Learning From Calamity:

A Report
of the
Remote
Learning
Task Force

TechAlliance

Executive Summary

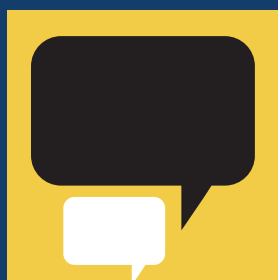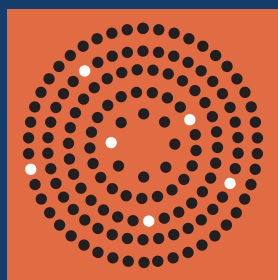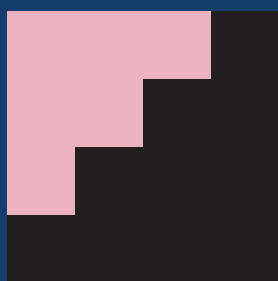In late August 2020, the Technology Alliance[1], a statewide nonprofit organization of leaders from Washington's technology-based businesses and research organizations, convened a diverse group of Washington's education, business, and government leaders from around the state. The Technology Alliance, which has long been active in driving private/public projects to support K-12 education, charged the Remote Learning Task Force with exploring the problems arising in public K-12 education from the current COVID-19 pandemic and envisioning a system that is better prepared for the next major disruption, whether in the next year or the next decade. Task Force members agreed to spend three months studying the issues and then make recommendations on how best to prevent a major event from disrupting our students' learning in the future. First, we looked at the impact of the pandemic on our children, schools, educators, families, and communities. We found that the pandemic served to shed a bright light on the ways, despite good intentions and a lot of hard work, significant educational opportunity gaps persist for too many students in our state. After gathering information on how remote learning is working—and not working—in Washington, we focused on what can be done over the next five years to create a public school system that is empowered and resourced to provide high-quality education to all of our children during a calamity.

Underpinning our work was the deeply held belief that all students deserve the opportunity to maximize their academic and personal potential and that all our schools should be built around the "North Star" of helping every single child succeed. We strongly recommend you read the full report to understand the context and rationale behind our recommendations. At the end of the report, there is a list of issues we believe need further study or attention but proved to be beyond the scope of this Task Force.

The Task Force organized its work and recommendations around five topics: Internet Connectivity, Learning Devices, Student Learning and Educator Readiness, Information Technology Support, and Family Communication. On the following page our recommended action steps for each of these categories can be summarized as follows:

[1] Technology Alliance website

Internet Connectivity Action Steps

1 The legislature includes annual financial support for internet connectivity in the "Maintenance, Supplies, and Operating Costs" portion of the prototypical school funding model, which is used by the state to allocate resources to school districts.

2 School districts, with the support of other partners, collect information on internet connectivity speeds and gaps for students in all school districts to create an anonymized database to support resource distribution and project prioritization for digital equity. Additional data may be collected by partners, anonymized, and the address or coordinate data provided to a central collection point such as the Washington Broadband Office, or the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). Annually, the collecting agency prepares an overview of the status of connectivity statewide and the progress made toward the state internet coverage goal. This step should be seen as complementary to, not in opposition or competition with, the Digital Equity Access Dashboard conceived by the Internet Action Crisis Team, mobilized by State Representative Mia Gregerson.

3 The Washington State Broadband Office and the Department of Commerce (1) pursue federal funding, prioritizing connectivity projects and seeking federal funds for broadband expansion and adoption in a technology-neutral manner; (2) encourage local Broadband Action Team efforts to expand connectivity by providing state grants and support to build strong applications for federal funding opportunities; and (3) determine sustainable funding sources for a state broadband infrastructure program.

4 The legislature authorizes Public Utility Districts (PUDs) to enter retail provision of internet services in places where there is inadequate access to internet services and electrical utilities are already established.

Learning Devices Action Steps

5 The legislature incentivizes Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to pursue partnerships with rural communities to offer services to connect or "light up" existing already-laid infrastructure that is not currently connected (dark fiber.)

Learning Devices Action Steps

1 The legislature includes annual financial support for the purchase, maintenance, and replacement of digital learning devices for each student, faculty, and key administrative staff member in the "Maintenance, Supplies, and Operating Costs" portion of the prototypical school funding model. Districts can utilize Educational Service Districts (ESDs) to leverage the power of group purchasing to bring down costs for all, particularly impacting smaller districts. Device purchase and maintenance is basic, fundamental, and core to the central mission of each school.

2 Each school district issues a learning device to every student, faculty, and key administrative staff member at the beginning of every school year. Devices meet state-identified standards, with the ability to access the internet at a speed that meets or exceeds state-identified standards.

Student Learning and Educator Readiness Action Steps

1 Schools and districts support educators through embedded professional development to effectively use technology tools, digital curricula, and other effective strategies for students to learn remotely or in blended learning settings. The Association of Educational Service Districts (AESD) and the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (CTSP) are two excellent resources for this effort.

2 Schools and districts support the sharing of data and best practices, including highlighting examples where student-centered, innovative learning is reshaping what is expected from students and educators.

3 As a state, encourage more flexibility in course structure and design, such as shifting from a seat-based model[2] to a growth-based learning model.[3] Schools and districts rethink how learning outcomes are defined, in order to provide greater flexibility for innovating in student learning. We recommend a statewide move to more formative assessments[4] in lieu of summative assessments[5] when possible.

4 In preparation for the next major disruption, the legislature gives the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) the statutory authority to move into a previously-agreed-upon remote learning model that allows districts increased flexibility in instructional time and other requirements. This model should stipulate effective and engaging digital curricula to support remote learning on personal devices.

5 District administrators develop capacity-building strategic plans to prepare for future in-school learning disruptions. These plans are vetted by all key stakeholders including families, students, teachers, and principals. Furthermore, these plans are practiced (like a fire drill) frequently (i.e., at least monthly) when there is no crisis to identify areas in the plan that need further refinement and help all constituents become practiced in blended/remote learning.

6 Schools work to grow the foundation of trust that is necessary to keep students and families engaged in future remote scenarios by embracing a more inclusive and culturally-responsive school environment. This includes a greater focus on the whole child's well-being by providing proactive, responsive social and emotional support in addition to communication to families throughout the school year.

7 Districts define and articulate an anti-racist framework and create a plan for reviewing and resolving policies regularly, both horizontally and vertically across departments and schools.

8 Districts ensure, through hiring and reviewing practices, that all educators and staff possess the mindset and skills to serve our students effectively and compassionately regardless of how schooling is delivered.

Information Technology Support Action Steps

1 OSPI and the Association of Education Services Districts (AESD) convene a working group of IT leaders and educators within 60 days of this report's release to describe in detail what a student-centered IT support system looks like and identify the skills and staffing that will be needed to make it a reality.

2 Recognizing how critical IT support is to equity in learning, OSPI advocates for measurable, increased funding for IT support through increases in the prototypical school funding model.

3 The Task Force works with partners to share case studies of IT support and training for educators, students, and families that respond to remote and blended learning needs. Topics include creating support roles for students, reviewing effective IT support models from other states, creating business and/or community partnerships to extend and enhance IT support, developing decentralized/grassroots or peer-to-peer support, developing programs on network security for IT staff, leveraging the resources and institutional knowledge of the state Office of the Chief Information Officer's security office, and utilizing family engagement best practices to support home access.

Family Communications Action Steps

1 The legislature fully funds implementation of Governor Inslee's Digital Equity investment, including Digital Navigators, as detailed in his December 2020 Equity policy brief and discussed later in this report.

2 The legislature fully funds the Education and Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee's (EOGOAC) 2020 recommendations for improving family engagement in Washington State. The recommendations include:
   a. Increasing funding for the position of family engagement coordinators within the "prototypical schools" funding model as recommended by OSPI's Staffing Enrichment Workgroup.
   b. Passing HB 2631 to establish a workgroup to create a family engagement framework.

3 OSPI directs school districts to fully fund and prioritize staffing of the family engagement coordinator when staffing schools, particularly schools with high percentages of students in poverty and large variance in home languages. This role is vital to both connecting families with their schools and connecting schools and families to community organizations and outside resources.

4 OSPI requires school districts report on how state family engagement funds are spent, and holds them accountable for how they use their set aside dollars for family engagement under Title I.

5 OSPI and the State Board of Education require that each district has a written plan in place for how to communicate clearly and effectively with families about plans for education and student support in the event of a school disruption. The plans will draw from the Center for the Improvement of Student Learning's (CISL) clearinghouse on best practices for family engagement and districts should review and revise their plans annually, with input from a representative panel of community members.

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[2] Measure of learning based primarily on student attendance.
[3] A collection of definitions, calculations or rules that summarizes student performance over two or more time periods and adjusts for the specific context of the student.
[4] Activities and projects that monitor student learning to provide ongoing feedback that can be used by instructors to improve their teaching and by students to improve their learning by identifying their strengths and growth areas.
[5] Projects or activities that evaluate student learning at the end of an instructional unit by comparing it against some standard or benchmark.
[6] An Historic Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.
[7] Closing the Opportunity Gap in Washington's Public Education System.

