

**STATE ACTION GUIDE:
EDUCATIONAL EQUITY IN THE
TIME OF COVID-19**

SEPTEMBER 2020

The pandemic is exacerbating educational inequities in our education system, so it is essential that state leaders respond in ways that prioritize our most vulnerable students.

This guide can help.



DIGITAL ACCESS

Across the country, [many districts and schools](#) have moved learning completely or partially online for at least the fall 2020 semester, and many more may be forced to close their school buildings periodically as COVID-19 infection rates ebb and flow. But in many communities, [especially communities of color and low-income communities](#), students [lack access to the technological resources they need to connect to virtual learning opportunities](#). Advocates must urge states to close this digital divide, not only when school is virtual, but when school buildings are open, since technology and the internet are a part of the fabric of schooling and life in the 21st century.

EQUITY PRINCIPLE: Every student has access to their own device; reliable, high-speed internet; technical support and repairs; and a safe, supportive space to connect to virtual learning opportunities.

EQUITY ACTIONS:

- **Leverage bulk purchasing power** and **partner with businesses and internet providers** to provide laptops/tablets and expanded internet service to students and teachers, especially in high-poverty communities, through an inclusive [procurement process](#) that ensures that the new technology and devices are accessible to all students and educators with disabilities.
- **Provide grants**, with federal and state funds, to high-need districts to increase their capacity to facilitate virtual learning. This could include purchasing tablets/laptops and Wi-Fi hotspots; purchasing assistive technology for students and educators with disabilities; centralizing platforms used for instruction; purchasing high-quality Learning Management Systems that make it easier to provide feedback to students and communicate with families in multiple languages; and providing professional development to educators and digital literacy supports to families.

How is your state expanding broadband access through laws? Check out [the Pew Charitable Trust's state broadband policy explorer](#) to find out.



- **Provide information** about internet service providers offering free or discounted internet services for students and where Wi-Fi hot spots can be found throughout the state.
- Provide **professional development for educators and other school-based staff** on how to effectively use technology to provide students with access to educational opportunity in distance, hybrid, and in-person environments.

EXPANDING DIGITAL ACCESS

California has made several efforts to close the digital divide. The state [partnered with Google](#) to provide Chromebooks and mobile hotspots to students, especially those in rural areas, to facilitate virtual learning. The California Public Utilities Commission issued an [executive order](#), asking the five largest wireless providers and 10 largest internet service providers to eliminate data caps and overage charges, and the state created a [webpage](#) describing access to affordable internet services provided by telecom and data companies.

Although California has done more than many other states to address the lack of internet access and devices that limit students' access to virtual learning, the digital divide remains a challenge. [Ed Trust – West's map](#) paints a picture of the lack of access that many students, especially students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, face across the state.

