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**Facilitator Guide – Homework Gap**

**What is in this Guide?**

Facilitators can use this guide to conduct a professional learning session around the homework gap. It is our assumption that the facilitator will have at least a basic knowledge about learning in the digital age. This guide includes step by step instructions and activities, with suggested times for each activity, as well as narrative content and resources to support the topic. Accompanying this guide is a presentation slide deck for use during the professional learning session and a link to the logistics resources to help facilitators plan the session. Logistics include recommendations for audio visual, catering, registration and outreach.

This facilitator guide can be used in its current format or it is easily customizable to meet your needs. The guide is organized as follows:

* Purpose of the professional learning session
* Objectives for participants
* Session overview
* Resources

**Purpose**

The goal of this session is for participants to learn more about the homework gap and strategize potential solutions.

**Objectives**

* Learn more about the homework gap and its impact on digital equity
* Strategize solutions with peers
* Collaborate with colleagues on best practices
* Develop and maintain relationships with other district and state leaders

**Session Overview (Total time: 90 minutes)**

* Welcome and Introductions (5-10 minutes)
* Background (5-10 minutes)
* Equity of Access Activity (10-15 minutes)
* Exemplar Rapid Fire Presentations (15-20 minutes each)
* Brainstorming Strategies and Solutions (20-25 minutes)
* Reflection and Wrap Up (5-10 minutes)

\*\*Please note – the timing of activities requires a rapid paced session. Each facilitator will need to consider their audience (as related both to background knowledge and size) as well as future opportunities for professional learning opportunities around the topic and then choose the activities and time commitment for each.

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**Welcome and Introductions (5-10 minutes)**

***Facilitator Note:*** *Introduce yourself, review the agenda and logistics for the session. Introduce the welcome activity. This activity will help the facilitator better understand the audience. If you have a large group, ask the participants to complete this via individual tables vs whole group. You can also choose an activity from the Activity Toolbox.*

**Ice-Breaker Activity**

* Share your name, role and school/district.
* How many devices do you have?
* Do you have high-speed internet access at home?
* Can you do your job without internet access?
* How many web-based applications do you access on a regular basis?

**Background (5-10 minutes)**

***Facilitator Note:*** *Share some general information about the homework gap how the homework gap impacts students.*

**Overview**

Learning does not stop at the end of the school day, and access to digital learning resources should not either. However, many students do not have adequate access to the internet at home—often referred to as the “homework gap,” the gap between students whose internet connections at home are slow or non-existent—and those who have home connections with adequate speed. This is a problem disproportionately common in rural and underserved communities.

As more and more educators use digital devices and digital instructional materials for learning, connectivity at home for students is an essential component of a 21st century education—not something merely nice to have. Access to technology tools and resources offers new learning opportunities to support deeper learning and best prepare students for college and careers. When students have access to high-speed reliable internet both in and out of school, they can take online courses, complete online homework assignments, participate in virtual activities and collaborate with peers.

**Quick Facts**

* [Pew Research Center](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/04/20/the-numbers-behind-the-broadband-homework-gap/) reports that 5 million households with school-age children do not have internet access at home.
* [Pew Research Center](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/03/22/digital-divide-persists-even-as-lower-income-americans-make-gains-in-tech-adoption/) reports that in 2016, one-fifth of adults living in households earning less than $30,000 a year were “smartphone-only” internet users – meaning they owned a smartphone but did not have broadband internet at home.
* 10% of Americans nationwide lack access to speeds of at least 25 Mbps for downloads/3 Mbps for uploads ([2016 Broadband Progress Report](https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-releases-2016-broadband-progress-report)).
* Nearly 40% of citizens living on Tribal Lands and in rural areas lack access to speeds of at least 25 Mbps for downloads/3 Mbps for uploads ([2016 Broadband Progress Report](https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-releases-2016-broadband-progress-report)).
* Although, the Federal Communications Commission recently voted to increase E-rate funding by 60% annually to improve broadband connectivity in schools and libraries, these E-rate funds cannot be used for home access.
* According to [2015 data](http://blog.tomorrow.org/index.php/2016/06/06/homework-gap-real-currently-addressed/) from Project Tomorrow, two-thirds of students say that it is important for them to have safe and consistent access to the internet when they are outside of school for them to be successful in school.
* According to a recent [study](http://neatoday.org/2016/04/20/the-homework-gap/) from the Hispanic Heritage Foundation, Family Online Safety Institute, and My College Options, nearly 50% of students say they have been unable to complete a homework assignment because they didn’t have access to the internet or a computer.
* Furthermore, 42% of students say they received a lower grade on an assignment due to lack of access.
* Without home internet access, 35% of students go to school early or stay late; 24% of students use the public library; and 19% of students go to fast food restaurants or cafes to use the internet.
* [CoSN’s 2016 Annual Infrastructure Survey](http://www.cosn.org/Infrastructure2016) reports that nearly two-thirds of school district technology leaders report they have no strategies to address off-campus internet access—an issue that prevents “anytime, anywhere” learning.