If we systematically and diligently implement the recommendations and conduct the action steps set forth above, we will not just be prepared for the next statewide calamity. We will also have gone a long way towards creating a more equitable education system for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) children, for low income children, for special needs children—for all the children that an inequitable and complacent world leaves behind. *All* **the young people of Washington are entrusted to our care; investing in them is our calling and our duty. This Task Force stands ready to help make our recommendations a reality.**

Introduction: What School Could be Like in 2025—A Scenario:

Chau is a fifth grader in a Washington state public school in 2025. She is having a much better school year now than five years ago during the global pandemic when she was unable to regularly attend class due to poor internet connectivity, lack of access to a workable learning device, and inconsistent communication from her school. She now has strong and reliable internet access and a personal district-provided learning device: a basic laptop loaded with standard learning and security software. She has been using the device regularly for the past week to attend class and do her schoolwork while her school undergoes an unexpected replacement of the heating system.

When seventh grader **Diego** got a text that his middle school would be closed for several days due to treacherous roads from unexpected snowfall, he immediately powered on his learning device to check the lesson calendar, which his classroom teacher had already posted online: current events discussion would begin online at 10:00, science class would be conducted virtually at 11:00, PE class would follow at 1:00, and his teacher's office hours were from 2:00-4:00. Instead of volleyball, his PE teacher led a guided fitness circuit that could be done inside in a small space. Diego was able to participate in all his classes seamlessly, and easily connect to his teacher to get feedback on his writing assignment. At the end of the day, Diego's parents got a call from his volunteer classroom mentor, who speaks their primary language, and has been providing Diego with IT support and coaching in science. He was able to discuss Diego's progress and enthusiasm for the virtual science experiment they worked on together.


Ana is a ninth grader and an excellent math student. She uses her laptop at home not only to complete regular homework, but also to progress through a supplemental math curriculum that enables her to explore and learn at her own pace. This allows for seamless learning from home when necessitated, whether due to local flooding or a regional flu outbreak. When such events have occurred, Ana's parents receive a text in the morning in their primary language informing them of the school's alternative schedule for that day. Ana's textbooks are preloaded on the device, which she also uses to virtually join her school's chess club and stay in contact with her classroom teachers and her peers. The school blocks inappropriate sites, and frequently services the equipment to maintain its security. The laptop and internet connectivity enable Ana to be an equal part of a 21st century learning community, just like her peers from wealthier families.

High school teacher **Akmal** has been implementing his district's transition from a "seat-based/time-based" model of learning to one that is focused on student growth and is competency-based. His professional development has been intense over the past five years, but he appreciates that student outcomes are no longer dictated by punitive assessments that often disadvantage kids of color or those living in poverty. His focus now is on helping students master concepts and engage their unique curiosity. His students' engagement in their education has increased, demonstrated by their dramatic learning gains. Early in the school year, each student in Akmal's class identified a personal learning mentor: a sibling, senior student, or specialist. When unexpected school closures happen, Akmal encourages his students' mentors to check with their students to see if they need any help connecting to class. These mentors were trained by the district's IT staff in basic technology support and know how to connect students to specific assistance at the district helpdesk.

With these vivid and hopeful pictures of what remote learning transitions look like in 2025, let us shift our gaze back to the current state of schooling in Washington. How is remote learning working for teachers like Akmal and students like Chau, Ana, and Diego right now in the 2020-21 school year? Unfortunately, for too many students in Washington, the story is more like this:

CURRENT STATE OF DIGITAL LEARNING

NEW DEVICES

SECURE + RELIABLE INTERNET

UP TO DATE SOFTWARE

ROBUST IT SUPPORT
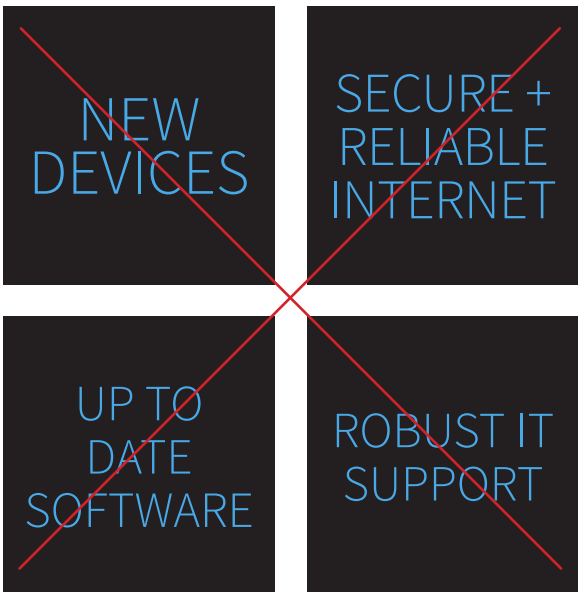
Chau shares an outdated laptop with her older brother, consequently missing classes and having trouble getting much of her homework done. Ana's family does not have reliable internet, because even in many urban areas, connectivity is spotty and expensive and using her cell phone to do homework is frustrating. School districts have worked to set up "hotspots" for internet connectivity, but these have not always worked well, and many students like Diego still have unreliable connections or no connection at all. Akmal has several students who struggle to connect online and attendance for his remote learning classes has been spotty. Full time remote learning is difficult and challenging for students, educators, parents, and staff during a pandemic even under the best of circumstances, and now, the gulf in learning opportunities between children of well-resourced families and their less privileged fellow Washingtonians is widening at an alarming rate.

Washington state can *and must* do better for our children and their educators. Not only do public health experts tell us this isn't the last pandemic, but with high quality, flexible, and robust learning organizations, extended school closures for a variety of reasons (weather, natural disaster, etc.) don't need to be disruptive. In fact, our schools can use what we are learning from this pandemic to create organizations that serve our students—and their educators—much better. We owe it to Chau, Ana, Diego, and their one million peers in Washington state public schools to aggressively build a learning system that can both overcome systemic inequities and withstand external disruption. Our society and economy require it.

Task Force Purpose and Overview

In late August 2020 the Technology Alliance[8], a statewide non-profit organization of leaders from Washington's technology-based businesses and research organizations, convened a diverse group of Washington's education, business, and government leaders from around the state. The Technology Alliance, which has long been active in driving private/public projects to support K-12 education, charged the Remote Learning Task Force with exploring the problems arising in public K-12 education from the current pandemic and envisioning a system that is better prepared for the next major disruption, whether it is in the next year or the next decade. Task Force members agreed to spend three months studying the issues and making recommendations on how to prevent a major event from disrupting our students' learning in the future. First, we spent time looking at the impact of the pandemic on our children, schools, educators, families, and communities. We found that the pandemic served to shed a bright light on the ways that, despite good intentions and a lot of hard work, significant educational opportunity gaps persist for too many students in our state. After gathering information on how remote learning is working—and not working—in Washington, we focused on what can be done over the next five years to create a public school system that is empowered and resourced to provide high-quality education to all of our children during a calamity. Please see Appendices A and B for a complete list of task force members.
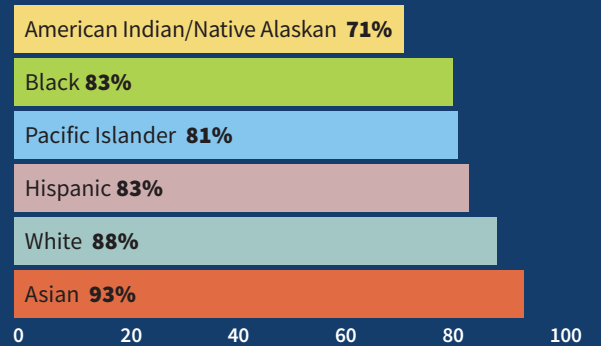
Washington has 295 separate school districts, controlled by locally elected school boards. Districts must comply with state and federal laws but have considerable leeway in managing their schools. Half of Washington's $53.3 billion biennial budget goes to education funding. There are approximately 1.1 million students in Washington state's K-12 education system. The latest ethnic breakdown provided by OSPI is as follows: White (52.5%), Hispanic (24%), Asian (8%), Black (4.4%), and those who identify as Two or More Races (8.6%). 50% of these students are considered low income and 10% of them are English Language Learners.[9]

THERE ARE APPROXIMATELY 1.1 MILLION K-12 STUDENTS IN WASHINGTON STATE

Latest ethnic breakdown of K-12 students provided by OSPI

- White 52.5%
- Hispanic 24%
- Asian 8%
- Black 4.4%
- Two or More Races 8.6%
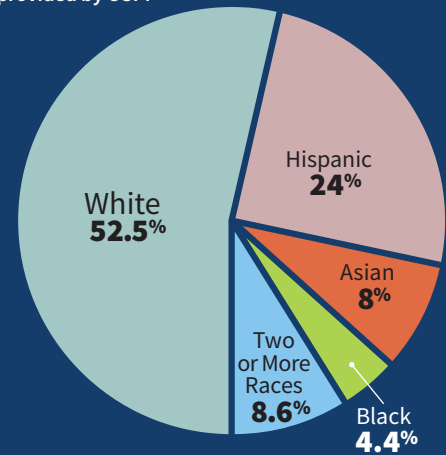
Latest ethnic breakdown of Washington State high school graduation rates provided by NCES

- American Indian/Native Alaskan **71%**
- Black **83%**
- Pacific Islander **81%**
- Hispanic **83%**
- White **88%**
- Asian **93%**

Our Guiding Principles

In order to create a system that delivers a quality education to every child even in the event of a regional or statewide calamity, we must also, out of necessity, reckon with our state's and nation's existing systemic inequalities, including those in education. To accomplish this, the Task Force developed and used guiding principles, outlined below, that not only informed our work but also served as key guideposts as we crafted our recommendations:

- Every student deserves the opportunity to maximize their academic and personal potential. Every school should be built around the "North Star" of helping every single child succeed, which includes cultivating active student engagement in the learning process.

