

A young woman with dark hair, wearing glasses and a light blue button-down shirt with a floral pattern, is sitting at a desk. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. In front of her is a laptop. To her right is a whiteboard with some handwritten text, including 'W' and 'AB=C'. She is holding a purple marker in her right hand. The background shows a window with greenery outside.

T PROJECT
10MILLION

Tools for educators: Meeting the challenge of distance learning

TIPS, RESOURCES, AND HOW TO BRING FREE
INTERNET SERVICE TO 10 MILLION STUDENTS

T T-MOBILE
FOR EDUCATION

Introduction

Educators have long argued that internet access is as critical to learning as books and pencils. Now, connectivity is taking on even greater significance as school districts implement distance learning full time. By August 2020, 17 of the 20 largest U.S. school districts had chosen to employ distance education as their instructional model, impacting more than 4 million students nationwide.¹

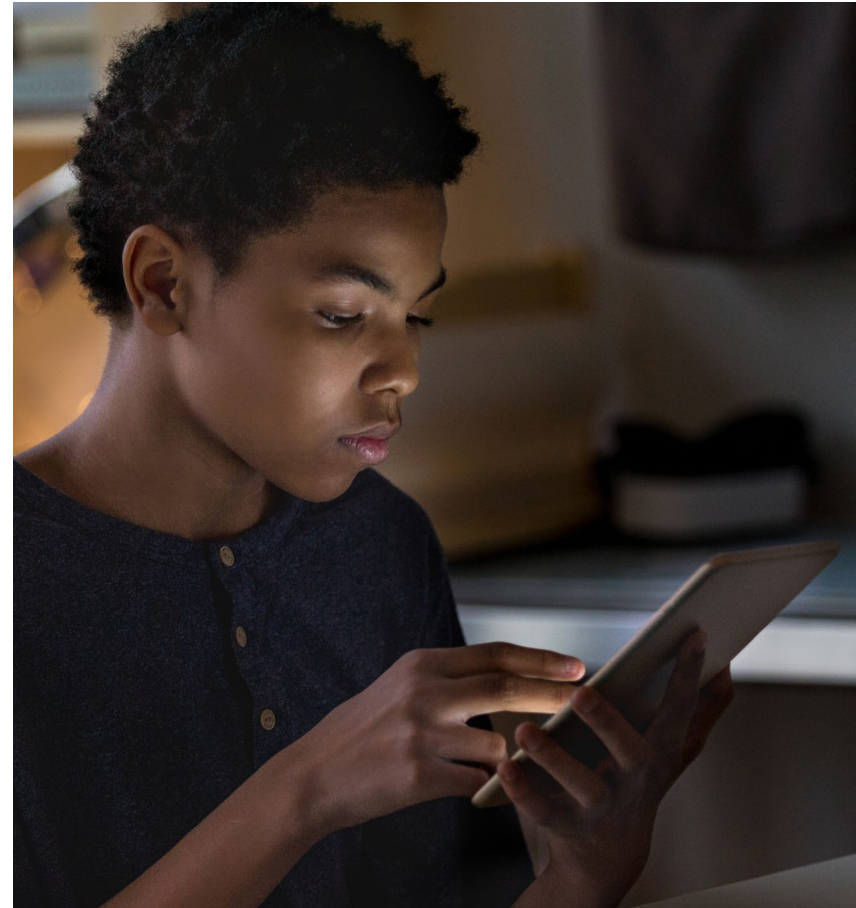
In a distance learning environment, failure to provide internet access means failure to educate children. Yet students in both rural and urban districts may not have connectivity at home, due to insufficient infrastructure, a lack of resources to purchase internet access, or both.

Those who do have internet access may also face challenges. Because many educators lack the preparation—or tools—to tackle distance learning. Fewer than half of 100 school districts surveyed by the Center for Reinventing Public Education—including the country's 30 largest school districts—offered summer professional development programs for educators or have a plan to coach educators on remote teaching practices.²

“

Connectivity is so much bigger and broader than just making sure a child has a device and a computer. It's about opening up a world of vocabulary, experiences, and opportunities to see, hear, and learn from peers who just happen to be in other places.”

