



April 2020

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT Remote Learning

PRO POINTS

- **Schools across the country are shuttered due to the coronavirus,** and educators are scrambling to teach students through online lessons or worksheet packets. The transition has been slow as school districts train staff and confront a host of other challenges.
- **The pandemic is exacerbating what's known** as "the homework gap" for students who don't have broadband access at home. Some districts are providing computers and hot spots to students. An estimated 12 million children live in homes lacking a broadband connection.
- **The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act, H.R. 748,** provides \$13.5 billion to help K-12 schools and funding can be used for remote learning. The bill also includes \$50 million for the Institute of Museum and Library Services to expand digital network access.

HOW WE GOT HERE

Remote learning calls for instruction when the student and teacher aren't in the same place. But the U.S. education system is largely designed to provide services within a brick and mortar building, not between schools and homes, and many schools struggled to put remote learning in action when the pandemic hit.

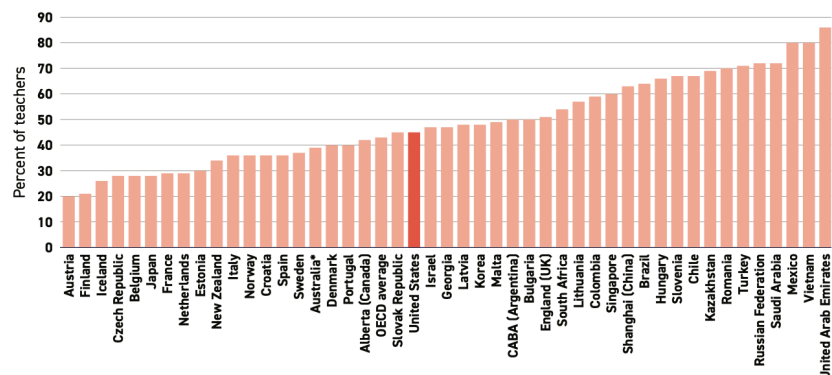
The transition has raised new questions about access to computers and broadband, teacher preparation and how to educate students with disabilities from afar. The Department of Education has clarified that compliance with disability laws shouldn't prevent schools from offering distance instruction.

The Federal Communication Commission's E-rate program helps connect the nation's schools and libraries to broadband, but expanding the program to connect students at home has been difficult and funding has not been a priority.

These concerns and others about meeting students' more immediate basic needs have all played a part in a slow rollout, with some schools initially providing no resources at all, while others offer ungraded assignments or work for students to complete without a teacher's input.

Teachers and digital technology

An essential element of remote learning is the use of digital technology, but many teachers don't feel like they're ready. In the United States, just 45 percent of teachers in a 2018 international survey said they were "well prepared" or "very well prepared" following their formal education to use information communications technology in their classes, putting the U.S. about in the middle of the pack globally.