- Educational success requires capacity-building and innovative thinking at the state and district level to ensure we are ready for future major disruptions to our schools.

- Collectively, we need to embrace a transformation of the teaching profession, its academic preparation process, and its credentialing process, to enable teachers to center their efforts on the reason they got into the profession—providing student learning opportunities and developing student competencies—rather than on the completion of "seat time."

- Individually and collectively, we must actively and regularly check our assumptions of race, sex, gender identity, ability, economic status, national origin, and primary language. This includes.

   (1) using language and behavior that promote equity and justice over outdated notions of equality, (2) bringing an anti-racist orientation to all our work, (3) writing recommendations applicable for students and families with and without consistent housing or facing other economic hardship, and (4) making sure students with learning differences, those who are medically fragile, and who have other atypical needs are not left out

- Individually and collectively, we must reckon with the history of white supremacy and the underserving of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) children in Washington public educational institutions.

- Individually and collectively, we must regularly practice the behaviors described above so that they become habits—the rule rather than the exception. Ideally, this document will serve to inspire and cultivate intentional and continuous new habits that support learners, learning guardians, and their broader communities.

Addressing Systemic Inequities: A Call for Educational Justice

Since its creation, our public education system has perpetuated inequities in student access and learning experience across lines of race, perceived ability, language status, and socioeconomic class. The pandemic didn't create these problems, but it did exacerbate them and bring them center stage. As our nation begins to recover from the fallout of the pandemic, it is imperative that we not push these issues back into the shadows. This will mean dealing head-on with reality and creating measurable goals in the short and long term to address and rectify the longstanding inequities in public education.

In talking about how educators see these inequities first hand, one principal described his job as a three-pronged effort, in this order: "Number one is to meet our students' basic needs; number two is getting students access to devices, connectivity, and digital literacy; and number three is engaging students in learning." That is a very different job description than for principals of the past, but it underscores the need to redesign, reinvest, and reinvent as we prepare for the future.

It has been a great frustration for the members of this Task Force that reliable data and metrics around remote learning have been so hard to come by. The challenge is partly because we are measuring things we have never measured before, such as student access to high quality, reliable internet from home. Another challenge is that the data is constantly changing: many students now have adequate learning devices for their personal use who had nothing last spring. That said, we know many thousands of children are not engaging in school because of lack of access to digital learning, and that many are engaged only sporadically.

More than 50% of children in our state live in families that are low-income, and 44% meet the federal poverty rate criteria. Only about 60% of lower-income students are currently able to log into online instruction during the pandemic. This number is in stark contrast to the 90% of high-income students who have more access and better resources, allowing them to more easily succeed in this new online based curriculum[10]. The cost to our students in their future lives, both emotionally and academically, is enormous. In addition, the cost to their families, our neighborhoods, state, and country, as well as the entire global community is immeasurable.

In Washington, 44% of schoolchildren qualify for the national free-and-reduced lunch program. In three out of four Washington school districts, more than 80% of kids qualify, including more than 100 schools where 100% of kids qualify. This means that during the first weeks of the pandemic-caused school closures, many districts focused almost solely on getting meals to students and their families, as food insecurity for many was extreme. Months later, providing food for students is still some districts' number one priority, while others have delegated the task, with varying degrees of success, to volunteer or community organizations.[11]

While this topic was beyond the scope of what the Task Force could address in a few short months, we all know hungry kids can't learn, so planning now for a timely, orderly, and effective alternative food distribution plan will be critical to the success of our students in any future extended shutdown situation

And while it is more comfortable to talk abstractly about poverty, we can't ignore race. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), Washington state has an on time high school graduation rate of 86.7%, slightly above the national average of 85%. White and Asian students graduate at rates of 90% or better. The picture is far different for many of our BIPOC (Black Indigenous and People of Color) students. Only 80% of Black ninth graders and 77% percent of Native American ninth graders who start high school with their peers finish. Just over 80% of Hispanic children and Pacific Islander children finish. This data represents real lives. Every year, thousands of students leave our public schools having lost the opportunity for on-time high school graduation or, possibly, any opportunity to graduate. As a result, these young people face significantly increased barriers to participating in higher education, learning technical trades, or otherwise successfully participating in Washington's innovation economy.

If we estimate that the pandemic school closings will last until at least spring 2021, then many thousands of Washington students, almost surely more than 100,000 students, are essentially missing out on an entire year of school. Another 100,000 or more are only getting minimal schooling. Each year of typical schooling is shown to help students achieve an average increase of 8% in future earnings[12]. Hundreds of thousands of students, mostly low-income and BIPOC, are getting lower quality and less frequent instruction than their well-off, largely white peers. The result is significantly degraded learning opportunities and outcomes. This is unjust and we can and must do more to support the academic and human development of all kids, regardless of their zip code.

Nevertheless, while pandemic-related school closures and remote learning mandates further exacerbate existing inequities, they also present a unique opportunity to thoughtfully reflect upon, reimagine, and rebuild a more effective, engaging, and just educational system. Our state leadership has the opportunity and obligation not to simply restore the old system in a "return to normal" but to support all our communities, families, educators, and students by envisioning and creating a new one.

This clarion moment calls on us to reexamine how we can create an educational system that is built upon the belief that talent exists everywhere, but opportunity does not. And, importantly, access to a quality education that is engaging, personalized, and efficacious is the pathway to academic and life success for every child. This new model should be more student-centered, flexible, and encouraging of innovation and risk-taking to explore and test new and promising models and practices.

It is time to reimagine the student learning experience and optimize it for all students. Now is the time to create a school system that can not only better withstand disruption but also one that is more resilient, more flexible, more relevant and, above all, more equitable.

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[10] COVID-19 and student learning in the United States: The hurt could last a lifetime
[11] Messages identified in Task Force-conducted focus groups and interviews correspond with findings from "Feeding Students During COVID-19–Related School Closures: A Nationwide Assessment of Initial Responses." 2020. Gabriella M. McLoughlin, PhD; et all. Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior 52(12)
[11] Wages and GDP lost due to COVID-19 school closures

Task Force Recommendations

In developing our recommendations, we recognized that there are many players that have the standing or ability to make a difference for our state's 1.1 million students.[13] In particular, the Remote Learning Task Force addresses Governor Inslee, the Washington Legislature, our 295 school districts, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, professional educators and administrators, Colleges of Education, our business community, our nonprofit organizations, and the public at large. We also have an interest in bringing the attention of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and the broader technology community to solving these pressing problems. Equitable digital learning is not a luxury; it is a necessity. We hope the recommendations set forth below will be taken as specific calls to action for a wide variety of leaders across our state.

We divided our work among five committees, all of which overlap to some degree in content, but each with a primary focus: Internet Connectivity, Learning Devices, Student Learning and Educator Readiness, Information Technology Support, and Family Communication. The following five sections contain overviews, recommendations, and proposed action steps for each of the committees.
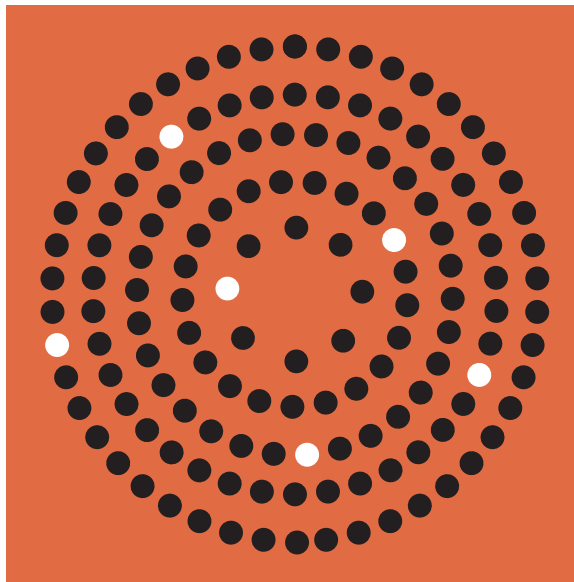
INTERNET CONNECTIVITY

Where and in what ways do students around the state lack robust internet connectivity, and what are possible short- and long-term solutions?

