

SB 1130: Broadband for California



Introduced by Senator Lena Gonzalez

Coauthors: Senators Caballero and Stern

Assembly Members Eduardo Garcia and Quirk-Silva

Co-sponsors: Common Sense & Electronic Frontier Foundation

Background

Common Sense has long tracked the divide between students who have home broadband access and those who do not, known as the [Homework Gap](#). This divide is an indicator of whether or not a student will be able to complete their homework and succeed in school alongside their internet-connected peers.

COVID 19 has blown open the Homework Gap creating a Learning Gap, as students and educators attempt to access distance learning during school closures. **In California, 1 in 4 students lack adequate access to the internet.**¹ The digital divide for students exists in communities across the state, but connectivity gaps are most pronounced in rural communities and for Black, Latinx, and Native American households; of students who lack adequate access to the internet in California 60% are Black, Latinx, or Native American.² Additionally, only 59% of rural California residents have access to broadband at home,³ leaving them at an incredible disadvantage as educators and families rely on the internet to access not only education but telehealth and emergency services.

SB 1130 would require the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to implement and expand the California Advanced Services Fund (CASF) program to encourage deployment of futureproof broadband infrastructure to rural and urban communities that lack the robust broadband service that allows students and families to access remote learning, telehealth and jobs.

Robust Distance Learning: Internet Speed Requirements

Although California has made progress closing the digital divide at schools, internet access at home is still a challenge. For a robust distance learning experience, students and teachers need high-speed internet service as well as devices. Though the majority of Californians have access to some form of internet service, Internet

service must meet certain download and upload speeds—corresponding to how quickly a connection can retrieve or send data, respectively—to be effective in a distance learning environment. Passive streaming and web browsing have historically formed the majority of internet usage, with internet service providers (ISPs) typically providing asymmetrical service favoring higher download speeds.

However, with videoconferencing increasingly used for distance learning, coupled with other household video needs like working-from-home and telemedicine, both household download and upload speed requirements are increasing. Students and teachers who previously thought their broadband connection was “enough” are now finding that for remote work and learning they need consistent broadband speeds of at least 25 mbps symmetrical.

Learn more about [Closing the K-12 Digital Divide in the Age of Distance Learning, 2020](#)

SB 1130 would update CASF funding requirements to encourage infrastructure expansion in underserved rural and urban areas. These changes to **areas that qualify** for funding as well as updates to what counts as “**covered**” would allow more communities to invest in “future-proof” high speed broadband networks.

Changes under SB 1130

Helps deploy existing \$300 million of CASF funds on robust fiber deployment:

- ❑ Updates California Advanced Services Fund to focus on the deployment of fiber infrastructure.
- ❑ Updates language on the definition of unserved communities: Unserved communities defined as - areas where 90% of the population lack access to facilities based broadband with speeds of 25mbps.
- ❑ Encourages open access of funded infrastructure (with exceptions for providers in certain circumstances)

¹Common Sense and Boston Consulting Group. [Closing the K-12 Digital Divide in the Age of Distance Learning](#). June 2020.

²Ibid.

³PPIIC, [California's Digital Divide](#), 2017

Teaching Through the Digital Divide

What learning without connectivity looks like during the coronavirus pandemic.

As part of our campaign to [connect all students](#), Common Sense has conducted new research and asked educators and parents across the country to share how lack of access is affecting student learning.

California - Digital Divide

25% of STUDENTS lack adequate access to the internet.

1,528,536 STUDENTS lack adequate access to the internet.

17% of STUDENTS do not have devices at home for distance learning.

1,063,415 STUDENTS do not have devices at home for distance learning.

60% of STUDENTS who lack adequate access to the internet are Black, Latinx, or Native American.

924,258 STUDENTS who lack adequate access to the internet are Black, Latinx, or Native American.

8% of TEACHERS lack adequate access to the internet.

2% of TEACHERS do not have devices at home for distance learning.

Source: [Closing the K-12 Digital Divide in the Age of Distance Learning, 2020](#). Common Sense Media and Boston Consulting Group.

Educator Stories

"We are in our 4th week of dismissal, and we are still finding students that have neither the equipment or the internet access to stay connected to the system. These kids are falling behind."

Jim, High School Teacher, Guasti

"Over 30% of our families currently do not have the Internet at home. Over 35% of families are accessing online content via parents' smartphones."

Jessica, Elementary School Teacher, Oakland

"My school district's proposal to remedy the [digital divide] is loaning tablets and parking buses with Wi-Fi routers in their neighborhoods. Unfortunately, families will have to share a device and the Wi-Fi will only be available during school hours."

Karen, Elementary School Teacher, Thermal

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