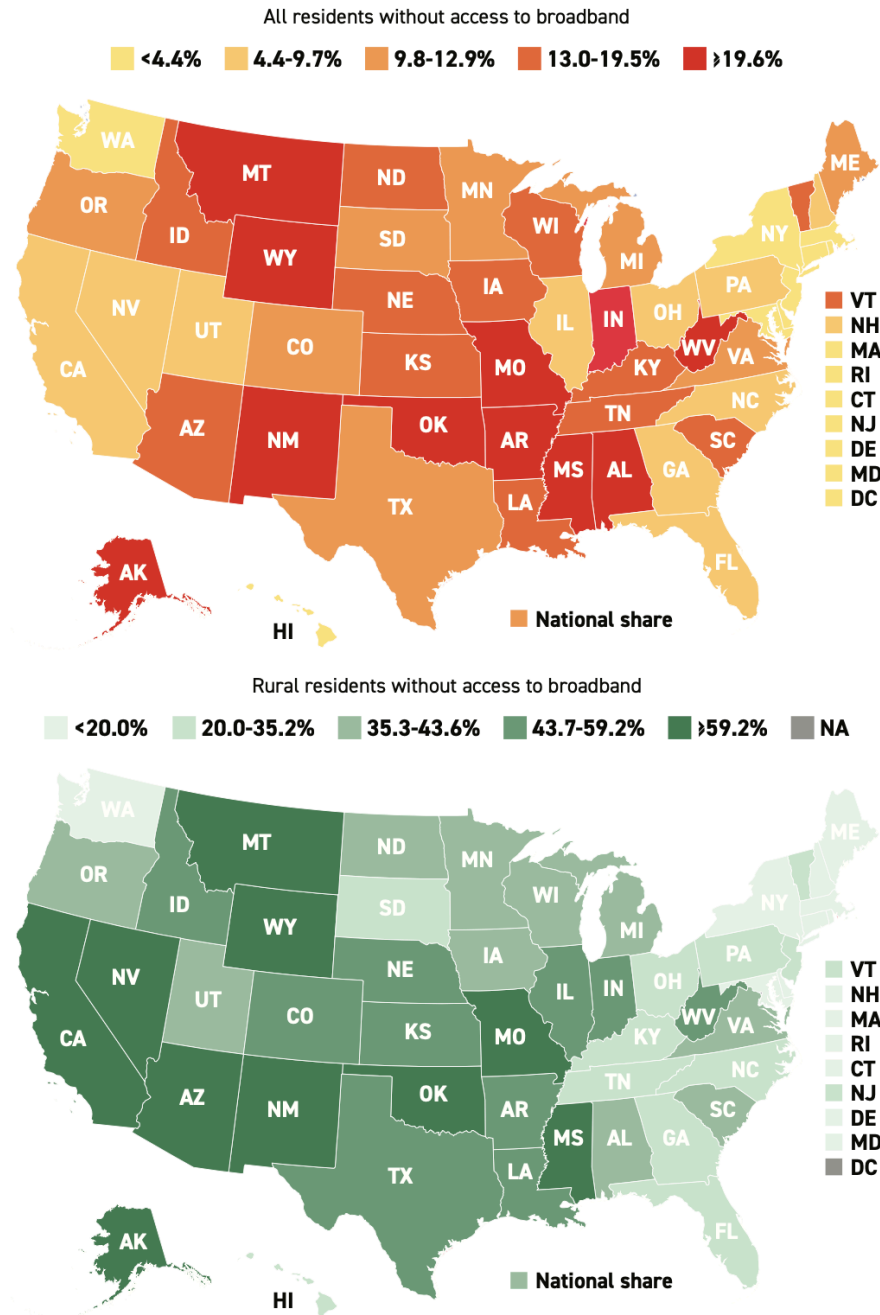
*Participation rate of principals is too low to ensure comparability for principals' reports and country estimates are not included in the OECD average

SOURCE: OECD, TALIS 2018 DATABASE



Why there's a 'homework gap'

Access to broadband internet has improved in recent years but many households still lack the high-speed internet connections students need for remote learning. Some families can't afford the cost, while others live in remote regions where providers are scarce. In some states more than half of rural households are without broadband internet access.



Note: Broadband is defined as fixed internet with download speeds of 25 Mbps or greater and upload speeds of 3 Mbps or greater; percent shown is the share of rural residents within the state that do not have access to at least one service provider that meets that definition; rural is based on the 2010 census data.

SOURCE: FCC 2016 BROADBAND PROGRESS REPORT



WHAT'S NEXT

With numerous states closed for the academic year, school districts will be under increasing pressure to develop or refine remote learning plans and instruct teachers on how to implement them. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos wants Congress to provide microgrants to help disadvantaged students continue to learn during the crisis.

Some education groups are calling for flexibility in implementing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act during the pandemic, a prospect that disability rights groups are fighting.

Governors are likely to see requests that stimulus funds be allocated toward providing web access and devices for students. Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) urged Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan to use some of the funding to address the homework gap.

Education groups and about three dozen Democratic senators are calling for \$2 billion in additional stimulus funding for the E-rate program in the next relief package so that schools and libraries can provide Wi-Fi hot spots or other devices with Wi-Fi capability to students. During the CARES Act debate, Republicans were open to as much as \$500 million for an FCC pilot effort that they deemed more effective at getting out money fast.

POWER PLAYERS



Ajit Pai

As FCC chairman, Pai has influence over funding to facilitate remote learning. He is likely to keep pushing for an "off-campus connectivity pilot" aimed at expanding federal subsidies for wireless and wired devices and connectivity at students' homes.



Jessica Rosenworcel

The FCC's senior Democratic commissioner is credited with coining the term "homework gap," and she has said that "this experience really is a clarion call" to start addressing it.



Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Miss.)

As chairman of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, Wicker would negotiate deals for the GOP on any additional stimulus to address the homework gap and his staff would coordinate with Pai.



Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.)

DeLauro chairs the House Appropriations Committee's panel on education and will have a say over any additional stimulus funding for education. She called the CARES Act's \$31 billion education stabilization funding "a start."