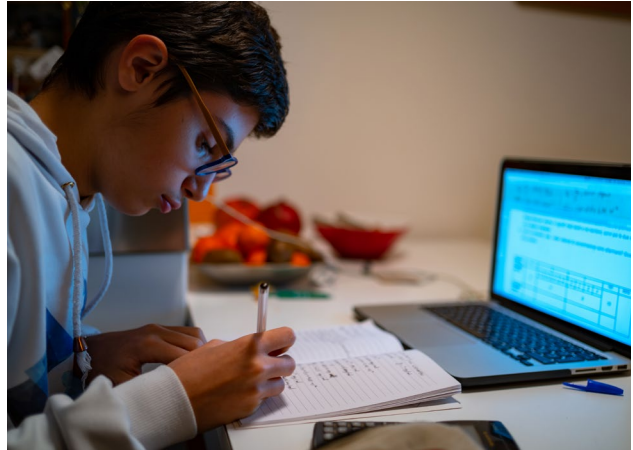
The Digital Divide is the gap between people who have sufficient knowledge of and access to technology and those who do not.

— [The Digital Divide and Educational Equity](#)

Exposing the Digital Divide Gaps

Access to technology, especially broadband, is an essential part of making progress in the workforce and especially in education. Many studies and articles have been written about the digital divide and how it impacts students. The digital divide has existed for many years, but 2020 propelled it back into the spotlight as more schools shifted from in-person learning to remote, online, and hybrid teaching and learning. The [Washington Post](#) notes several existing gaps in the digital divide, especially around the issue of reliable broadband access and connectivity. In addition, equity issues exist when implementing 1:1 device programs. This past school year, many districts and schools were forced to fast-track plans for massive 1:1 device investments.

Substantial gaps in access to quality broadband are prevalent for certain population groups, mostly low-income and rural communities. Ultimately, the digital divide gap can **perpetuate and even worsen socioeconomic and other disparities** for already underserved groups. The Economist Intelligence Unit [reports](#) that while students don't need connectivity to obtain an education, the educational opportunities available to students who have connectivity are significant enough to create a divide between those who are connected and those who are not.



Closing the digital divide for students who lack connectivity can provide a substantial boost to the economics around the world. There is a need for support and tools for educators and students to fully realize the possibilities and full potential that quality broadband connectivity brings.

— [Connecting Learners: Narrowing the Educational Divide](#)



A Closer Look at the Data

Policymakers and educational decision-makers have argued for years that low-income students are at a disadvantage without online access when educators assign homework. According to **Pew Research Center analysis** of the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community, 84% of the nation's K–12 educators report the digital divide is growing in their classrooms due to unequal access to essential learning technology resources at home. In addition, the **data analysis states** that approximately 29 million American homes with school-age children do not have broadband access, with low-income households, and especially for students identified as black and Hispanic, making up a disproportionate share of that number.

Education leaders agree that equitable access to high quality resources, curriculum, personalized instruction, and digital tools is a right for all students. Expanding connectivity to all means building the infrastructure required to allow everyone, regardless of their geographic location, gender, income, or other factors to have access to the internet. This requires overcoming barriers to investment, and overcoming infrastructural challenges related to connecting schools.

The impact of digital equity and the “homework gap”

- The majority of eighth-grade students in the United States rely on the internet at home to complete homework.
- The “homework gap” – which refers to school-age children lacking the connectivity they need to complete schoolwork at home – is more pronounced in black, Hispanic and lower-income households.
- Some lower-income teens say they lack resources to complete schoolwork at home.
- A quarter of lower-income teens do not have access to a home computer.

Source: **Pew Research Study**