Internet connectivity issues are prevalent across the state. For remote and rural areas, quality internet access is often an hour's drive away. In cities and suburban areas, lack of access may be due to family circumstances or spotty service provided by ISPs. (Please see Appendix C for a comprehensive list of Internet Service providers in Washington with accompanying service area maps.) Widespread remote learning, coupled with the concurrent internet demands of other working or studying household members, often means a lack of bandwidth is a big issue even in urban areas. Currently, 150,000-200,000 Washington students lack adequate, reliable internet access.[14] While school districts have made efforts to address these problems with their own resources and with the assistance of private donors, neither short-term solution is sustainable. School districts need additional resources to ensure they remain users, not providers, of internet services. This includes increased bandwidth and mobile internet hotspots, so that every student has an equal opportunity to learn in their current environment. Long-term solutions include developing dedicated funding-seeking teams at the district level and incentivizing private and public players to 'light up' dark fiber networks. Short-term solutions center on compiling and systematizing data and providing the ability to customize solutions for local and regional needs. The state needs a funded plan to ensure that this basic 21st century infrastructure is in place to support all of our students and schools, regardless of location or local resources.

[13] Washington State Demographics
[14] OSPI and Washington Office of Broadband

Internet Connectivity Recommendations

GOAL OF
50
DOWNLOAD
20
UPLOAD
SPEEDS
STATEWIDE BY
2023

100
DOWNLOAD
40
UPLOAD
SPEEDS
STATEWIDE BY
2026

The Task Force recommends that, within three to five years, one hundred percent of Washington state students will be prepared for a school campus interruption because they have adequate, reliable, and affordable broadband internet connectivity with their district-issued device at home or at a convenient pre-chosen work or study site.

Preparing students to be successful for the future requires a robust and flexible learning infrastructure capable of supporting new types of engagement and providing ubiquitous access to the technology tools that allow students to create, design, and explore. Reliable connectivity, like water and electricity, is foundational to creating an effective learning environment. Students and educators cannot take advantage of the opportunities to connect and engage globally or leverage high-quality learning resources without consistent and reliable access to the internet.[15] For more information on how one school district in Washington grappled with the challenges of connectivity, see the Onalaska Case Study in Appendix D.

We recognize that the primary barrier to 100% connectivity is financial for most students who are currently unserved or under-served, and that lack of internet access often compounds other inequities. Some remote areas utilize hotspots—access points allowing a laptop computer or other device to wirelessly connect to the internet through Wi-Fi technology. Ongoing fees can make this strategy prohibitively expensive, necessitating scalable solutions.[16] We need a system that provides robust internet access to students whose families cannot afford internet services and for students in non-traditional learning environments. We must also create a system that provides access to students experiencing homelessness, which includes at least 40,000 students statewide.[17]

Providing all students with internet access outside of school is both complex and expensive, but it is fundamental to providing educational access to all. Given state geography and the variety of student learning situations, this system will inherently comprise a range of tools, including fiber, satellite, and cellular hotspots. In some cases, Public Utility Districts (PUDs) may be effective internet service providers for underserved communities, when they themselves seek to enter internet provision. Another pathway for discovering solutions to increase access and use of the internet have been addressed through Broadband Action Teams, which work in partnership with citizens, groups, businesses, and agencies in their communities.

Washington state's strategic goal for 2024 is that all Washington residents will have access to 25/3 Mbps Internet connectivity (Appendix F).[18] Given the increased role remote work and learning will play in the future, a symmetrical speed of 150 megabits is considered 'adequate' for households with multiple internet users, though speed needs are anticipated to continue to grow through the 2020s and beyond as connectivity is increasingly viewed as a utility rather than luxury in modern life. Given the statewide improvements required to reach the ambitious—yet wholly necessary—goal of 150 symmetrical megabits by 2028 (per Senate Bill 5511), the Task Force proposes interim goals of 50/20 statewide speeds by 2023, and 100/40 by 2026.[19]

Affordable connectivity is heavily dependent on geographical and socioeconomic contexts. We define "affordable" as the availability of sustainable state-level subsidies for internet services to the following entities: individuals and families who meet income guidelines, nonprofit organizations that host community usage of the internet, and municipal entities such as community centers and libraries.

The Task Force encountered a pervasive problem in its on-the-ground work with school districts and communities throughout the process of developing the internet connectivity recommendations outlined below. Existing data on internet access, connectivity speeds, and service areas are not only concerningly disjointed, they are also incredibly difficult to access and compile. Available data are often disaggregated, and the parties possessing the data were reluctant to share district-level data outside of the district. ISP-provided data, which changes constantly as ongoing services are built out, was found at times to be inflated and overstated.[20] The initial data is, however, compelling and only serves to underscore the urgent need for further data collection. Without an accurate picture of student connectivity, school districts cannot prioritize projects or distribute resources most efficiently.

Several internet connectivity recommendations focus explicitly on collecting data on connectivity access and speeds and making such data accessible to the public. The collection of data in the short term will heavily drive the solutions for long-term problem-solving.

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[15] Office of Educational Technology: Connectivity
[16] See Appendix E for a visual on locations and real speeds of district-supplied hotspots in Onalaska School District.
[17] How the state can better support homeless students and those in foster care during COVID-19.
[18] Washington Office of Broadband. "Update: Broadband Accessibility and Digital Equity". November 19, 2020.
[19] Two primers on internet speeds, and what functions and activities they enable: robots.net, MakeUseOf.
[20] For demonstrative visuals on ISP-reported serviced areas across Washington state, see Appendix C.

Recommended Action Steps

1 The legislature includes annual financial support for internet connectivity in the "Maintenance, Supplies, and Operating Costs" portion of the prototypical school funding model, which is used by the state to allocate resources to school districts.

2 School districts, with the support of other partners, collect information on internet connectivity speeds and gaps for students and educators in all schools to create an anonymized database to support resource distribution and project prioritization for digital equity. District-level data is collected by school districts, updated annually, and includes address coordinates of locations where students lack internet access, have unreliable access, or have inadequate speeds (defined as a download rate of less than 10Mbps). Data collection may be supported in a variety of ways including district IT departments, tools provided by the Washington Broadband Office website, community-based organizations, and Digital Navigators. (See Family Communication for more information on Digital Navigators.) This data shall be anonymized, and the address or coordinate data provided to a central collection point such as the Washington Broadband Office or OSPI. Annually, the collecting agency shall prepare an overview of the status of connectivity statewide and the progress made toward the state internet coverage goal. This step should be seen as complementary to, not in opposition or competition with, the Digital Equity Access Dashboard conceived by the Internet Action Crisis Team, mobilized by State Representative Mia Gregerson.

3 The Washington State Broadband Office and the Department of Commerce pursue federal funding for internet connectivity projects and seek federal funds for broadband expansion and adoption in a technology-neutral manner—that is, without favoring one type of technical solution over another.

4 The Washington State Broadband Office and the Department of Commerce will encourage local Broadband Action Team efforts to expand connectivity by providing state grants and support to build strong applications for federal funding opportunities. Grant applications will be evaluated on (but not limited to) the following criteria:

a How the team will facilitate family communication, such as hiring a liaison who may speak to community-specific needs;

b How the team will ensure data is collected from households where English is not the dominant language;

c How bureaucratic barriers for families wishing to take advantage of free and low-cost internet programs will be minimized;

d How the team will include homeless and migrant families when compiling connectivity data.

5 The Washington Broadband Office and Department of Commerce convene within 60 days of enacted budget funding to determine sustainable funding sources for a state broadband infrastructure program. They may ask a stakeholder group to make recommendations within one year or, alternatively, they may hire a consultant. Recommendations include identifying a sustainable revenue source as well as setting priorities, including, but not limited to, provisions for state matching of federal funds and set-asides for tribes and traditionally marginalized populations.

6 The legislature authorizes Public Utility Districts (PUDs) to enter retail provision of internet services in places where there is inadequate access to internet services and electrical utilities are already established. PUDs can also offer ISPs a subsidized loop connection for their retail customers who qualify for the Lifeline Program.

7 The legislature incentivizes ISPs to pursue partnerships with rural communities to offer services to connect or "light up" existing already-laid infrastructure that is not currently connected (dark fiber).

LEARNING DEVICES

Where and in what ways do students around the state lack the personal learning devices that are essential for remote learning, and what are possible short- and long-term solutions?

