



Image: Mi Pham

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Mapping the Digital Divide in New Mexico

Since the height of the pandemic, how has the digital divide changed in New Mexico and Doña Ana County?

Access to the internet is crucial for many areas of our lives. Thanks to the internet, we can work and study from home, access online entertainment services, attend online therapy, and access a wide variety of information. Unfortunately, this is not the situation for all New Mexicans; many lack technology or internet services. In fact, according to the United States Census Bureau, 134,585 households in New Mexico, **nearly one out of every six families**, lack access to a computer or internet in their homes. ⁽¹⁾ During the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, we published the first digital divide dashboard and [newsletter](#) to raise awareness. This work led to the Success Partnership's [#Connect New Mexico Campaign](#). We have since updated the [dashboard](#) and looked at New Mexico's progress in closing the divide.

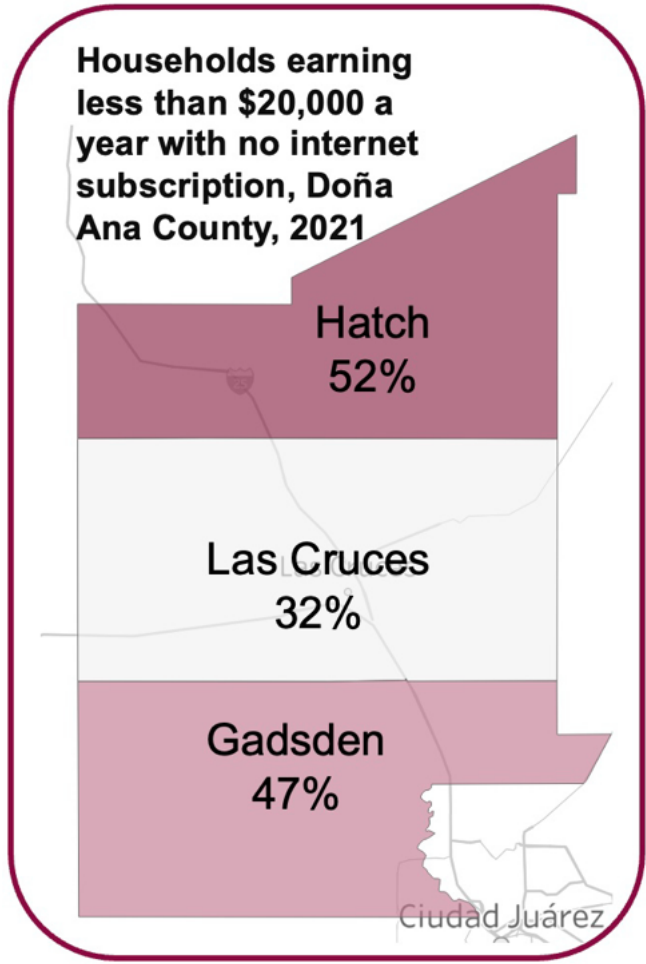
[Click here to see the updated digital divide map](#)

How Broadband Connection Impacts Disparities in Education

Home access to computers and the internet have long been basic necessities for students. Contacting teachers, accessing school work, and connecting to class resources such as textbooks and educational platforms is nearly impossible without it. The digital divide is not simply an inconvenience for those affected, it is a serious equity issue. Data shows that the digital divide perpetuates inequalities and limits opportunities for those who cannot afford these resources. The Urban Institute found eighth-grade students without access to computers or the internet were more than two years behind their classmates academically. ⁽²⁾

