Advancing Digital Equity
NTIA Digital Equity Grant Program

A Webinar Sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in collaboration with the US Department of Education Office of Educational Technology
2024 NETP: Digital Access Divide

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Digital Equity

The condition in which individuals and communities have the information technology capacity that is needed for full participation in the society and economy of the United States.
Digital Inclusion

• Reliable fixed and wireless broadband internet service;
• Internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user; and
• Applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation, and collaboration; and

• Includes—
  • Obtaining access to digital literacy training;
  • The provision of quality technical support; and
  • Obtaining basic awareness of measures to ensure online privacy and cybersecurity.
Why Digital Equity?

Educational Equity  Community Health  Economic Mobility
Why Digital Equity?

Efforts to bridge the digital access divide are foundational to the conversation about uses of AI in education.

1. Home internet access
2. Cost
3. Digital literacy
What Can It Look Like?

Māpunawai  Madison College  Queens Library

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Digital Equity Act

• The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) includes a $65B broadband package.
• This includes the Digital Equity Act programs, administered by the U.S. Department of Commerce’s National Telecommunications & Information Administration (NTIA).
• The first part of the Digital Equity Act funded the development of state digital equity plans.
Digital Equity Act

- Individuals who live in covered households (household income < 150% of poverty level)
- Aging individuals
- Incarcerated individuals, other than individuals incarcerated in a Federal facility
- Veterans
- Individuals with disabilities
- Individuals with a language barrier, e.g., English learners & individuals with low literacy levels
- Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group
- Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
Digital Equity Act: Looking Forward

State Digital Equity Planning Grant
A $60M formula grant program for states, territories and tribal governments to develop digital equity plans.

Digital Equity Capacity Building Grant Program
A $1.44 billion formula grant program for states, territories, and tribal governments

Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program
A $1.25 billion grant program. It will fund annual grant programs for five years to implement digital equity projects
Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program

- A political subdivision, agency, or instrumentality of a state
- An Indian Tribe, an Alaska Native entity, or a Native Hawaiian organization
- A foundation, corporation, institution, or association that is a non-for-profit entity and not a school
- A community anchor institution
- A local educational agency
- An entity that carries out a workforce development program
- A partnership between any of the entities
Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program

- Develop and implement **digital inclusion activities** that benefit covered populations
- Facilitate the **adoption of broadband** by covered populations in order to provide educational and employment opportunities
- Implement **training programs** for covered populations or other **workforce development programs**
- **Make available equipment, instrumentation, networking capability, hardware and software, or digital network technology** for broadband services to covered populations at low or no cost
- Construct, upgrade, expend, or operate new or **existing public access computing centers** for covered populations through community anchor institutions
Resources

[Image of a report titled "Advancing Digital Equity for All: Community-Based Recommendations for Developing Effective Digital Equity Plans to Close the Digital Divide and Enable Technology-Empowered Learning"]

[QR Code linking to tech.ed.gov/DEER]
Resources

tech.ed.gov/NETP
Think-Abouts

• What ideas are you thinking about exploring?
• How can you build on already ongoing work?
• Which resources can you consult to refine ideas?
• What relationships might also help in refining ideas?
Digital Equity & Inclusion in Washington State

- Legislation passed in 2021 focused on increasing equity of access to devices, training and support.
- Funded grants focused on high needs schools, especially those with limited access to full or part-time technology staff.
- Funded district support out to each region via Educational Service Districts (ESDs).
- Leveraged federal funds to maximize state funds to accomplish key goals.
Washington’s Progress to Date

- Equity of Access
  - Non-competitive grant process
  - Small, rural and remote districts that historically not applied for EdTech Grants (55%+ rural applicants)
- Communication and support are key!
- Funding needs vary: Responsive, right-size funding, scalable funding with specific aim at districts
- Re-evaluate grant focus within legislative context

“With our limited resources, every year we have technology asks driven by student need. This grant builds a strong foundation in our elementary school and middle school, and strong foundation for digital equity across the district in special education. This is a foundation that the district could never afford.”

Tim Smith, Principal Assistant, Nine Mile Falls School District

OSPI Digital Equity & Inclusion Webpage
AESC Educational Technology Webpage

1,436 Students Enrolled 2023-24 School Year
92 Number of Classroom Teachers 2022-23 School Year
Maximized Cross-Agency Efforts to Expand Equity of Access

- Coordinated and facilitated K12 school district participation in the Broadband Action Teams (BATs) to develop Washington State’s Broadband Plan
- Collaborated with the Department of Commerce/Broadband Office to facilitate funding for a K12 school district rural connectivity project
  - Pullman Public Schools CBRS Project to serve rural students/adjacent school districts
  - $3M cross-agency DEI funding primarily focused on small, rural and remote districts

Do you know who is leading broadband/DEI initiatives in your state?
A place to start: States Broadband USA
- WA State Digital Equity Forum
- WA State Digital Equity Planning

Pullman Public Schools Project Video
How You Can Maximize Cross-Agency Partnerships to Expand Equity of Access?