Most states have set a goal of a 1-to-1 device-to-student ratio for home use. K-2 students usually use a touchpad-type device; grades 3-5 often use a simple-operating-system-plus-browser type device; and grades 6-12 require a fully functional laptop computer. Even though Washington state ordered the purchase of 64,000 computer devices for schools in November, 2020 using federal CARES Act resources, the state still has a shortage of an estimated 200,000 devices to meet the 1-to-1 goal.[21] Some communities are rehabbing older laptops for student use, but this is an interim step at best. In the long term, what is the answer for the state when it comes to ensuring learning devices are readily available on an equitable basis? Additionally, how can we ensure our school faculty have the equipment they need to teach effectively from remote locations and that both educators and students have access to timely technical support?

THERE IS A SHORTAGE OF
200k
DEVICES FOR WASHINGTON STATE STUDENTS

[21] OSPI OSPI Digital Device Dataset. August 2020

Learning Devices Recommendations

For all students and faculty to have adequate learning and teaching devices, we need to change how we pay for technology tools. These devices are no longer "extras;" they are essential to learning and access to education. Resources for digital device expenditures, security, maintenance, and disposal/recycling must be built into the basic operational budgets of all districts. Achieving statewide equity demands that access to appropriate technology tools no longer be dependent upon special levies.

Recommended Action Steps

1 The legislature includes annual financial support for the purchase, maintenance, and replacement of digital learning devices for each student, faculty, and key administrative staff member in the "Maintenance, Supplies, and Operating Costs" portion of the prototypical school funding model. Districts can utilize Educational Service Districts (ESDs) to leverage the power of group purchasing to bring down costs for all, particularly impacting smaller districts. Device purchase and maintenance is basic, fundamental, and core to the central mission of each school.

2 Each school district issues a learning device to every student, faculty, and key administrative staff member at the beginning of every school year. Devices meet state-identified standards, with the ability to access the internet at a speed that meets or exceeds state-identified standards.

What recommendations might serve to assist districts in providing high-quality remote learning experiences for students? How can we assist teachers in the best practices for remote learning?

School districts around the state are at varying stages of implementing remote or blended learning models, selecting content, and implementing digital curricula. They are also in various stages of moving from a "seat-time model" of student achievement to one based on student progress with a goal of student proficiency[22] and competency. Both new and current educators need professional development in remote pedagogy to successfully teach in this new environment. What can be done to help expand learning opportunities for students and increase the skills our current and future K-12 educators possess so that students can have the best opportunities for success?

STUDENT LEARNING AND EDUCATOR READINESS

[22] The documented evidence that a student has met the required level of skill and knowledge needed to master the course material.

Student Learning and Educator Readiness Recommendations

In 2020, the Washington K-12 and higher education learning experience changed rapidly, with the bulk of instruction occurring through live[23] or asynchronous[24] online methods. In this changed environment, social, academic, and technical challenges abounded, including the difficulty of getting access to modern laptops, accessing digital curricula and reliable internet connectivity and, for some, simply finding a quiet place to "attend" class. Educators faced similar obstacles, with the added challenge of learning to teach online, a wholly different experience than standing in front of a classroom. The role of families and learning guardians changed even more dramatically. They were now required to serve as teachers or coaches, which meant ensuring their children stayed on task when learning from home even while they, themselves, navigated working from home or working outside of the home. For unhoused families, foster families, and those with children with special needs, the challenges were far greater.

In planning for future school disruptions, the state, districts, and schools must prioritize the continuation of challenging and relevant academic experiences along with the cultivation of student engagement. In other words, these experiences should be engaging and efficacious. This means both effectively using digital curricula at all grade levels as well as shifting the standard definitions of "learning" to foster flexibility and student agency. Remote education has reminded us that "learning" can be distinct from "schooling." Student agency, which gives students an authentic voice in how they learn, lies at the heart of learning, and our system's practices should promote student-directed learning and choice. This will lead to deeper student engagement and growth, with a goal of academic proficiency for all students.

To prepare for future crises, we must reinvent a pedagogy that is optimized for remote learning, including high-quality, personalized digital content that is intentionally inclusive and diverse, and therefore relevant. To get there, we recommend the following:

Teacher Support and Readiness:
For students to learn during calamity, teachers must be able to teach effectively during calamity. Remote and blended learning require new technological and communications skills, and, especially, mastery of digital curricula. That means giving current teachers professionally embedded support and giving incoming educators practice teaching in both remote and blended settings using digital curricula and other technology tools.

Most districts are moving or have already moved to online software called learning management systems (LMS) to create, deliver, manage, and track the delivery of educational content. This transition must be supported as it enables both remote and blended learning. While our state works to address gaps in access to both learning devices and high-speed internet, teachers should also receive resources on offering participatory and active-learning-based instruction that is possible across a variety of devices as a bridge to full statewide device access.

Building a Resilient and Equitable Education System:
Like society at large, our children, families, and communities are grappling not only with a global pandemic, but also with a national reckoning with our country's history regarding race, privilege, and power. This reckoning and the reality that underlies it pervades almost everything that schools are struggling with as they attempt to navigate remote learning. It is no accident some students can successfully access remote instruction while others struggle to obtain even the most basic information from their schools. These issues existed before the pandemic, and they will not go away when students return to physical school buildings.

To have any hope of success during future disruptions, and in the interest of building an equitable, resilient school system in the meantime, it is essential that our state government leaders, educational leaders, and community leaders press for anti-racist change throughout our school system. To accomplish this, all districts must be expected to adopt an anti-racist framework and a plan for regular training, reviewing, and resolving policies and practices, both horizontally and vertically across departments and schools. As point-in-time test data

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[23] Students are required to log in and participate in class at a specific and set time.
[23] Allows students to view instructional materials each week at any time they choose and does not include a live video lecture component.

can be used to either obscure or expose the realities of the racial opportunity gap, focusing on data that captures student learning growth is necessary. More work needs to be done to find alternative and transparent measures of student growth and progress.

Equally important is ensuring all educators and staff possess the mindsets and skills necessary to truly serve each of our students with openness and compassion. We strongly recommend that just as many schools are quickly and radically changing the way they deliver learning, then so must the institutions that are preparing educators for this new teaching environment. They will be teaching in a world where technology skills are essential, cultural responsiveness and respect is expected, and student learning is more individualized and focused on opportunity and growth.

Schools must also work to build genuine relationships with students and families before any future crises unfold. Strong adult/student and peer relationships are the foundation of student engagement and student engagement is the foundation of student success. The pandemic has demonstrated that deep, lasting learning will not happen without these relationships, as crisis response is most effective, and sometimes only possible, when schools, families, and students have established a strong foundation of trust and communication. By establishing a more inclusive and culturally responsive school environment, schools will have the foundation of trust necessary to keep students and families engaged in future remote scenarios.

Recommended Action Steps

1 Improving Learning Opportunities for Students

1. Schools and districts support educators through embedded professional development to effectively use technology tools, digital curricula, and other effective strategies for students to learn remotely or in blended learning settings. The Association of Educational Service Districts (AESD) and the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (CTSP) are two excellent resources for this effort.

2. Schools and districts support the sharing of data and best practices, including highlighting examples where student-centered innovative learning is reshaping what is expected from students and educators.

3. As a state, encourage more flexibility in course structure and design, such as shifting from a seat-based model to a learning growth model.

4. Schools and districts rethink how outcomes are defined in order to provide greater flexibility for innovating in student learning. We recommend a statewide move to more formative assessments in lieu of summative assessments when possible.

5. In preparation for the next major disruption, the legislature gives OSPI the statutory authority to move into a previously agreed upon remote learning model that allows districts increased flexibility in instructional time and other requirements. This model should stipulate effective and engaging digital curricula to support remote learning on personal devices.

The Need for Flexibility
"At the beginning of remote learning, we had five people sharing our internet at home. It couldn't handle the burden of all of us trying to work and study at the same time. I would go over to my grandparents' place, or my boyfriend's house so my younger siblings could use the internet at home."
-**Susan, Ballard Student**

2 Addressing Inequities and Improving School Culture:

1. District administrators develop capacity-building strategic plans to prepare for future learning disruptions. These plans are vetted by all key stakeholders including families, students, educators, staff, and principals. Furthermore, these plans are practiced (like a fire drill) frequently (i.e., at least monthly) when there is no crisis to manage to help these constituents become fluent in blended/remote learning. The state legislature and OSPI have important roles to play in providing incentives for the development of these capacity plans across the state.

2. Schools work to grow the foundation of trust that is necessary to keep students and families engaged in future remote scenarios by embracing a more inclusive and culturally responsive school environment. This includes a greater focus on the whole child's well-being by providing socio-emotional support and communication to families throughout the school year that is both proactive and responsive.

3. Districts define and articulate an anti-racist frame and create a plan for reviewing and resolving policies regularly, both horizontally and vertically across departments and schools.

4. Districts ensure through hiring and reviewing practices that all educators and staff possess the mindset and skills to serve our students effectively and compassionately regardless of how schooling is delivered.

