

EducationSuperHighway Study Reveals 18 Million American Households Have Access to the Internet But Can't Afford to Connect

*National Non-profit Announces Bold New Mission to
Close Two-Thirds of the Digital Divide and Ensure No Home Left Offline*

SAN FRANCISCO, CA – November 4, 2021 – EducationSuperHighway, the national non-profit that successfully connected 47 million students to close the K-12 classroom connectivity gap, today announced a bold new mission to close the digital divide for 18 million American households that have access to the Internet but can't afford to connect.

In a new report to mark the launch of their new mission and [No Home Left Offline](#) campaign, they highlight that after decades of public and private investment in broadband infrastructure, affordability is now the number one cause of the digital divide, despite the widespread availability of low-cost broadband options from internet service providers. Nearly two-thirds of unconnected households have access to a home broadband connection but are offline primarily because they cannot afford to connect.

This “broadband affordability gap” keeps 47 million Americans offline, is present in every state, and disproportionately impacts low-income, Black, and Latinx Americans.

Key report highlights include:

- 18.1 million unconnected households (46.9 million people) have access to Internet service but cannot afford to connect to even low-cost broadband plans.
- In 43 states, the broadband affordability gap is the largest portion of the digital divide, making up 58% of the digital divide in states with rural populations that exceed the national average.
- Previous efforts to provide the resources households need to connect have fallen short. As few as 17% of Americans eligible for federal broadband affordability programs have enrolled due to awareness, trust, and enrollment barriers.



Dramatically Accelerating Progress Toward Closing the Digital Divide

In response to the pandemic, a bipartisan consensus has emerged to dramatically accelerate progress towards closing the digital divide. The federal government has recognized the need to address the affordability gap by investing \$20 billion in the nation's largest-ever broadband affordability and adoption program. In addition, partnerships between non-profits, community-based organizations, Internet Service Providers, and state and local governments have developed game-changing approaches to identifying unconnected households, innovative solutions to increasing adoption, and the creation of programs that eliminate the need for households to sign-up for broadband service altogether, providing a blueprint for a broad public-private partnership to close the broadband affordability gap.

"We must seize this moment to accelerate progress in closing the digital divide," said Evan Marwell, CEO of EducationSuperHighway. "That's why today we are launching a bold new mission to tackle the broadband affordability gap - which has emerged as the number one barrier to closing the digital divide. Congress is stepping up, making resources available to close the affordability gap, and ISPs continue to increase the availability and speed of affordable broadband plans. We must now remove the barriers that keep low-income families from connecting or risk wasting this opportunity to ensure no home is left offline."

While accelerating the transition to a digital economy, the pandemic has caused those without home broadband to be shut out of economic security and opportunity. Without high-speed Internet access at home, Americans can't send their children to school, work remotely, or access healthcare, job training, the social safety net, or critical government services.

New Programs for Broadband Adoption and Free Apartment Wi-Fi

Today, EducationSuperHighway also launched new broadband adoption and free apartment Wi-Fi programs to help low-income Americans overcome the obstacles to signing up for federal broadband programs and home broadband service. Both programs target "America's most unconnected communities," where more than 25% of people don't have Internet.

"Building a robust digital inclusion ecosystem requires free and low-cost home broadband for those who cannot afford it and overcoming the barriers to broadband adoption," said Angela Siefer, Executive Director of the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA). "As we saw during the pandemic, these solutions are possible by investing in local solutions and building on the trusted community relationships that are essential to effective digital inclusion work."

EducationSuperHighway is also announcing a wide-ranging partnership with the City of Oakland to close the affordability gap in the city's most unconnected communities. Together with community-based organizations and other key stakeholders, the partnership will deploy free Wi-Fi in low-income apartment buildings and establish a broadband adoption center to help eligible households enroll in the Affordable Connectivity Program. "Public-private partnerships, exemplified by the success of #OaklandUndivided, are critical to achieving equity in cities



across the country,” said Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf. “Oakland is proud to partner with EducationSuperHighway, a critical leadership partner of #OaklandUndivided to remove affordability barriers and dramatically increase broadband access for our most vulnerable populations and close the digital divide for good.”

Identifying and Connecting Unconnected Households

EducationSuperHighway is also working to expand its program to help trusted institutions identify unconnected households. The organization’s K-12 Bridge to Broadband program partners with 130 regional and national Internet Service Providers to enable states and school districts to identify and connect unconnected student households. The program covers 90% of households and has already helped identify the connectivity status of over 3.5 million students in 11 states. With the support of ISPs, EducationSuperHighway hopes to make this critical data tool available to other trusted institutions serving low-income households in the near future.

Made Possible by Generous Support from the Philanthropic Community

The non-profit completed its mission to close the K-12 classroom connectivity gap in just seven years and is focused on repeating this achievement. Several foundations and philanthropic organizations have made a \$16 million multi-year investment in EducationSuperHighway’s mission including, Emerson Collective; Blue Meridian Partners; Ken Griffin, Citadel, and Citadel Securities; the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative; Walton Family Foundation; and Zoom Cares Fund.

“In only seven years, EducationSuperHighway executed on their mission to connect every classroom to high-speed Internet,” said Emerson Collective President Laurene Powell Jobs. “We know Evan and his team will bring the same creativity and ingenuity to deploying broadband into homes across the country, bridging the digital divide and increasing access to opportunity for all families.”

“Internet access is a gateway to opportunity. Yet, 18 million American households currently struggle to afford this vital lifeline to education, job training, and healthcare,” said Ken Griffin, Founder and CEO of Citadel. “I’m proud to support EducationSuperHighway’s work to increase access for families and close the digital divide.”

“EducationSuperHighway has played a pivotal role in closing the digital divide, paving the way for broadband access in K-12 classrooms at an unprecedented scale,” said Jim Shelton, Chief Investment and Impact Officer at Blue Meridian Partners. “Given the need for affordable home broadband, which has become even more apparent during the pandemic, EducationSuperHighway now has the opportunity to amplify its impact and close the affordability gap in America’s most unconnected communities.”

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ABOUT EDUCATIONSUPERHIGHWAY

EducationSuperHighway is a national non-profit with the mission to close the digital divide for the 18 million households that have access to the Internet but can't afford to connect. We focus on America's most unconnected communities, where more than 25% of people don't have Internet.

From 2012-2020 we led the effort that closed the classroom connectivity gap. In 2013, only 10% of students had access to digital learning in their classrooms. Today, thanks to an unprecedented bi-partisan effort by federal, state, and school district leaders, supported by K-12 advocacy organizations, the classroom connectivity gap is closed - 47 million students are connected, and 99.3% of America's schools have a high-speed broadband connection.

www.educationsuperhighway.org