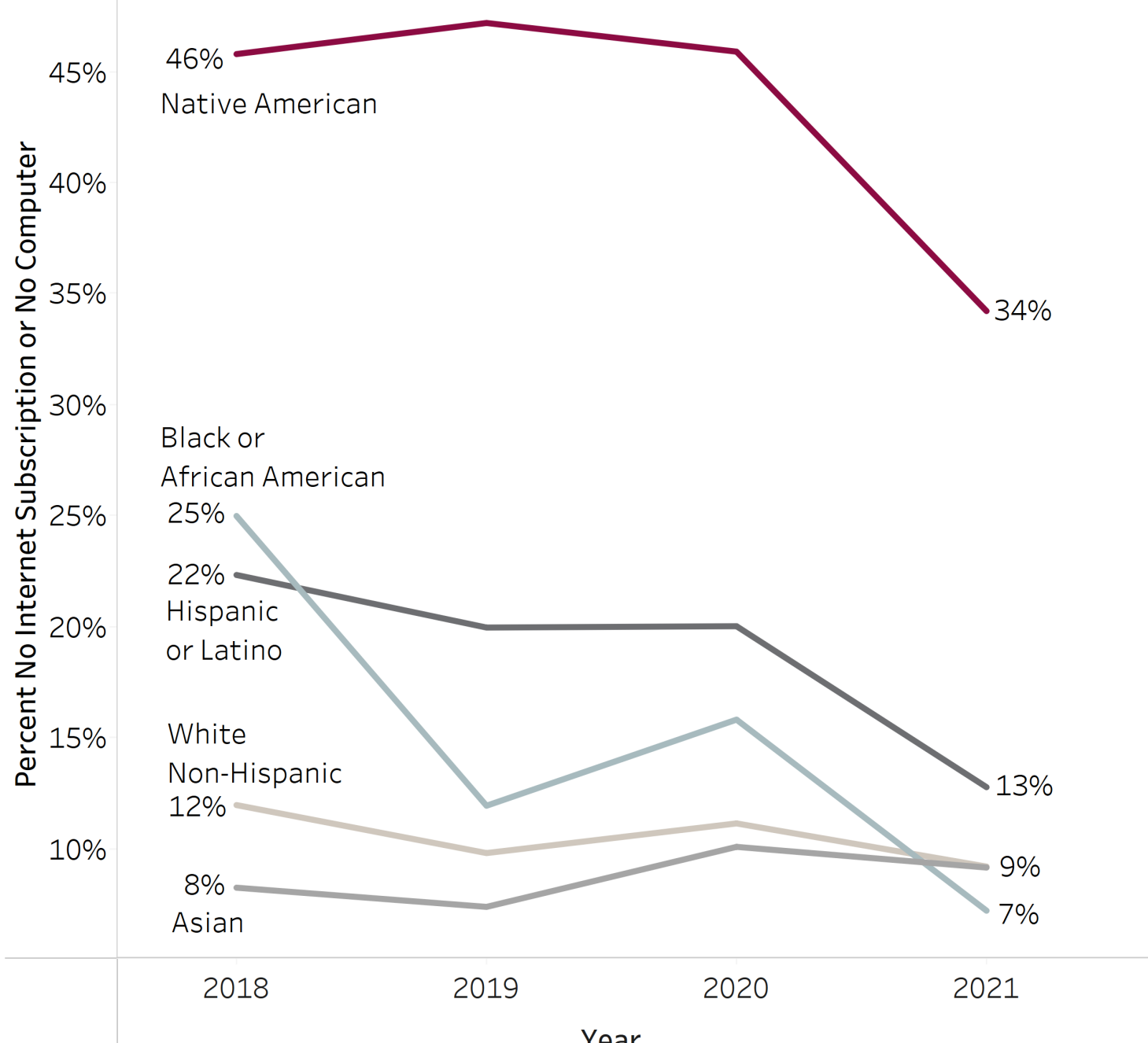
The Digital Divide in New Mexico by Income, Race, and Geography

According to the most recent data from the US Census Bureau, the digital divide is strongly tied to families' socioeconomic composition, geography, and race and ethnicity. Families earning less than **\$20,000 annually, those living in rural areas, and students of color are the most impacted**. Thirty-two percent of households residing within Las Cruces Public School District boundaries and earning less than \$20,000 a year are without internet access, compared to only 5% of households earning over \$75,000 yearly. ⁽³⁾ That number only increases when looking at Doña Ana's more rural districts. Within Gadsden Independent School District and Hatch Valley Public School District boundaries, approximately half of households earning less than \$20,000 a year lack broadband connectivity; 47% and 52%, respectively.



