



Broadband Access and Education Technology in Indian Country

National Indian Education Association



The National Indian Education Association (NIEA) is the nation's largest and most inclusive organization advocating for comprehensive culture-based educational opportunities for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians.

Background

Technology and the internet have transformed the way that students learn in modern classrooms, connecting students and educators across long distances, on rare subjects, and even in the midst of global pandemics. A rapidly evolving modern education landscape requires high-quality broadband access in the classroom and in the home. However, new education technology to facilitate a twenty-first century education has widened gaps in education for historically marginalized students, including Native students.

Native Education Technology Landscape

Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools have long been underfunded, resulting in outdated technology infrastructure and computer equipment. Though technology available differs between schools, many lack the resources to provide laptops or tablets to students. Coined the "homework gap" by national experts and media, many Native schools remain unable to send assignments home with students due to lack of broadband in the community at large.

36 %

Of Native students do not have access to internet in their homes

In 2017, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 36 percent of Native students nationwide did not have internet access in their homes, compared to 18 percent of their peers nationwide. Just last year, the Center for Indian Country Development at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis further clarified that

this effect is more pronounced on tribal lands, where only 61 percent of households have broadband access. In comparison, 70 percent of residents the typical county that overlaps a reservation and 69 percent nationwide have access to broadband in the home.

Impact of COVID-19

Due to lack of internet access at home, Bureau-funded schools serving students on and near tribal lands have struggled to implement virtual education options during the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. In order to address the immediate needs of Bureau-funded schools, NIEA has requested the following funding to ensure that each student and educator at Bureau-funded schools have access to essential educational tools during this unprecedented time.

Provide \$115 Million for Wireless Hotspots

Children and families currently at home must have access to broadband services to engage in critical distance learning and communication with schools. Wireless hotspots provide essential internet service for Native students to continue core educational programs through virtual learning tools until it is safe to return to the classroom. To be effective, high-speed broadband at home must meet the needs of a whole family and withstand intensive network use.

Provide \$60 Million for Laptops

Due to chronic underfunding in Bureau-funded schools, many do not have enough, and in some cases any, laptop computers to send home with students, educators, and staff for the purpose of continuing education in a virtual classroom. Native students must have parity in access to resources that ensure current achievement and opportunity gaps do not widen due to the coronavirus outbreak.

