

Ensuring Devices for Learning at Home During Coronavirus (COVID-19)

As many as 74,250 learning devices are available to public school students, and up to 63,390 students can receive assistance accessing the internet

The coronavirus (COVID-19) public health emergency continues to impact the amount of in-person learning possible for this fall. In August 2020, before the start of school, the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education surveyed LEAs to assess their expected needs for learning devices (defined as Chromebooks, laptops, desktops, and tablets) and internet access for students in the upcoming school year, SY2020-21. Sixty-one out of the 66 public charter LEAs responded to the survey. Schools provided their anticipated enrollments and students' technology needs based on outreach to incoming families and their experiences in the spring, as well as the number of devices they will have available for students. DCPS collected students' expected needs from a survey conducted in August and September and provided the number of devices that they will make available.

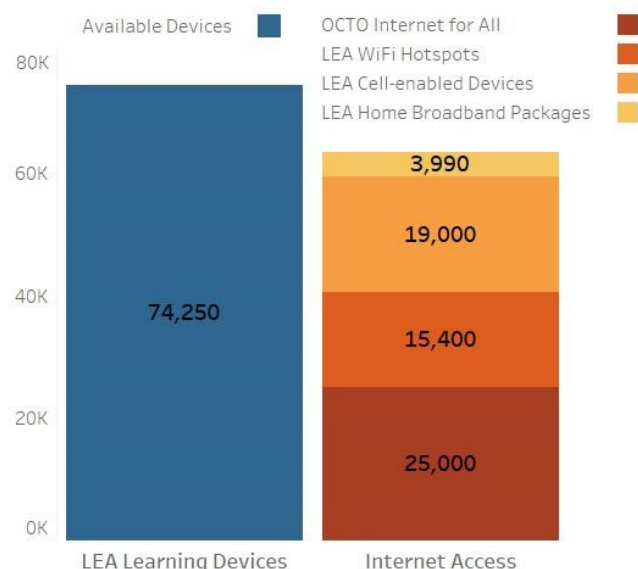
Learning Devices

All LEAs are relying on technology to ensure the continuation of teaching and learning, and nearly all are ensuring that each student has their own individual device. Many schools allow students to use their own personal devices, if the device meets the required specifications; this allows schools to prioritize the LEAs' devices for students who do not have one.

LEAs have a total of 74,250 learning devices that may be distributed to students. According to survey responses, 53 public charter LEAs were prepared to distribute approximately 22,850 learning devices at the start of school. In addition, 51 charter LEAs indicated that they have as many as 6,400 learning devices in surplus to be used later in the school year or to replace broken devices, if necessary. Taking into account the students' own devices and the charter LEAs' planned distribution of devices, approximately 100 charter students may have still needed a device at the start of school. The Ed Equity Fund extended philanthropic support to those few LEAs in need.

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Count of Available Learning Devices and Ways to Access the Internet



DCPS has 45,000 learning devices in their inventory for students that can be distributed, if necessary. Sixty percent of those surveyed by DCPS identified they were in need of a learning device or approximately 19,200 students (roughly 32,000 families responded to the survey). As of the end of September, DCPS distributed over 29,000 learning devices to students and is planning to continue their distributions as necessary.

Internet Access

The urgent need to close the digital divide has increased due to the transition to all-virtual instruction in term 1. The average home broadband adoption rate in Wards 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 is estimated at 87 percent, while the average rate in Wards 5, 7, and 8 is only 66 percent (American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2014-2018).

Altogether, public charter LEAs are prepared to assist as many as 38,390 students with internet access. According to the DME survey, 54 public charter LEAs planned on distributing as many as 4,400 mobile WiFi hotspots to students at the start of school. In addition, 30 public charter LEAs estimated that they can pay for as many as 3,990 students' home broadband internet through commercial low cost packages. According to survey results, 440 charter students may still have needed access to the internet at the start of school, taking into account families' own personal internet services and LEAs' assistance. Again, the Ed Equity Fund extended philanthropic support to those few LEAs in need.

DCPS is helping students get access to the

internet by distributing as many as 19,000 learning devices that are cell enabled (meaning students can log onto the internet through the learning device) and as many as 11,000 WiFi hotspots. About one-fifth of respondents to DCPS's family survey (6,400 students) indicated they needed reliable internet access.

Internet for All Initiative

To further ensure students have access to the internet, the DC Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO) implemented Internet for All, a new initiative to pay for residential internet service for low-income families with children enrolled in grades PK-12 in public school. The initiative is funded by the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER), a federal funding packages to support schools during the public health emergency, which was distributed by Mayor Bowser to the Deputy Mayor for Education. With this GEER Funding, OCTO hopes to connect up to 25,000 eligible households in Washington, DC.

OCTO is directly contacting DCPS and public charter school households with PK3-12th grade students receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits via texts, phone calls, and email. If the guardian agrees to receive internet paid for by DC Government, the partner Internet Providers, Comcast or RCN, will contact them to initiate installation. OCTO began their first round of outreach in September, and approximately 4,000 households signed up for the free service thus far. OCTO is conducting additional outreach in October.

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