

Provide Emergency Funding to Close The Homework Gap & Digital Divide



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COVID-19 has shone a spotlight on a specific aspect of the digital divide known as the homework gap—the inability to do schoolwork at home due to lack of internet access. Nationwide, up to 12 million students are affected—roughly 1 in 5. A disproportionate share of those students are African-American or Hispanic, come from low-income households, or live in rural areas.

WHY ACTION IS NEEDED

- ▶ Before the coronavirus crisis, students who didn't have the internet at home could use **free Wi-Fi** in libraries and other places.
- ▶ With schools and libraries closed and stay-at-home orders in place in most cities and states, that's **no longer possible**.
- ▶ Students who don't have access to the internet can't participate in **distance learning** and may fall behind their peers.

WHO IS HIT HARDEST

- ▶ According to the Pew Research Center:
 - **37 percent** of rural Americans do not have broadband internet access at home
 - **35 percent** of students from households with annual incomes below \$30,000 do not have access to high-speed internet at home
 - **25 percent** of African-American households and **23 percent** of Hispanic households with school-age children do not have access to high-speed internet at home

WHAT EDUCATORS WANT

- ▶ Support the **Emergency Educational Connections Act (H.R. 6563)** by Rep. Grace Meng (D-NY) to provide \$2 billion for an emergency fund, administered through the E-Rate program, for schools and libraries to support distance and remote learning for students without home internet access for the duration of the COVID-19 emergency.
- ▶ This approach is best because:
 - E-Rate is established, successful, and has **bipartisan support**
 - E-Rate has guardrails to ensure **equitable distribution of funds**—fees vary with student eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch, with priority given to schools serving the students in greatest need
 - Narrowly tailored adjustments could ensure **funds are used as intended**—to close the homework gap during the coronavirus crisis