Lastly, it is important to realize that the pandemic has changed the way many students and families—as well as school professionals think about school and schooling. When schooling models shift to include remote locations, learning must not be interrupted. Even if schools close, learning must stay "on" for ALL kids, regardless of the zip code in which they live.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT

How can our school districts best provide the required IT infrastructure and then support that infrastructure?

One of the biggest challenges for districts, large and small, is providing the information technology infrastructure required for successful remote learning. This is a huge pivot for districts, and they are not prepared. In the short term, are there some models of volunteer tech support currently working in some communities that may be able to be scaled statewide? In the longer term, what investment should the state make to improve IT support to districts and students?

Information Technology Support Recommendations

IT support in urban and suburban schools is often understaffed and is limited or non-existent in small and rural schools. It is typically designed primarily to support educators and staff, rather than students and families, particularly in places that do not provide devices to students. Serving students, especially during remote instruction, requires very different skillsets than most IT support professionals currently have. Educators, meanwhile, are overwhelmed by the challenge of remote instruction, and are ill-equipped to troubleshoot technology issues. Unfortunately, they often have no other choice. Connectivity issues are a constant source of frustration and add another layer of complexity to instructional challenges. Additionally, many tools currently used in schools are not built for scale, and too many of the apps students and educators are currently using are cobbled together or are not integrated.

The IT staff in Washington public school systems lack training in supporting teaching, learning, and special needs populations. This lack of education-centered training can lead them to make decisions based more upon network security or efficiency rather than educational outcomes. This situation demonstrates the need for closer partnerships between the teaching and learning staff and IT support.

In the current pandemic, districts have had to find devices where they can, which means they may provide a range of devices with different software configurations, making providing even basic technical support more challenging. The culture of IT support tends to be very siloed and organized around traditional staffing models, and staff rarely reflect the demographics of the population they are serving. There is very little peer-to-peer or informal support or partnerships. Lastly, cybersecurity is a constant but chronically underfunded worry for administrators and staff, especially with so many students now learning from home, where IT support has no control over the technology environment.

However, we have seen some successes in IT support during the pandemic, including some exciting models like the Family Tech Support Center (FTSC), a public-private partnership between sea.citi, a tech-focused nonprofit organization; the local tech industry; Seattle Public Schools; and the Alliance for Education. Another example is the Learning Management Systems (LMS) training provided by the Association of Educational Service Districts (AESD). Additionally, there have been many examples of educators taking individual initiative to support their students virtually using technology, including some innovative practices that have been highly engaging for their students. For more examples of best practices in IT support, please see Appendix G. Lastly, see the Onalaska Case Study (Appendix D) for an example of one local effort and the obstacles they face.

Successful IT Support

In my district, you can call IT staff directly, and speak to individuals. I've been assured in calls that "I may have to call two or three times to understand this, don't be embarrassed." They know what it's actually like for people on the other end.

-**Lisa, Spokane**

Scalability Issues

Chad Stevens, Leader for K12 Education at Amazon Web Services, saw that, "as technology usage ramped in schools beginning in the late 90s the pace of innovation really grew faster than many IT support models. One minute schools were just getting started with computer labs, the next they were on to data centers. This led to great complexity, siloed systems and layers of technology piled onto each other."

Guiding Principles for Improved IT Support

- Students are the primary customers and stakeholders, with teaching and learning as both the starting point and measure of each decision made by IT leaders.

- School districts build IT support systems that assume 1-to-1 devices and ubiquitous, robust connectivity in three to five years with students able to move seamlessly between virtual and physical realms.

- Scalability goals take into account that district size, staffing, and security need to be balanced with educational efficiency in IT decision-making.

- Schools ensure all students, regardless of their family's income, location, primary language, need for assistive technology, or housing situation, have equal access to high-quality IT support. IT staff receive training in responding to sensitive situations they encounter, such as food insecurity, abuse, or homelessness.

- District IT staff support strategies to help build strong, independent, lifelong learners.

- School leadership and training/coaching are key to ensuring success of education technology initiatives.

- District IT departments regularly review existing tools and systems to ensure integration among existing inventory.

Recommended Action Steps

1 OSPI and the Association of Education Services Districts (AESD) convene a working group of IT leaders and educators within 60 days of this report's release to describe in detail what a student-centered IT support system looks like and identify the new skills and staffing models that will be needed to make this a reality. This approach focuses on measuring engagement rather than attendance, in keeping with a more competency-based approach to student learning.

2 OSPI communicates more clearly how IT support is critical to support equity in learning by advocating for increased funding for IT support in expanded roles through increases in the prototypical school funding model (currently .628 FTE/1000 students, increase over four years to 2.0 FTE/1000 students). The current IT staffing model was developed to support technology use within schools only and has proven to be inadequate to support remote learning technical support needs during remote education.

3 The Task Force works with partners to share case studies of IT support and training for educators, students, and families that can respond to remote and blending learning needs. These will include:

a Models incorporating students in support roles (e.g., GenYes)

b Models from other states with regional tech support and/or knowledge base sharing (and explore how this might be implemented via our state's Educational Service Districts)

c Business and/or community partnerships to extend/enhance IT support

d Decentralized/grassroots or peer-to-peer support

e Ways to provide much-needed support and training to those in IT support roles (e.g., leveraging the state Office of the Chief Information Officer's security office to increase the security knowledge base of school IT personnel)

f Family engagement strategies to support better access

Special Education Learning

Mr. Y from John F Kennedy High school has been teaching math for the last few years. He noticed that one of his special education students in his 9th grade "common core" mathematics class was struggling and wanted to find the best way to address those needs. To clear up any misconceptions, Mr. Y said, "I know that special education students need extra accommodations in the classroom, so during a pandemic, those accommodations that would be used in the classroom needed to be adapted to online learning. Some of these students have ADHD, auditory processing disorders, etc. Some others get distracted easily or need to show their learning through different modalities. I knew that one-on-one instruction using a breakout room would be the most effective method because it stimulates that interpersonal connection that we are missing from not being in the classroom. In a breakout room, my student feels like they are seen and cared for. Although the virtual one-on-one is not the same, I was still able to make sure that my student was caught up with the material and not falling behind."

FAMILY COMMUNICATION

What can be done to ensure that all families and learning guardians in a student's education have the support required to make remote education a success?

This often-overlooked area is key to ensuring remote learning can be successful. Students with physical, cognitive, and/or emotional challenges, English Language Learners, marginalized populations, kids in foster care, and parents in general, all need specific solutions and support in order for remote education to succeed. What resources can be made available to these families and what are the best ways to communicate with them in this new environment? What are the social and emotional challenges that might arise for students, parents, and educators, and what can be done to assist them? How can families struggling with this new learning model be identified and helped? In the long term, what does a supportive remote learning community look like, and what role can the state play in helping to develop it?

Family Communication Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-21 has forced the state to confront and address severe inequities in how districts and schools engage and communicate with families and other learning guardians. The sudden and catastrophic move to remote learning meant schools had to rely much more heavily on electronic communication, which has always been problematic for families that speak non-dominant languages or lack access to technology. Furthermore, the nature of communications has become far more complex: schools have found themselves explaining new models of learning, assisting families with technology access, and helping families access other resources, such as free and reduced-price meals.

Families and learning guardians (namely, designated individuals in a student's life who assist them in learning, whether they be a relative, trusted neighbor, or community mentor) deserve certain guarantees as part of the learning experience. These include clear, ongoing venues to give feedback to their school and district; greater transparency around learning data and decision-making with respect to their child's learning; and a clear complaint and resolution process. During remote learning, families should have clear and regular communication from their child's teacher, training and resources for supporting their children, and access to childcare and/or in-person learning centers for those who must work.

Family communication, like other aspects of remote learning touched on elsewhere in this report, has varied dramatically from district to district and even school to school. Some schools have flourished and innovated while others have floundered and, as a result, some families have been essentially "lost" by their schools. For example, the Equity in Education Coalition and 21 of its community-based organization partners recently surveyed more than 800 families, over a two-week period, throughout Southeast Seattle and the South King County area. Of the families surveyed, over half had not heard from their school district since September 2020. About one quarter of those families said the last time they heard from their school district was over the summer, and about 100 families said that the last time they heard from their school district was before schools closed due to the pandemic. This means that, in King County alone, at least 400 students who were previously enrolled in public schools are no longer receiving any educational services. While these data are from King County, similar situations exist elsewhere in the state, meaning thousands, if not tens of thousands, of students have been excluded from learning.

As the pandemic and resulting school closures wear on, some schools are making inroads with students who struggle with access to learning, technology, and support—in part through work by community- and faith-based organizations and hard-working and innovative individuals. However well these piecemeal systems may work in getting schools through this round of closures, the state will need a comprehensive strategy of family and community engagement moving forward.