The digital divide also impacts certain racial groups more than others. In New Mexico, Native American households are approximately three times as likely as all other racial and ethnic groups to lack a computer or internet access. ⁽⁴⁾ However, New Mexico has experienced some progress since 2018. According to the most recent data from the US Census Bureau, in 2018, nearly half of Native American households (46%) lacked a computer or internet access, compared to 34% in 2021. Similarly, trends show that the percentage of access is slowly decreasing for other racial and ethnic groups. Still, our state has a long way to go to close this gap.

Percent of households with no internet or computer in the home by race and ethnicity in New Mexico, 2018-2021



Source: US Census Bureau, 2018-2021 ACS 1-year estimates.

Making Progress

The pandemic prompted schools to address the issue. With federal funding, public schools gave out laptops that students could use to access their class resources. ⁽⁵⁾ If students did not have internet, some districts provided a mobile hotspot or connected families to discounted internet services. Many New Mexico colleges also provided students with computers and internet access. In the school year 2022–2023, New Mexico State University and Doña Ana Community College launched initiatives that provided incoming students who met specific requirements with free laptops or iPads. ⁽⁶⁾



NMSU and DACC provided first-year students with laptops and iPads during the pandemic.

State and local organizations also launched numerous campaigns and initiatives to address and bridge the gap. One notable endeavor is the *Connect New Mexico* initiative, introduced in 2021, aimed to provide internet access to all residents of New Mexico. *Connect New Mexico* has active surveys and mapping programs to determine the areas that need internet connectivity. ⁽⁷⁾ In recent developments, New Mexico secured a grant of \$5.74 million as part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The grant will allow state officials to plan for another federal award of more than \$100 million. These awards fund the hardware installation necessary to provide internet in areas with little to no internet. While this is a step forward, the state's estimated cost of achieving comprehensive connectivity is more than \$2 billion. ⁽⁸⁾

Most recently, in June 2023, the federal government and partners launched the *Online for All* initiative. ⁽⁹⁾ The program has garnered praise for its effectiveness in lowering internet costs for low-income families by providing a monthly subsidy of \$30 for internet expenses.

New Mexico has the seventh-highest enrollment in the program, but over half of eligible households are not using assistance from the program. ⁽¹⁰⁾

60%
of eligible New Mexico homes are not participating in the Online for All program.

What We Can Do | Get Involved

The best way to help close the digital divide in New Mexico is for New Mexicans to get involved. The easiest way to become involved is to share the services and programs available, **ensure schools provide all students with access to computers and the internet even if federal funding ends**, and continue the conversation. The *Online for All* and *Connect New Mexico* initiatives play vital roles in promoting technology and internet access in the state. Showing support and getting the word out about these programs can help with the essential funding needed to keep them alive and let others know they are available. People can check their eligibility for the federal internet subsidy and sign up at [GetInternet.gov](#).

Visit the updated Center for Community Analysis interactive dashboard for more information on the digital divide.

[Click here to see the updated digital divide map](#)

Sources:

- (1) US Census Bureau, ACS 2021 1-year estimate
- (2) Even before the Pandemic, Students with Limited Technology Access Lagged behind Their Peers
- (3) Center for Community Analysis Digital Divide Dashboard
- (4) US Census Bureau, ACS 2021 1-year estimate
- (5) How Las Cruces Public Schools is providing technology to 1 in 5 students who need it
- (6) Aggie Launch Pad and DACC Offers Free iPads to Students
- (7) Federal Communications Commission Broadband Map
- (8) Grant aims to close NM digital divide
- (9) Online For All
- (10) White House launches internet access push