—Dr. Kiesha Taylor,
National Education Administrator, T-Mobile



¹ “[School Districts' Reopening Plans: A Snapshot](#),” Education Week, August 2020.

² “[2020-21 Fall Reopening Plans and Summer Responses to COVID-19 Closures](#),” Center for Reinventing Public Education, August 2020.

What's inside

This e-book offers tips for educators, administrators, parents, and students. This will help them succeed in the new reality of distance learning.



Closing the homework gap

How to help ensure every student has equitable access to education in an era of distance learning



Teacher tips

Tips to help teachers navigate the reality of distance education, from revisiting fundamentals to a new set of distance learning tools



Harnessing technology

How to keep kids safe online and leverage existing tools without overloading students, parents, and teachers



Meeting the challenges of distance learning

From stretching and self-care to communicating in a new way, new challenges merit new approaches

01

Closing the homework gap



Closing the homework gap

Educators and students first encountered the challenges of online instruction when COVID-19 prompted school systems nationwide to follow shelter-in-place orders and close campuses.

Many educators experienced widespread absenteeism among students. For example, in Los Angeles, about a third of its high-school students failed to log in for classes in April 2020. Rural school districts also reported high absenteeism rates, due to families in remote locations lacking internet access.³

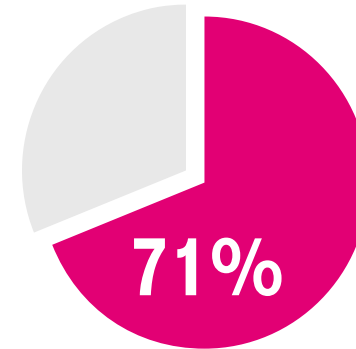
A recent EdWeek Research Center survey found an enormous equity gap aligned to socioeconomic status going into the

2020–21 school year.⁴ The survey found that nearly two-thirds of districts with low poverty rates (below 25 percent) had internet access.

Less than one-third of districts with high poverty rates (above 75 percent) had the internet access they needed.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, internet access also varies by geography and race. Students in rural areas sometimes lack the robust networks accessible by students in cities. Also, white and Asian children have higher than average access to computers and the internet, whereas Black, Latinx, American Indian, and Native Alaskan children have lower than average access.⁵

In an American Association of School Administrators (AASA) survey, 71 percent of superintendents reported that their biggest barrier to transitioning to a fully online learning model was the lack of adequate internet access at students' homes.⁶



71 percent of superintendents reported that their biggest barrier to transitioning to a fully online learning model was the lack of adequate internet access at students' homes.⁶

³ ["As School Moves Online, Many Students Stay Logged Out,"](#) New York Times, April 2020.

⁴ ["COVID-19 & Remote Learning: How to Make It Work,"](#) EducationWeek, July 2020.

⁵ ["Children's Internet Access at Home,"](#) National Center for Education Statistics, May 2020.

⁶ ["Report of Initial Findings: COVID Survey 2 Impact on Public Schools,"](#) June 2020.

Closing the homework gap

T-Mobile's Project 10Million

At T-Mobile, we're committing to help close the homework gap by offering eligible households 100GB of data per year and a FREE mobile hotspot for 5 years. Participating school districts also have the option to apply the value of the free program, nearly \$500 a year per student, towards additional data plans based on students' needs.

The program includes:

- Free internet access for five years (up to 100 GB/year)
- The option to apply the value of the free program toward low-cost plans for even more data
- Free mobile Wi-Fi hotspot device: a take-home internet connection for mobile network access
- Discounted Wi-Fi-ready devices: including tablets and laptops at low-cost
- Education grade content filter on all devices: to control the internet content accessible to your students
- Simple and easy installation and support from T-Mobile's industry-leading Customer Care team

Who is eligible?

- K-12 students who do not have internet access at home
- A household with at least one child in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

We believe access to the internet equals opportunity. Together with schools, school districts, and parents, we're working to help 10 million eligible families over the next five years get the connection they need.



Prior to the pandemic, between 15 and 16 million U.S. students out of 50 million total lived in a household that lacked either internet access, a digital device, or both.”⁷

—EducationWeek



⁷ “[A Third of K-12 Students Aren't Adequately Connected for Remote Learning, Report Says](#),” Education Week/Common Sense Media, June 2020.

