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Texas Plan Must Address Digital Divide in Education

IDRA Releases New Report, Launches Video Campaign Addressing Digital Divide

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The abrupt shift to virtual learning in response to COVID-19 derailed schooling for millions of Texas students without reliable Internet access. Today, IDRA released a report, [Digital Destination – Texas Needs Broadband Connectivity for All Students & Families](#), on the digital divide’s effects on Texas students and families and what Texas should do to secure equitable access to broadband for Texas’ most vulnerable student populations.



Digital Destination – Texas Needs Broadband Connectivity for All Students & Families

By Thomas Meserhal & Christina Muñoz, April 20, 2021

Student success depends on the quality of students' educational resources to learn, engage and grow. The abrupt shift to virtual remote learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic derailed learning for millions of Texas students, especially for those without reliable Internet access. The digital divide is not new. But in March 2020, it resurfaced and will prevent an opening barrier to student learning.

To keep up with digital needs for students and their families, the state of Texas must ensure all students, regardless of their zip code, have access to broadband.

This policy brief outlines recommendations for ensuring state policy decisions include plans to secure equitable access to broadband infrastructure and reliable connectivity for students in Texas' most vulnerable populations.

We urge four key actions to address the digital divide:

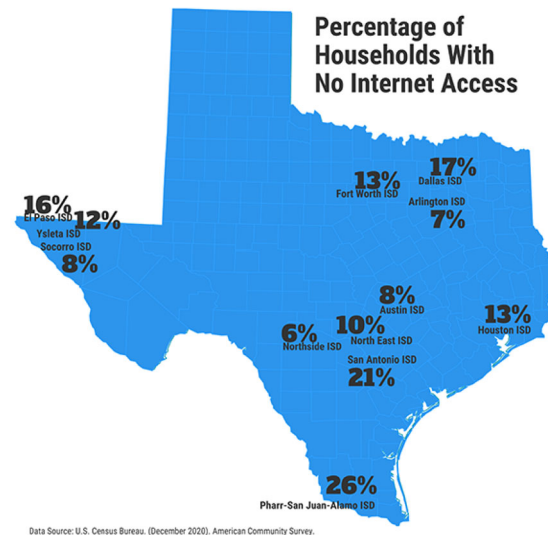
- 1 Invest in sustainable broadband infrastructure within Texas communities
- 2 Continue distribution of digital devices that are consistent, reliable and suitable for students' education needs
- 3 Offer training and support to educators, students, and families in digital literacy and citizenship, and
- 4 Invest in robust community engagement programs, such as ongoing community-led digital equity audits and resources for school district capacity to support students and families.

This brief also includes student and parent testimonies from IDRA's Speak Up Texas Community Ground community participatory research project, the Texas Student Advisory Council facilitated by IDRA, and various Texas community members about their experiences teaching school and work life during the pandemic and how the digital divide impacted both.

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“Without strong Internet access, students can’t connect to get assignments, see their teachers’ instruction or interact in class discussions,” said Celina Moreno, J.D., IDRA President & CEO. “Despite common perception, the digital divide impacts not only rural communities but also many students in urban centers who carry the brunt of limited broadband access.”

1.7 million Texas households (18%) did not have reliable broadband access, and over 637,000 did not have a computer as the pandemic began. Latino students and Black students are less likely than their white peers to have access to the Internet.

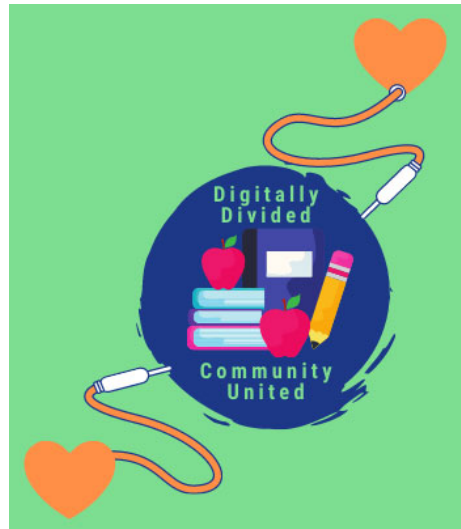


Lawmakers are considering proposals to establish a state broadband office, set up a federal grant program for broadband funds, and create a mapping system to identify where to focus resources. To keep up with digital needs for students and their families, the state of Texas must prioritize education and ensure all students, regardless of their zip code, have access to broadband. IDRA calls for four key actions to address the digital divide:

- 1 Invest in sustainable broadband infrastructure within Texas communities;**
- 2 Continue distribution of digital devices that are consistent, reliable and suitable for students’ education needs;**
- 3 Offer training and support to educators, students and families in digital literacy and citizenship; and**
- 4 Invest in robust community engagement programs, such as ongoing community-led digital equity studies and resources for school district capacity to support students and families.**

This week, IDRA also launched a video campaign, [Digitally Divided – Community United](#), to promote digital equity and

highlight community voices about how the digital divide has impacted learning and daily life for them. Students, educators and community members can record a 15-second video that will be shared with Texas policymakers in the next few weeks. The campaign is led by IDRA, [Lit Communities](#), the [Digital Inclusion Alliance of San Antonio](#), and the [Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition \(TLEEC\)](#).



Authored by Thomas Marshall and Christina Muñoz, two [IDRA Education Policy Fellows](#), the report itself includes testimonies from students and community members participating in multiple IDRA stakeholder convenings with educators, superintendents, students and families about the challenge Internet access is a for school districts.

One student, Bill Ramiro, said, “For the past few months, I’ve had to drive to my aunt’s house to take my online classes, making it difficult for me to even do assignments and homework every day I’m not able to drive there.”

Another student, Andrea Guzmán, described: “With slow Internet, we become anxious and stressed because the pages won’t load fast enough. We have the constant thought that the Internet might crash at any moment and we won’t be able to access the exam anymore.”

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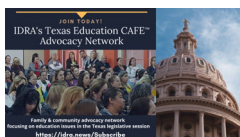
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The Intercultural Development Research Association is an independent, non-profit organization. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.

IDRA works hand-in-hand with hundreds of thousands of educators and families each year in communities and classrooms around the country. All our work rests on an unwavering commitment to creating self-renewing schools that value and promote the success of students of all backgrounds.