Family Engagement Programs:
Unfortunately, the conversation around our education system's inadequate ability to engage families is not new to the pandemic. Rather, it has been ongoing for many years, with incremental—not transformative—change happening along the way. in Washington, OSPI's Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC) has been calling for increases in funding and other changes to family engagement programs since 2009. Most recently, in their 2020 annual report, EOGOAC advocated that the legislature:

- **Adopt and fund the family engagement coordinator allocation in the prototypical schools funding model as recommended by OSPI's 2019 Staffing Enrichment Work Group.**[25]

- **Pass HB 2631, which would establish a workgroup to create a family engagement framework for ages 0 to 21, across all Washington schools.**

They also recommended that:

- **The Center for the Improvement of Student Learning**[26] **(CISL) within OSPI develop family engagement best practices within its research clearinghouse. Best practices would include "evidence-based practices for authentic, reciprocal models of community and family engagement that resonate with linguistically diverse communities and communities of color" as well as highlighting case studies of Washington schools that exemplify these best practices.**

- **The Washington State School Directors Association (WSSDA), in consultation with stakeholders, revises its model family involvement policy to ensure it is culturally responsive and addresses the needs of BIPOC students.**

Curtailed Communication:
In our Middle Schooler's school handbook, there's a page that poses the question of 'what if I don't have internet?' from a student. The handbook just says 'it's not required. You'll be able to do homework, but it may take longer.' That's all it had to say on that issue.
-**Pat, King County**

Service Gaps for Neurodivergent Students
I cannot overstate how much of a struggle remote learning has been for my family. My son cannot communicate with words and uses a TOBII device. Early in the fall, I was astounded at how much parents were being asked to step in and teach lessons, even as their children were getting less than four hours of dedicated time with their teachers per week. Before COVID, online learning was available and a viable option for students who needed it. But during the pandemic, the onus is being put on parents to fill in gaps.
-**Adrienne, Parent. King County**

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[25] The recommended allocations for family engagement coordinators are: 1.250-elementary schools, 1.157-middle schools, and .833-high schools (pg 23). https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/communications/2019-12-Staffing-Enrichment-Workgroup.pdf
[26] https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/support-programs/center-improvement-student-learning-cisl

Governor Inslee's Digital Navigator Program:
The National Digital Inclusion Alliance developed the Digital Navigator mode[27] to adapt traditional digital inclusion support to the social distancing required by COVID-19; as schools and libraries closed, the primary point of digital access for many communities disappeared overnight, leaving a massive hole in services, and creating a crisis for many students. In addition, even for families who receive laptops and hotspots, many are faced with navigating the internet for the first time and are struggling to connect.

The Digital Navigator program presents an innovative approach to the challenges of connecting people to the internet. Digital Navigators work to identify people in need of internet access, hardware, and digital skills, provide people with those technologies and digital literacy support, and connect people to opportunities and resources for digital inclusion, including food, housing, health, and mental health services. Digital Navigators are experienced, trauma-informed social service providers who, while reaching out to families around food, housing, health, and mental health services, are also cross-trained to offer digital access and digital literacy support.

Digital Navigators:

• Offer base level technical advice, social service support, and digital literacy training;

• Are full-time employees of either a community-based organization, school district, or other anchor institution that is cross-trained in digital literacy and social support services; and

• Create a warm "hand-off" to a technology support call-in center if needed;

This offers a solution to many of the barriers families currently face, from access to hardware to guidance on how to use their devices. The National Digital Inclusion Alliance model also includes Digital Navigator training as a coordinating tool where digital inclusion resource mapping could contribute to community planning, prioritizing the building of more resources, statewide asset mapping, data collection, and coordination with Washington's Broadband Action Team.

Recommended Action Steps

1 The legislature fully funds implementation of Governor Inslee's Digital Equity investment, including Digital Navigators, as detailed in his December 2020 equity policy brief.[28]

2 The legislature fully funds EOGOAC's 2020 recommendation[29] to improve family engagement in Washington State. These recommendations include:

a Increasing funding for the position of family engagement coordinators within the "prototypical schools" funding model as recommended by OSPI's Staffing Enrichment Workgroup.[30]

b Passing HB 2631 to establish a workgroup to create a family engagement framework.

3 OSPI directs school districts to fully fund and prioritize staffing of family engagement coordinators when staffing schools, particularly schools with high percentages of students in poverty and large variance in home languages. This role is vital to both connecting families with their schools and connecting schools and families to community organizations and outside resources.

4 OSPI requires that school districts report on how state family engagement funds are spent, and holds them accountable for how they are using their set aside dollars for family engagement under Title I.

5 OSPI and the State Board of Education require that each district has a written plan in place for how to communicate clearly and effectively with families about plans for education and student supports in the event of a school disruption. The plans will draw from CISL's clearinghouse on best practices for family engagement and districts will review and revise their plans annually, with input from a representative panel of community members.

Implementing these recommendations will take the state further down the path of serving its most vulnerable students: those who were already furthest from educational justice. And while it is tempting to dismiss these necessary changes due to cost, the pandemic has made the truth inescapable: lack of investment is far more expensive than the considerable financial investment it will take to be prepared for the next crisis. At the same time, developing plans and forming relationships is a process. The hard work that we need to do to prepare for the next pandemic must begin now

Including Families in the Conversation:
To promote digital equity in the low-income Sierra Vista Mobile Park, Silicon Valley, the school district offered free parent training for online management platforms and incorporated multilingual family communication software. While challenges remain in creating dedicated work spaces at homes, the software innovations and flexibility in communication channels received positive reviews from families.

28 https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/Equity_PolicyBrief_Dec%2014.pdf
29 Closing the Opportunity Gap in Washington's Public Education System
30 https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/communications/2019-12-Staffing-Enrichment-Workgroup.pdf
31 More information can be found on Connect Washington

Related Topics Deserving Further Study, Development or Consideration:

In the three months of Task Force work, we were able to focus only on the issues that were core to our mission of improving a sudden transition to remote education, and just began the process of studying large and critical issues that need further exploration. During our work, we surfaced a host of related topics deserving further study and effort by the state. These topics include:

- **Digital Equity Plan & Dashboard:**
  The Internet Action Crisis Team, mobilized by State Representative Mia Gregerson in mid-2020, identified the need for a GIS-based Digital Equity Action Dashboard for the state of Washington. This dashboard will allow stakeholders from various entities such as tribes, school districts, and community organizations, to identify areas of greatest need, prioritize projects, and invest wisely.

- **Crisis Readiness Score:** It may behoove the State Board of Education, in collaboration with OSPI, the Governor's Office, and vested stakeholders (including the Office of Equity) to develop a Crisis Readiness Score for school districts in which it takes each of the topics referenced above and any others that are identified (such as food distribution) and develops a grading rubric that each school can measure itself against. This will allow district and school leaders to identify areas of strength and weakness and invest accordingly. Parents will also have a window into how prepared their school is in the event of an extended closure.

- **Ongoing, effective, and embedded Professional Development for Educators:** In order to teach effectively in remote and blended settings; to develop and implement instructional strategies for new circumstances; to identify and utilize individualized digital curricula; to master a myriad of technology tools and platforms; and to troubleshoot student technology and learning issues remotely, teachers need help. ESDs have utilized federal CARES Act resources to provide some immediate support for professional development, which we highlighted earlier in the report, but much more needs to be done. Teachers are essentially being asked to reinvent their profession on the fly. This work will require ongoing district and professional support, deploying innovative solutions, and a deep commitment from the profession itself to design a new model of instructional excellence.

- **Preparation and credentialing of educators:** There was a high degree of agreement among task force members that we need a transformation of how we teach and evaluate students, which necessitates an overhaul of the academic preparation and credentialing process. A reimagined system enables teachers to center their efforts on providing student learning opportunities and developing student competencies. It also requires current technology skills, cultural responsiveness, and skills in facilitating student learning in an environment much more individualized and focused on opportunity and growth. Colleges of Education can be leaders in this transformational effort.

Adaptive Privilege

In many ways, this horrific pandemic has forced us to rethink what learning looks like. Those who are thriving in these challenging times have taken risks, and have had the privilege to take such risks. As we think about learning, we know that it happens best in community. We also know that it involves and embraces failure, not something our current education systems embrace and celebrate. The ability to nimbly adapt to our dynamic environmental and educational conditions is critical as we move forward in our global community.
  -**Michelle Reid, Supt, Northshore SD**

Conclusion

On August 29, 2020, the Technology Alliance virtually gathered a group of 40 leaders from across Washington State to address the impact of the pandemic on our K-12 schools and to explore what we could do to ensure our children never have to go through another year like this one. The primary goal was to see what is necessary to effectively prepare for the next major disruption, whether this comes in the form of another pandemic, weather-related shutdowns, or other emergencies. As we did our work, it was impossible to ignore the many uncomfortable truths we found along the way. Over the course of three months, group members dealt honestly, and sometimes painfully, with what the pandemic has revealed to us about the glaring disparities in educational access and opportunity among our state's children. Many in the group already knew it; but a broader understanding brought a deeper commitment to address these disparities now, rather than later. As research[32] and discussion progressed, a silver lining among all the bad news became increasingly apparent. Although preparing our schools for the next disruption will be expensive, time-consuming, and difficult, it also presents a unique opportunity to make our schools more equitable and higher quality for all Washington kids. Ensuring each student has the requisite tools and support to do remote learning effectively has the added benefit of creating endless new opportunities for all children to explore and learn and grow in a world not bound by the physical schoolroom.