During congestion, Project 10Million customers may notice speeds lower than other customers due to data prioritization. Video typically streams at DVD quality (480p). Limited time offer; subject to change. Available lines are limited. Intended for student mobile connectivity. Must verify student National School Lunch Program eligibility. 1 offer per household. Confirm your program can accept free equipment and/or service. Roaming not available. Annual data service ends at earlier of 100GB or 365 days with free plan. Excessive switching between data allotments may be limited. Video streams at up to 1.5Mbps. Optimization may affect speed of video downloads; does not apply to video uploads. For best performance, leave any video streaming applications at their default automatic resolution setting. Optional educational filtering may prevent some video streaming or other content. Coverage not available in some areas. Network Management: Service may be slowed, suspended, terminated, or restricted for misuse, abnormal use, interference with our network or ability to provide quality service to other users, or significant roaming. During congestion the small fraction of customers using >50GB/mo. may notice reduced speeds until next monthly cycle due to data prioritization. See [T-Mobile.com/OpenInternet](https://www.t-mobile.com/OpenInternet) for details. See Terms and Conditions at www.t-mobile.com for additional information.

A woman with brown hair, wearing a grey cardigan over a maroon t-shirt and a black headset with a microphone, is sitting at a wooden desk. She is smiling and looking at a dark grey laptop. Her hands are on the keyboard. In the background, there are wooden bookshelves filled with books of various colors. A blue mug is on the desk to her right.

02

Teacher tips

5 Areas of focus

Many school districts must meet specific distance learning standards to receive state funding. For example, California requires districts to provide daily live interaction and content aligned to grade-level standards that are equivalent to in-person instruction.⁸

To maintain grade-level standards of instruction, teachers may have to fine-tune their approach as they develop and deliver their curriculum throughout the year. Here, we offer a few suggestions.

1. Review and reset

In spring 2020, teachers, families and students faced enormous learning challenges, with many students making little progress beyond March.⁹

In fact, the average student could begin the next school year having lost as much as half of the expected progress in math from the previous school year, and a third of the expected progress in reading, according to scholars at Brown University and the University of Virginia. Teachers found they needed to revisit some prerequisites from the previous grade to achieve the current grade's standards.

Resources like **The Council for the Great City Schools** offer strategies for addressing unfinished learning.¹⁰ For example, they recommend educators resist the temptation to re-teach or remediate whole sections of the previous grade and instead focus on grade-level content while addressing gaps as needed.

2. Prioritize grade-level standards

Teachers may be asked to make trade-offs in curriculum planning to ensure they cover the essential standards. For example, a first-grade teacher might de-prioritize teaching students how to identify various animal species to devote more time to addition and subtraction.

Some states offer guidelines that prioritize standards. Teachers may also benefit from ideas from national organizations like **Student Achievement Partners** and **The New Teacher Project** (TNTP), whose guides help schools and districts adjust their curricula.¹¹

For example, TNTP advises that educators run every learning topic through a simple test: Will this help every student get back to grade level? This question can help educators filter through curricula ideas and prioritize the programs that will accelerate students' exposure to grade-appropriate content.

⁸ [AB-77 Education Finance: Education Omnibus Budget Trailer Bill](#), June 2020.

⁹ ["Research Shows Students Falling Months Behind During Virus Disruptions,"](#) New York Times, June 2020.

¹⁰ ["Addressing Unfinished Learning After COVID-19 School Closures,"](#) Council of the Great City Schools, June 2020.

¹¹ ["2020-21 Priority Instructional Content in English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics,"](#) Student Achievement Partners, August 2020; ["Learning Acceleration Guide,"](#) TNTP, April 2020.

Teacher tips

3. Consider team teaching

Educators might want to “team teach,” splitting up responsibilities according to the needs of students. For example, teachers could divide students into two groups (many video platforms support break-out rooms), with a smaller group for students who require more personalized instruction.

4. Empower students with choices

Building choice into assignments gives students a sense of autonomy and ownership, while milestones and deadlines offer the structure and support students need to complete assignments. Teachers have already been using choice boards and learning menus—bringing digital versions of these to distance education can help students feel more in control of their learning.¹²

¹² “[Creating a Choice Board for Your Classroom](#),” TCEA, December 2018.

