N H S A
NATIONAL HEAD START ASSOCIATION

Our mission is to coalesce, inspire, and support the Head Start field as a leader in early childhood development and education.

Head Start: Uniquely Positioned to Close the Digital Divide

The digital divide—the economic, educational, and social inequalities between those who have computers and online access and those who do not—starts early and especially impacts families with low-incomes, families in rural communities, and Black and Hispanic households.

Many Americans with incomes $30,000 and lower rely solely on smartphones, with 27% of adults reporting they have a smartphone but no broadband Internet at home. In rural areas, one-fourth of the population lacks access to broadband Internet service. Eighty percent of White U.S. adults said they had access to broadband at home, compared to 71% of Black U.S. adults and only 65% of Hispanic U.S. adults.

For *Head Start parents*, digital lives are all encompassing, from taking classes online or applying for jobs, to banking virtually or looking up a bus schedule. One study found that 79% of Americans have used online tools and resources to find jobs. Connected Head Start families are better able to access education, economic, and civic opportunities.

Americans with lower incomes have lower levels of technology adoption
% of U.S. adults who say they have each of the following, by household income

■ Less than $30K ■ $30K-$99,999 ■ $100K or more

Smartphone	76 / 87 / 97	
Desktop or laptop computer	59 / 84 / 92	
Home broadband	57 / 83 / 93	
Tablet computer	41 / 53 / 68	
All of the above	23 / 42 / 63	

Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 25-Feb. 8, 2021.
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

For *Head Start children*, appropriate early technology use helps to ensure they are keeping up with their peers as they transition to a K-12 setting. Specifically, the American Pediatrics Association found access to technology increases self-efficacy in math and science of low-income, minority children.
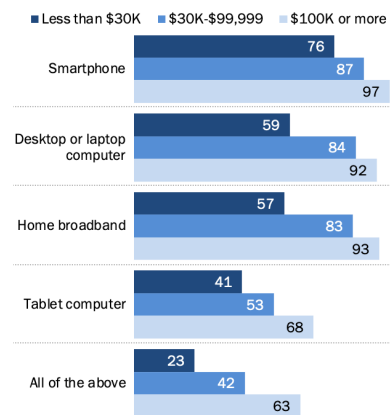
In closing the divide, we must also create digital equity and inclusion of all families.

Digital equity: A condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy. Necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services.

Digital inclusion: The activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of Information and Communication Technologies. This includes five elements: 1) affordable, robust broadband internet service; 2) internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user; 3) access to digital literacy training; 4) quality technical support; and 5) applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation, and collaboration.

4 Ways Head Start Can Build Digital Equity and Inclusion

Following are four ways Head Start programs can promote digital equity and inclusion:

1. **Connecting families to broadband Internet supports and devices.** Head Start programs are able to provide onsite Internet access to families, extend device access to families and connect them to subsidy programs, such as the federal Emergency Broadband Benefit.
2. **Promoting age-appropriate use of technology to parents of enrolled children.** Parents of young children have identified 3 groups of people they trust to offer technology advice: pediatricians, family members, and early childhood teachers. Head Start staff can set expectations about age-appropriate technology use, guide families toward good digital practices and promote using the Internet to advance kindergarten readiness skills.
3. **Promoting digital literacy, including how to protect children online.** Digital access is only as valuable as digital literacy. Head Start programs can support parents' ability to engage in online banking, job search, benefits access and the like. Head Start programs can also help families learn how to protect family privacy and protect children from inappropriate content. A recent study found 72% of parents with children under age six reported concerns about technology use.
4. **Equipping Head Start staff to use and guide technology use.** Nationwide, there are over 250,000 Head Start staff. As key supporters of child and family development, their own connection to devices, hi-speed Internet and digital literacy, is key to promoting the goals of Head Start. Staff training, expanded device access and home connectivity are all key components of equipping Head Start staff.

Take Action on the Digital Divide with NHSA

While the digital divide for Head Start-eligible families is already large, it may get worse as technology adoption expands further into education, work, and daily life. We have to act now.

NHSA is now a member of the National Digital Inclusion Alliance and, through our partnership with EBB Para Mi, is raising awareness about the federal Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB), which lowers hi-speed Internet costs for families. We are also advocating in Washington, D.C., for inclusion of Head Start programs as eligible beneficiaries in the federal E-Rate program and Emergency Connectivity Fund.

Join us! Here's what you can do today:

- Subscribe to NHSA's Action Alerts and stay up-to-date on the latest advocacy opportunities.
- Watch our Digital Divide panel with FCC Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel.
- Join the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (membership is free).
- Read NHSA CIO Tim Oppenheim's blog on local actions you can take to support digital inclusion.
- Share your story with NHSA about your experience with the digital divide.