Washington state is home to some of the most successful companies the world has ever known, and our innovation economy has generated enormous wealth for a few, and substantial prosperity for many. The median family income for a family of four in Washington is nearly $106,000, which places us at seventh out of 50 states. However, we suffer from increasing wealth disparity; 50% of our schoolchildren belong to low-income families. Our spending per child on K-12 education in 2020 was $12,995, which is a substantial increase from a decade ago, but still places Washington at 18th out of 50 states.[33] Simply put, we are underinvesting in our schools relative to our overall income.

What is clear is that we are not committing the resources necessary to help the 50% of Washington children who are living in poverty so they have the same learning opportunities as their wealthier peers. Broadband connectivity, state-of-the-art devices, and access to educational software are commonplace among wealthier homes and scant or nonexistent among low-income ones. It used to be that going to school gave a student at least a theoretical equal shot at an equal education, even though we know systemic racism has and continues to play havoc with that window dressing. When students do not have the basic tools required to learn—which in today's world clearly includes a functional learning device and robust connectivity—we cannot delude ourselves that our schools provide an equal opportunity experience for all our children.

If we systematically and diligently implement the recommendations and undertake the action steps this Task Force recommends, we will not just improve the experience during the next calamity for every child regardless of their demographics. We will also have gone a long way towards creating a much more equitable system for low-income children, for BIPOC children, for special needs children—for every child that an inequitable world conspires to leave behind. All the young people of Washington are entrusted to our care. Investing in them is our calling and our duty. This Task Force stands ready to help make our recommendations reality.

[32] Task Force research included extensive phenomenological interviews with teachers, parents, education staff, and students. For a selection of interview notes and transcripts, see Appendix I.
[33] Department of Justice
[34] U.S. Census, 2020

Appendix A:

Task Force Members

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Dennis Small
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Bellevue School District

Mat Wisner
Lead at North America
Amazon Future Engineer
Program, Amazon

Jessie Woolley-Wilson
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Dreambox Learning

Appendix B:

Task Force by Committee

Task Force Co-Chairs
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Jessie Woolley-Wilson

Connectivity Committee
Chair – Francine Wiest
Ellen Ahlness
Annette Becker
Jasper Chattra
Carl Done
Russ Elliott
John Flanagan
Kurtis Heimerl
Sharonne Navas
Jenny Rojanasthien
Lisa Wellman

**Curriculum and
Teacher Readiness**
Chairs – Bree Dusseault &
Christy Johnson
Dave Cillay
Geri Gillespy
Ian Goodhew
Lisa Holmes
Gary Locke
Matt Medlin
Trish Millines-Dziko
Michelle Reid
Melissa Webster
Mat Wisner
Jessica Vavrus

Devices
Chair – Angela Jones
Jane Broom
James Dorsey
John Flanagan
Mia Gregerson
Al Herron
Christine Pham
Heather Redman

Family Communications
Chairs – Melissa Bowen &
Sharonne Navas
Will Daugherty
Lindsay Hunsicker
Caroline Kiehle
Carrie McKenzie
Michael Meotti
Nate Miles
Brian Moreno
Maddy Thompson

IT Support
Chair – Dennis Small
Matt Boehnke
Kurt Gazow
Andrew Hickman
Carrie McKenzie
Nick Merriam
Christine Pham
Pete Phillips
Chad Stevens

Task Force Staff
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Consultant,
Susannah Malarkey

William H. Gates Sr. Fellow in
Innovation & Entrepreneurship –
Ellen Ahlness & Christine Pham

Appendix C:

Number of Providers Operating in Each Postal Code

For best portrait of WA state connectivity, this visual may be referenced alongside the WA Providers List, which comprehensively lists WA internet providers, their areas of operation, and size of serviced populations, as available. An ISP is included in a postal code's count if it provides services to more than 100 households in that postal code; it does not mean all households are serviced or serviceable by the provider. All ISPs areas of operation are drawn from public data and Task Force inquiries to ISPs, and do not reflect the scope or size of service zones.

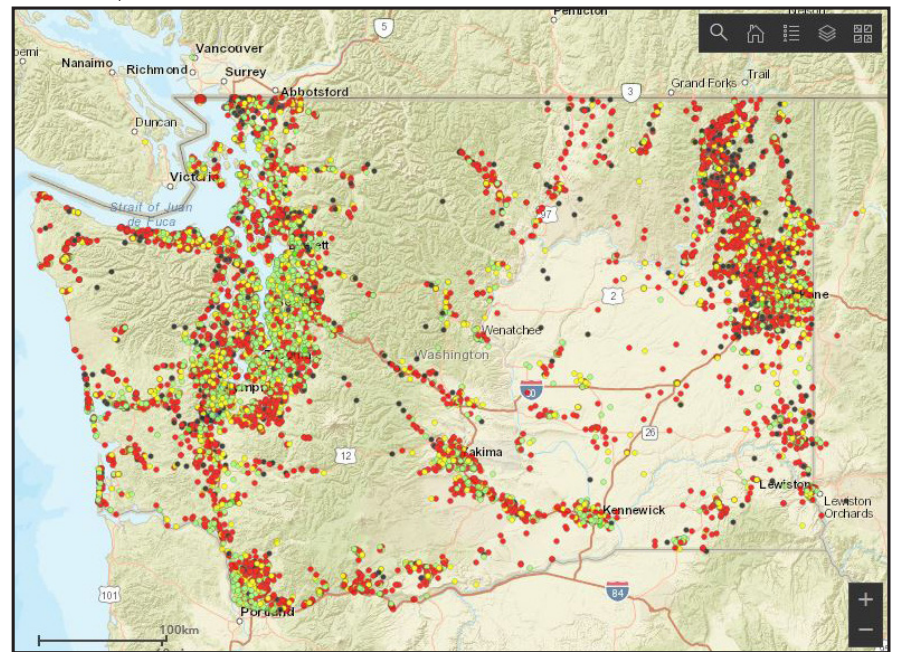**Number of Broadband Providers**
In each postal code
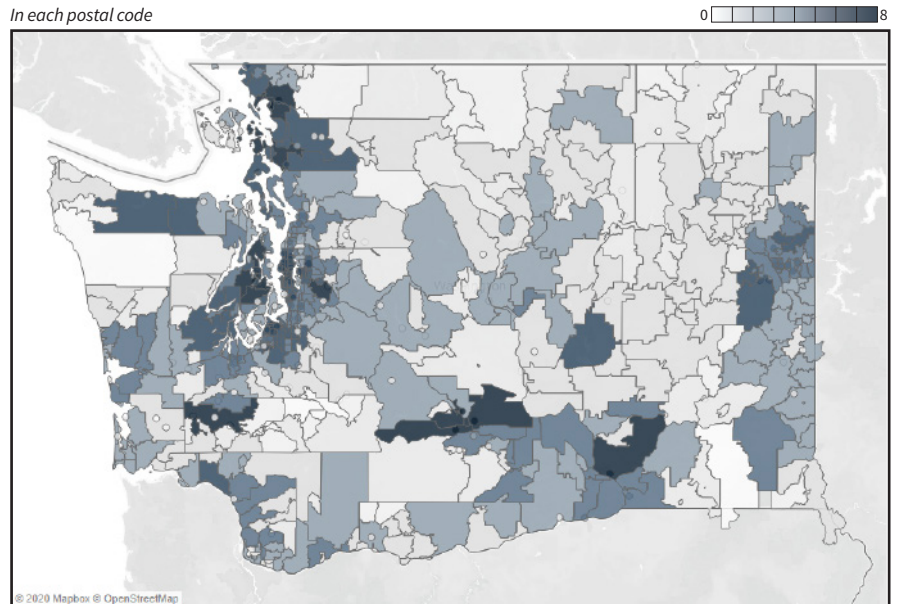
Appendix F:

Washington Broadband Survey Results
All download speeds

High > 500 mbps   Low 10-25 mbps   No Service
Medium 25-500 mbps   Very Low 0-10 mbps

Complete appendices, including Appendices D and E, are available with the complete task force report at **www.technology-alliance.com**

Visuals by Ellen A. Ahlness

You can help make these recommendations a reality.

Please go to
www.technology-alliance.com/2021-remote-learning-petition
to sign a petition to support our state moving forward on the
Remote Learning Task Force's recommendations. Thank you!

TechAlliance

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