Supporting Broadband Is an Investment in K-12 Students

Broadband access is essential for student success. The days of optional access to the internet for K-12 students are over. Seven in 10 K-12 teachers assign homework that requires internet access. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to students learning online for extended periods of time and in-person options are uncertain for the 2020-2021 school year. American children may be learning through a hybrid model or exclusively online for an extended period. Without high-speed broadband and the tools to effectively access the internet, entire swaths of students are at serious risk of falling behind in their education.

Unfortunately, even before COVID-19, approximately 42 million Americans didn't have broadband at home, including 12 million K-12 students. During COVID-19, this number soared, with millions more struggling to afford broadband, and 30% of children unable to effectively pursue distance learning. This lack of access disproportionately affects rural, Tribal, and minority communities. Twenty-six percent of those in rural areas and more than half of those in rural Tribal areas lacked access to fixed broadband. Moreover, only 66% of African Americans and 61% of Hispanics report having broadband at home. Many of these same households also lack a computer through which to access the internet. Even if these families have access to wireless internet through a mobile device, data plans are often capped -- making it difficult to engage in data intensive activities, like online classes. Without broadband access, students are at risk of falling behind their more affluent peers or failing to complete their education. These impacts carry forward in the long term as students may then be unable to move forward to postsecondary education and training after graduating high school, which can impact their ability to find a good job. Thus, Congress must prioritize policies that promote broadband adoption in schools and at home to keep all students on track.

The Benefits of Broadband for K-12 Students

- Broadband enables students to complete their homework, and learn remotely. Sixty-four percent of students without home broadband often or sometimes cannot complete homework.

- Broadband access is correlated with student success. Students with fast home internet access have higher grade point averages, and score higher on standardized tests. Students attending Florida Virtual Schools outscored the state's standardized assessment average by more than 15 points.

- Broadband allows teachers to provide content and curriculum to students at an individual level, letting students who are behind catch up and students who are advanced continue learning.

- Students in institutions that don't offer advanced courses or dual-enrollment can use videoconferencing to get instruction from a teacher elsewhere or even college-level instruction.

- Students who engage in online learning and in-person instruction -- "blended learning" -- can learn subjects more quickly and are more likely to complete a course.

- Online learning can reduce drop-out rates by getting students to take classes online. The Aldine Independent School District in Texas allowed students to take online courses to complete their studies, while the Salem-Keizer School district in Oregon re-enrolled more than half of its dropouts through its online Bridge program each year.

- The internet enables students and teachers to access publicly available textbooks for free. Utah allows this. These materials not only save students and schools money, but can link to other websites, helping students learn by emphasizing concepts in a different way.