5. Foster relationships

Educators and parents can make special efforts to prioritize relationship-building for a healthier distance-learning environment. Teachers could, for example, use video conferencing break-out rooms for one-on-one conversations with students to get to know them. Prioritizing relationship building can help address the lack of in-person interaction.

Building choice into assignments gives students a sense of autonomy and ownership.



Council of the Great City Schools

Presents an instructional framework for addressing unfinished learning and learning losses, as well as a review of essential skills and content in English Language Arts and Mathematics to support access to grade-level content in key grade transitions for all students.

[Addressing Unfinished Learning After COVID-19 School Closures](#)

Student Achievement Partners

Provides K-12 instructional content priorities in mathematics and ELA/literacy for the 2020–21 academic year. It determines content priorities by leveraging the structure and emphases of college- and career-ready Mathematics and ELA/literacy standards.

[2020-21 Priority Instructional Content in English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics](#)

The New Teacher Project (TNTP)

Offers free distance learning ideas and resources for school and district stakeholders to accelerate student learning over the next two years.

[Learning Acceleration Guide](#)

Texas Computer Education Association

Provides a five-step guide for designing a choice board to allow students to select how they will learn a concept.

[Creating a Choice Board for Your Classroom](#)

Consideration for parents

Whether your child is an introvert or extrovert, bursting with energy in the morning, or slow to start the day, each child has a unique learning style. Some kids work better solo, while others are social learners who prefer to work in groups. How does your child learn?

Things to consider:

- How did your child manage distance learning last spring?
- What issues came up?
- When is your child most alert? Are there times your child is most productive for different types of tasks?
- Would partnering with a study buddy via video help your social learner?
- Does your school have school-sponsored social activities outside of class time?

03

Harnessing the technology

Harnessing the technology

More online activity means children are exposed to more nefarious online activity. In April 2020, the FBI sent an alert that cyber actors were increasingly exploiting vulnerabilities in virtual environments to carry out their crimes.¹³

As classroom discussions and conference calls went online in the spring, some hackers and trolls interrupted these meetings, recorded them, and posted them on the internet, exposing teaching sessions and participant interactions to public view.¹⁴

The following are a few recommendations for ensuring online education is safe, secure, and simple for teachers, parents, administrators, and students to use.

Follow privacy guidelines

Organizations, such as the **Consortium for School Networking (CoSN)**, produce briefs, checklists, and guidelines to help schools ensure virtual environments are safe and secure. For example, CoSN offers a list of privacy considerations for setting up a video call. Suggestions include avoiding systems that require students to create accounts and giving parents the ability to opt their child out of participating in video sessions.¹⁵

Brief educators, parents, and students on cyber hygiene

Providing basic cybersecurity education—such as guidance not to open links from unknown senders—can help keep learning environments free from phishing attacks. Districts can remind educators, parents, and students to check domain names and immediately delete emails with suspicious links or attachments.

Update password protocols

Some districts have implemented multifactor authentication techniques to reduce the risk of password theft and system infiltration. Implementing this approach in learning environments will help shore up security.

Create technology support office hours

School districts can designate tech coaches with virtual office hours to help teachers, parents, and students with technical glitches. This might require districts that are already budget-challenged to hire additional personnel to fill tech support roles; regardless, providing instruction on how to use education technology is fundamental to distance learning.

Check out Consortium for School Networking's [Privacy Considerations Checklist](#)

¹³ "[Cyber Actors Take Advantage of COVID-19 Pandemic to Exploit Increased Use of Virtual Environments](#)," FBI, April 2020.

¹⁴ "[Thousands of Zoom Video Calls Left Exposed on Open Web](#)," Washington Post, April 2020.

¹⁵ "[Privacy Considerations Checklist](#)," Consortium for School Networking.

Harnessing the technology

Streamline the number of technology tools

Educators should examine their portfolio of technology tools, identify the “must haves,” and eliminate others. By streamlining the toolset, educators may be able to reduce costs while creating a consistent technology platform. This will prevent teachers, parents, and students from having to juggle multiple passwords and procedures across classes and subjects.

