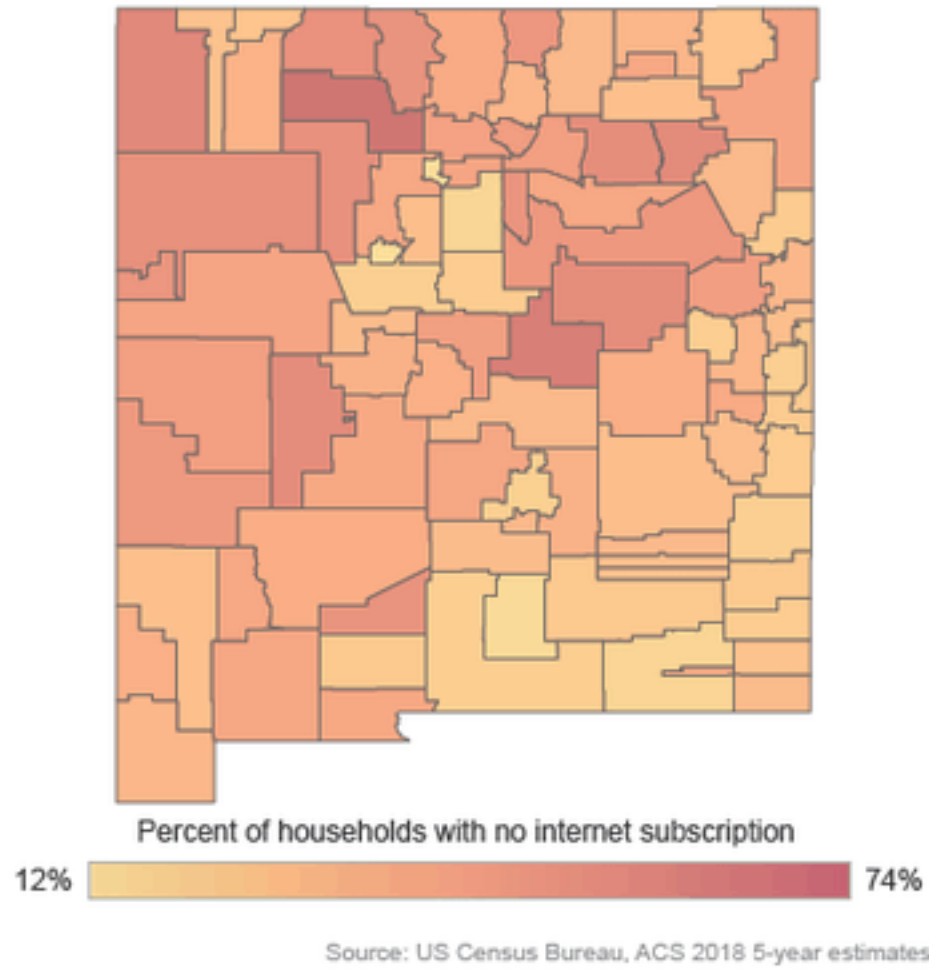


What COVID-19 taught us about the Digital Divide in Education

NMSU Center for Community Analysis
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For years disparate access to internet and technology, otherwise known as the “digital divide” signaled one of the great inequities in education. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found the percentage of K-12 students with no internet access differed significantly according to the students’ race/ethnicity and was even further compounded when the student lived in a rural community [1]. The Urban Institute found eighth-grade students without access to computers or the internet were more than two years behind their classmates academically [2]. And although numerous articles and even our own Education Context Report published in 2016 [3] illuminated the digital divide, measures to provide students in New Mexico with technology outside of the classroom gained little traction until schools were forced online, practically overnight last March.

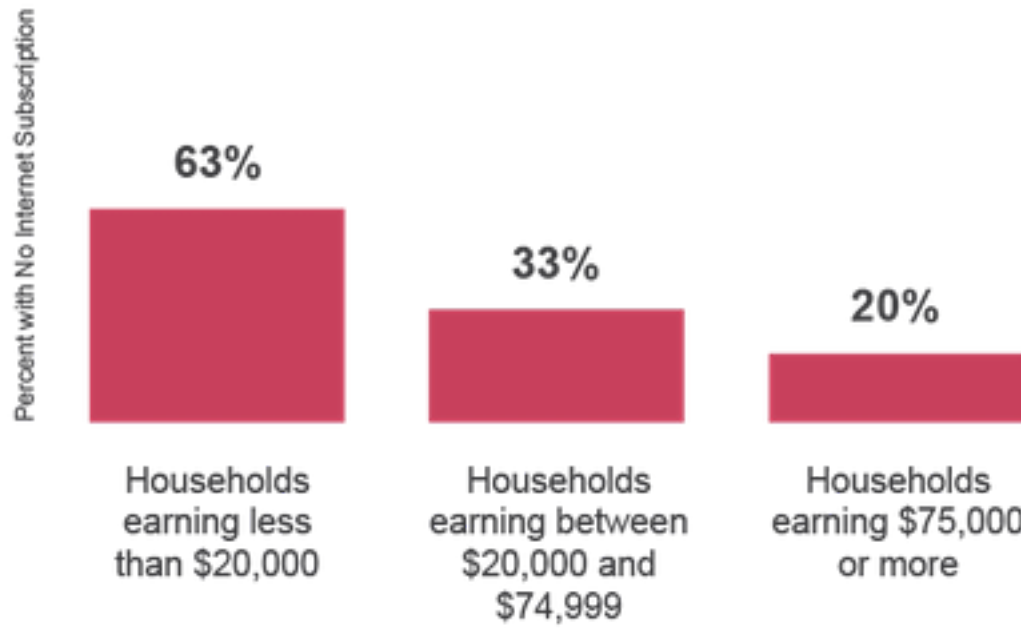
Percent of households with No Internet Subscription, by school district



Our recently published dashboard: [Who Has Access to Technology?](#) takes a look at households’ access to computers and the internet. Two views are available, households by school district and by census tract across the state.

The dashboard also presents the relationship between household income and internet access. For example, in the Gadsden Independent School District alone, 63% of households earning less than \$20,000 do not have internet access while of those earning more than \$75,000 a year, only 20% lack access. Although this data precedes the pandemic (before districts across the state hustled to provide reduced price or free internet to qualifying families, set up Wi-Fi hot-spots in rural areas, and distribute technology) the data provides us with a baseline of where we were, and reminds us where we need to go.

Households in the Gadsden Independent School District with no internet subscription, by income



In total, 209,486 households in New Mexico do not have an internet subscription (including cellular data plan) and 125,714 households do not own a computer nor any other type of computing device (tablet, cell phone, etc.) [4].

When students eventually return to the classroom, districts must continue to provide equitable access to technology inside *and outside* of the classroom. Technology is not a luxury; it is a necessity. It is our responsibility to ensure that all students have access to online textbooks and other resources needed to complete homework, as well as access to higher education opportunities needed for a sustainable career in the 21st century.



[1] <https://nces.ed.gov/blogs/nces/post/the-digital-divide-differences-in-home-internet-access>
[2] <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/even-pandemic-students-limited-technology-access-lagged-behind-their-peers>
[3] <https://cca.nmsu.edu/documents/July-2016-Dona-Ana-Context-Report-Final.pdf>
[4] US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year estimate 2018

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