**Workforce Impact**

Students who lack home access are also at a disadvantage as they look for part-time jobs and prepare for college and career. Online employment resources rival personal and professional networks as a top source of job information, according to the Pew Research Center’s survey; [Lack of broadband can be a key obstacle, especially for job seekers](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/12/28/lack-of-broadband-can-be-a-key-obstacle-especially-for-job-seekers/). Survey results indicate that 52% of Americans believe that those without access at home are at a “major disadvantage” when pursuing job opportunities or gaining new career skills. Without broadband access at home, 37% of respondents indicate that it would not be easy to create a professional resume; 30% would find it difficult to contact an employer via email, or fill out an online job application; and 27% would have a hard time finding online lists of available jobs in their area.

***Facilitator Note:*** *Choose the featured video or select one of your own. This activity will help support the mindset of the participants; provide an opportunity for dialogue; and share experiences in and among leaders. Choose whole group, table or partner discussion depending on timing and size of group.*

**Technology in Classrooms**

These students created the video to promote awareness about programs that provide internet access at home since the school could track who had access. This way people could contact a school rep voluntarily to get signed up. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lSscbqRZVM>

**Discussion Questions**

* Share one thing that is similar about your school/district and the featured video.
* Do your students lack robust broadband access at home?

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**Equity of Access Activity (10-15 minutes)**

***Facilitator Note:*** *Participants will learn more about the impacts of the homework gap and equity of access on student learning. Introduce the Think-Pair-Share activity or choose another activity from the Activity Toolbox. Ask participants to choose a discussion question or discuss as many as time allows.*

**Think-Pair-Share Activity**

* Think: Ask participants to think about equity of access in their district/school. Use the discussion questions as a guide.
* Pair: Talk with a partner and discuss equity of access in your district.
* Share: Share your partner discussions with your table or whole group depending on the size of the group.

**Discussion Questions**

* What percentage of students in your district lack internet access at home?
* What percentage of your students have access to non-shared devices at home?
* What percentage of your students have access to the internet through a computer or tablet and not only a smartphone?
* If you don’t know the answers to these questions, how can you obtain the answers?

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**Exemplar Rapid Fire Presentations (15-20 minutes each)**

***Facilitator Note****: Ask two exemplar school/districts to share their background and experience regarding initiatives to reduce the homework gap and provide digital equity for all students. The presentations should be 5-7 minutes and prepared in advance of the workshop.* *Additional information about presentations can be found in the Logistics resource.*

**Discussion Questions**

* How is your school/district similar to the exemplar?
* Do you have specific outreach strategies to address out-of-school access?
* Are there policies/practices shared that your school/district can implement within the next quarter?

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**Brainstorm Solutions to Address Homework Gap (20-25 minutes)**

***Facilitator Note:*** *Participants will brainstorm key strategies and solutions to address the homework gap. Introduce the* [*DotStorming*](https://dotstorming.com/) *activity, a free app for real-time group brainstorming and decision making. Participants need to join Dotstorming for this activity. The facilitator creates a Dotstorming board and invites participants to join the discussion. Participants add ideas and/or pictures. All participants vote on the ideas they like. Ask participants to choose one discussion question or discuss as many as time allows.*

**Small Group (10-15 minutes)**

At each table, the group will brainstorm ideas on how to address home access to the internet for all students. Each idea will be entered onto the dotstorming page by the group. Groups can refer to the key questions below to consider as they develop their solutions.

