

TO: Superintendents, Principals and School Leaders
FROM: Indiana Department of Education
DATE: June 26, 2020
RE: Guidance for Collecting Information on Home Internet Access

The purpose of this memo is to notify Indiana schools of efforts underway to support the collection of high quality data sets about access to the Internet and to urge schools to move forward with initial efforts to collect this data during the registration process as students return to school this fall. The IDOE anticipates this topic will require regular and ongoing communication as we work together to understand and solve this challenge.

Background

The question of student home access to the Internet has become critical for schools as they plan strategies for continuous learning and the return to school for the 2020-2021 school year. Schools have varying levels of confidence in their understanding of the true levels of access to the Internet their students have. This is partially due to the fact that this information is often collected via home surveys which may be anonymous. Additionally, because of the inherently technical nature of questions surrounding Internet access, the answers families provide may not be entirely accurate since being able to access the Internet and having access that will support the learning opportunities available through the school can represent various flavors of access.

Schools across the nation are attempting to dial in answers to the questions about home access since understanding the true scope and nature of the gap is critical to solving the challenge. Data collection is a critical first step in addressing this challenge. School corporations in Indiana need to collect data that moves from understanding the percentage of students without adequate access to the Internet to understanding which students do not have access and what the service options are for these students.

The Indiana Department of Education is collaborating with national organizations (Council of Chief State School Officers and EducationSuperhighway) to develop a playbook for schools to use in their efforts to collect high quality data regarding home access to the Internet. Several Indiana schools are piloting the tools of this playbook and the goal is to have this playbook available by the end of the summer.

This data collection effort has a direct impact on the ability of local schools to provide continuous learning opportunities to their students and families. Solving the home access Internet challenges across the nation will require data aggregation, coordinated efforts, advocacy, strategic investments to address this challenge systemically. The playbook mentioned above is being designed with a direct focus on helping local schools increase the confidence in their data about home Internet access but also with an eye toward the potential for aggregating this data at the state and national level to inform the development of long-term solutions.

Call to Action

We are encouraging schools to take advantage of the registration process to collect student level information about home access to the Internet. Depending on how quickly the data collection playbook is ready for general use, schools in Indiana may be able to benefit from this new resource. However, schools should not wait for the playbook to be developed. **Each Indiana school is encouraged to have a plan with the following components:**

- Targeted Data Elements
- Data Collection Strategy
- Data storage and Maintenance Strategy

Targeted Data Elements

The data elements below represent the desired components of a high quality data set that can be used locally and potentially at an aggregated level. Collecting each of these fields may not be possible during the registration process. However, we would suggest schools review this list and select a set of target elements for collection during registration for the 2020-2021 school year.

Data Field	Survey Question	Response Options
Digital Device Type	What is the primary learning device the student most often uses to complete school work at home?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Chromebook ● Desktop computer ● Laptop computer ● iPad ● Other tablet ● Smartphone ● No device available
Device Access Source	Is the primary learning device a personal device or school-provided?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Personal ● School-provided
Device Utilization	Is the primary learning device shared with anyone else in the household?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes ● No
Internet Access in Residence	Can the student access the Internet on their primary learning device at home?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes ● No
Internet Access Type in Residence	What is the primary type of internet service used at the residence?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Residential Broadband (e.g. DSL, Cable, Fiber) ● Cellular Network ● School-provided hotspot ● Satellite ● Dial-up ● Don't know ● None
Internet Performance	Can the student stream a video on their primary learning device without interruption?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes, with no issues ● Yes, but not with consistent quality ● No

Please Note: *Student Home Address is a critical component of understanding the home access challenge since without this piece of information it is impossible to identify potential Internet access providers for the student. It is very important to have an accurate physical residential address for each student (where a student lives vs. where they get their mail). Fall registration is an excellent opportunity to verify the home address of each student and to ensure the address is the same for each student in the household living at that address. Any steps a school can take to improve the quality of home address data will directly impact not only the local understanding of available options but also the potential demand for bandwidth at a particular location which is a factor of the number of simultaneous connections.*

Collection Strategy

There are probably multiple options for collecting the data each school has targeted. Some considerations for selecting a strategy. Can the data be collected through an online form or platform making the data easy to connect to other student level variables such as home address already stored in the school student information system? How can free text entry be limited by providing choices in dropdowns menus leading to cleaner, higher quality responses? How can the school overcome limited access to the Internet in the data collection effort (e.g., using text messaging, phone calls, etc.)?

Data Storage and Maintenance

The data each school has about the Internet access of their students should be stored in a location that is secure and accessible for local decisions makers. There should be a plan for updating the data set with new fields as they become available and individual student records should be able to be updated more frequently than once a year. Ideally, the student information system should be the target storage option for this data about home access since this will provide for future aggregation of this data.

Thanks for your efforts to address the home Internet access challenge for students in your school. If you have questions about this guidance, please contact us at <https://help.doe.in.gov/>