- Identify the “Lead(s)” agency for your state’s Digital Equity efforts
- Determine if there are internal members already “at the table”
- Intentional outreach and connections: *Invite yourself to the “table”*
- What processes are in place: How are decisions being made?
- Are there intersectional opportunities?
  - Maximizing funding
  - Equity of Access for K12 students - Informing broadband needs/gaps
  - Conversations around state funding streams
- What is your “value add” to the conversation?
  - Sharing information/insights/feedback?
  - Gathering insights/feedback from key stakeholders?
  - Assisting with connecting with key stakeholders?

Contact info: Collaboration is fundamental to OUR work…please reach out!
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Digital Equity in Lindsay Unified School District

**Lindsay Unified School District, Community Wi-fi Network**

Lindsay Unified is a small, rural district serving about 4,000 students in Tulare County. Nearly all (95%) students are Latino, and 90 percent are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. More than one in three students are English Learners/emergent bilinguals. The district’s Strategic Initiative emphasized the need for ubiquitous technology access outside of school hours: it makes maximum use of technology for learning, and all curriculum is online. After the district provided devices for students to access online curriculum, the district learned that as many as 60 percent of students did not have internet at home, and for those that were connected, the speed was too low (less than 1.5 mbps) to support distance learning. Starting in 2012–13, the district built a community Wi-fi network to deliver high-speed internet to students at home. The district's community Wi-fi network relies on a private LTE and an unlicensed 5GHz Spectrum, and the district is currently building out a Citizens Broadband Radio Service (CBRS) to cover densely populated areas that cannot be reached with 5G or enough LTE density.
Our TECHNOLOGY Vision

**HOW WE WILL USE TECHNOLOGY TO INCREASE ACCESS TO LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**

- Every learner has access to a computer and the Internet at their learning community and at home.
- All Lindsay curriculum can be accessed online 24/7. Learners have two or three learning style choices, as well as two or three learning interest choices, for most online instruction.
- The Lindsay Information Technology systems allow for easy and effective communication between learning facilitators and parents. Parents, at any time, can access their child’s learning records, get tips on how to help their child with their present learning challenges, and view the entire Lindsay Unified curriculum.
- Learning facilitators use technology as one effective accelerator of learning, when possible and appropriate, to inspire and challenge their learners.
- All technology purchases—hardware and software—are made based upon the positive impact the technology will have on learners.
Digital Equity in Lindsay Unified School District

- Digital equity means a paradigm shift not only in access and means, but in consideration of population, purpose and pedagogy
- **Population** goes well beyond digital natives and digital immigrants
- **Purpose** should be driven by a meaningful need
- **Pedagogy** must derive from the interplay of teaching and learning elements, versus technology as an add-on or learning replacement
Digital Equity

Students are less likely to receive support for off-campus broadband access than they were in 2021.

Less than 9% of respondents reported that all their students have broadband access at home.
Year 1: Learning with **Video is Essential** for Education—many factors impact remote learning.

Year 2: While most students have returned to school locations, **MORE connectivity on school network comes from outside school.** Insufficient home connectivity remains a major challenge with disparities by ethnicity & socioeconomic status.
Year 3 – Digital Equity Dashboard

Benefits

- Identify areas in your community for improvement regarding broadband access
- Inspire conversations among school and community stakeholders to close the homework gap
- Leverage data in support of funding initiatives
### State of the World (context)

#### Hurdles (barriers)
1. Attracting & Retaining Educators and IT Professionals
2. Ensuring Cybersecurity & Safety Online
3. Scaling Innovation & Inertia of Education Systems

#### Accelerators (mega-trends; catalysts)
1. Changing Attitudes Toward Demonstrating Learning
2. Building the Human Capacity of Leaders
3. Learner Agency

#### Tech Enablers (tools)
1. Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI)
2. Analytics & Adaptive Technologies
3. Rich Digital Ecosystem

### Bridges (themes)
With That Baseline...

How Should Leaders Think about the **Future** of Education and the Role of Technology?

*Don’t seek to predict. Strive to Invent.*
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Thank you!