**Whole Group (15 minutes)**

After the table complete the questions, the facilitator brings the group together and reads and discusses the solutions from each table. If multiple groups entered similar ideas, consolidate into one solution per unique idea. Once the final set of unique solutions is set in dotstorming, each person can vote on their favorite ideas. The number of votes each individual gets should equal the number of solutions divided by three. So, if there are 12 solutions to pick from, each person gets 4 votes. Individuals can use all their votes for one solution or spread their votes across separate solutions. For instance, if they have 4 votes to give, they could put one vote for 4 different solutions, or vote twice for one solution, and once for two other solutions, OR give all four votes to their one favorite solution. After votes are finished, the solutions can be resorted in order of most votes. The whole group can then reflect on the top solutions and whether they can be implemented in their school/district.

**Discussion Questions**

* What strategies do you employ to address a lack of home access?
* How does your district leverage community partnerships to increase internet access outside of school?
* How does your district provide families with information on wireless hotspots in the community?
* How do you provide outreach to families about discounted internet programs?
* How does your district address students who lack a device outside of school?

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**Reflection and Wrap Up (5-10 minutes)**

***Facilitator Note:*** *Take a few moments to reflect on the session, share details about additional events related to the remainder of the day and engage the audience to take action when they return to their schools/districts. Use this Audience Challenge activity or choose another one from the Activity Toolbox.*

**Audience Challenge Activity**

What can you do when you return to your position to help ensure ALL students have access to digital tools and resources outside-of-school?

* Create an outreach plan at your local school to inform families of connectivity resources
* Invite your colleagues to discuss the homework gap and brainstorm solutions
* Create a flyer to share at the next PTA/PTO Meeting

**Wrap-Up**

***Facilitator Note:*** *The facilitator wraps up the day and shares resources with participants. Sample language: “This is only the first step of many steps in supporting teachers and students for learning in the digital age. I encourage you to follow up on our reflection activity during the next few weeks and continue to collaborate with your peers. Think about what tools and resources you can use to maintain relationships and encourage collaboration, as well as identify opportunities for on-going professional learning and workshops.*

**Resources**

The US Department of Education does not endorse any resources; instead they are provided to assist the facilitator in preparing for the workshop. The facilitator can also share these resources with participants to support on-going professional learning and school/district planning after the workshop. For example, some districts have used the NETP for on-going book studies throughout the school year to support the development and refinement of technology initiatives.

**US Department of Education Resources**

[Building Technology Infrastructure for Learning](https://tech.ed.gov/futureready/infrastructure/)

[Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)](https://www.ed.gov/essa)

[National Education Technology Plan (NETP)](https://tech.ed.gov/files/2017/01/NETP17.pdf)

[Stories of Ed Tech Innovation](https://tech.ed.gov/stories/)

[Rural Education Resource Center](https://www.ed.gov/rural-education)

**Facilitator Guide Resources**

[Broadband Progress Report 2016 (FCC)](http://transition.fcc.gov/Daily_Releases/Daily_Business/2016/db0129/FCC-16-6A1.pdf)

[CoSN Digital Equity Action Agenda and Toolkit](http://cosn.org/focus-areas/leadership-vision/digital-equity-action-agenda)

[CoSN’s 2016 Annual Infrastructure Survey](http://www.cosn.org/infrastructure2016)

[Dotstorming](https://dotstorming.com/)

[FCC 2016 Broadband Progress Report](https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-releases-2016-broadband-progress-report)

[FCC Lifeline](https://www.fcc.gov/general/lifeline-program-low-income-consumers)

[Pew Research Center: The numbers behind the broadband ‘homework gap’](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/04/20/the-numbers-behind-the-broadband-homework-gap/)

[Pew Research Center: Digital divide persists even as lower-income Americans make gains in tech adoption](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/03/22/digital-divide-persists-even-as-lower-income-americans-make-gains-in-tech-adoption/)

[Pew Research Center: Lack of broadband can be a key obstacle, especially for job seekers](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/12/28/lack-of-broadband-can-be-a-key-obstacle-especially-for-job-seekers/)

[Project Tomorrow Homework Gap](http://blog.tomorrow.org/index.php/2016/06/06/homework-gap-real-currently-addressed/)

[The Homework Gap: The ‘Cruelest Part of the Digital Divide’](http://neatoday.org/2016/04/20/the-homework-gap/)