

How Civic Infrastructure Supports Digital Equity

Long before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 15 million public school students lacked internet access at home which prevented their ability to complete homework. This homework gap disproportionately affected Black, Indigenous and Latine families. The shift to virtual classrooms during the pandemic widened the digital divide and limited learning opportunities for millions.

The StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network had long recognized digital access inequities and pivoted quickly during the pandemic to bridge the digital divide.

A CLOSER LOOK: Dallas, Texas



The Commit Partnership, a member of the StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network, convened a coalition of more than 40 community leaders to support student access to virtual learning during the early days of the pandemic and to forge a strategic plan to achieve digital equity.

The Internet for All coalition includes chief technology officers from nine school districts that helped get students connected to virtual learning in the short term and setup pilots of private wireless networks for the long term. The coalition also includes the Dallas Regional Chamber, Dallas Innovation Alliance, the City of Dallas and The Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas.

The coalition developed a Dallas County connectivity analysis and data dashboard identifying zip codes with the greatest connectivity need to make equitable selections for pilot network locations. As a result, five school communities with the highest density of economically insecure students now have access to reliable, at-home broadband. To assist with uptake of these private wireless networks by students, community engagement consultants were hired and have developed a primary strategy around “zip code sprints.”

Data also informed recommendations such as:

- 100 miles of city-owned fiber optic backbone to eventually provide free public Wi-Fi and targeted supports for households experiencing poverty
- Development of a wireless infrastructure to fill broadband gaps with a shared network between the city and school districts to ensure equitable access
- Expansion of digital equity initiatives such as digital skills training

STRIVETOGETHER: WHO WE ARE

StriveTogether is a national network of nearly 70 communities across 28 states and Washington, DC, working to build a future where a child’s potential is not dictated by race, ethnicity, zip code or circumstance. The StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network impacts the lives of more than 11 million youth — including more than 7 million children of color. For more information about StriveTogether, visit strivetogether.org.