Turn off unnecessary notifications

A lot of education technology software comes pre-built with automatic email notifications. Turn off unnecessary notifications to prevent bombarding parents and students with trivial or duplicative information.

Advocate for the essentials

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 14 percent of children ages 3 to 18—more than 9 million students—don’t have internet access at home.¹⁶ Distance learning has exacerbated inequities in access to education, leaving some children at an enormous educational disadvantage.

Nationally, districts are trying to help. Many are loaning out laptops or giving out Wi-Fi hotspots so children can go online. Review our Project 10Million summary to learn how families can get free internet access and subsidized devices through T-Mobile today.

14% of children ages 3 to 18—more than 9 million students—don’t have internet access at home.

—National Center for Education Statistics

T-Mobile’s Project 10Million helps families get free access to internet and low-cost devices.

Enroll today

¹⁶ “[Children’s Internet Access at Home](#),” National Center for Education Statistics, May 2020.



04

Meeting the challenges of distance learning

Meeting the challenges of distance learning

New challenges require new solutions. The following are a few suggestions to help educators, students, and parents contribute their best efforts throughout the year.

Take frequent breaks

Research has demonstrated that frequent breaks—or periods of wakeful rest—support the kind of mental processing necessary for learning. A 2012 study conducted by researchers at MIT and USC used an fMRI scanner to examine neural activity during the brain’s default mode of neural processing, which is relatively suppressed when people focus on the outside world through activities like active learning.

The study found that the brain’s default mode is more than idleness—it provides space for people to recall personal

memories, imagine the future, and feel social emotions. These are all essential activities for integrating learning with personal relevance and experience.¹⁷ In 2013, colleagues from the National University of Singapore found brain waves indicative of mental fatigue increased during sustained attention, and decreased during breaks.¹⁸

Incorporate physical activity into breaks

One of the best activities for structured breaks is exercise. Students and teachers need to stretch and step away from their computers to support neural and physical health. Many free online resources offer quick, indoor exercises that teachers and students can practice. For example, guides developed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the University of California, Berkeley, offer dozens of suggestions for simple activities and exercises.¹⁹



¹⁷ “[Rest Is Not Idleness: Implications of the Brain’s Default Mode for Human Development and Education](#),” *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, June 2012.

¹⁸ “[EEG alpha activity is associated with individual differences in post-break improvement](#),” Elsevier, 2013.

¹⁹ “[Physical Activity Breaks for the Workplace](#),” CDC, October 2019; “[Activity Breaks](#),” UC Berkeley.

Meeting the challenges of distance learning

Share what works

Teachers can help each other by sharing virtual teaching tips and online curriculum ideas early and often throughout the school year. Administrators can set up formal processes for sharing or teachers can communicate ad-hoc regarding simple wins and newly discovered best practices for curriculum development, engaging students, or structuring synchronous learning periods.

Listen

To shape curriculum development and delivery to meet students' needs, administrators and teachers can ask for frequent feedback from students and parents. Surveying has helped some schools better understand parents' needs and develop creative new offerings, such as professional development for parents to learn how to use the technology to help their students succeed.

For example, Opelika City Schools in Alabama has created a Parent Academy, which offers online technology instruction for parents on how to use all online tools employed by the district.²⁰ Some schools have created instructional videos for each technology tool hosted in a central location, such as a learning management system home page.

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Take a break

Sitting in front of a computer for long stretches is both mentally and physically taxing. Brief easy breaks are essential.

[Physical Activity Breaks for the Workplace](#)—Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

[Activity Breaks](#)—University of California, Berkeley

²⁰ [Opelika City Schools Parent Academy for Technology](#), Opelika City Schools, 2020.

Next steps

Adapting to an entirely new process of education may seem overwhelming, but there are plenty of places to turn to for help. Many organizations have devoted time and resources to sharing ideas, best practices, and toolkits for educators, parents, and students. This will only improve over time.

At T-Mobile for Education, we're working to do our part by providing at-cost laptops and tablets, free hotspots and data, and low-cost plans for even more data.

We believe access to the internet equals opportunity. Together, with schools, school districts, and parents, we are working to help 10 million eligible families over the next five years get the connection they need.



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