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Governor Phil Murphy

ICYMI: Department of Education Announces NJ Schools Have Bridged the 'Digital Divide'

03/10/2021

All public schools report that students have technology needed to access their classroom remotely

TRENTON – The New Jersey Department of Education announced today that all public school districts report that every one of their students now has the technology needed to connect with their classroom online.

"As of today, New Jersey's digital divide is no more. It has been closed," **said Governor Phil Murphy.** "Closing the digital divide wasn't just about meeting the challenges of remote learning – it's been about ensuring every student has the tools they need to excel in a 21st century educational environment. This is vitally important as more and more of our students return to in-person instruction – whether their schools are all in-person or are reopening to allow in-person classes on a hybrid schedule. Their laptops are not just for home instruction. They're just as critical as any textbook."

Bridging the "digital divide" – the number of students who didn't have access to devices or the internet connectivity needed for online instruction – has been a major obstacle that schools around the country have faced since the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the use of virtual instruction. While the education community has worked diligently to provide high-quality learning opportunities for all students at every stage of the pandemic, the prevalence of virtual learning has underscored the importance of ensuring every student has access to digital learning technology.

"New Jersey educators and school leaders did an amazing job of pivoting to remote instruction during the pandemic," **said Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan, Acting Commissioner of Education.** "However, our education system was not designed with a remote-instruction model in mind, and our schools found themselves competing with schools across the globe for devices to deliver online learning to students. These facts did not derail us. Instead, we found ways to connect students to their classrooms and now can proudly say that we have bridged the digital divide."

In July of 2020, the Administration launched the $54 million Digital Divide Grant to close the digital divide in New Jersey public schools, and allocated another $6 million in Coronavirus Relief Funds for grant funding to nonpublic schools. At the time, it was estimated that approximately 231,000 of the state's nearly 1.4 million public school students needed either devices, internet connectivity, or both.

By January 2021, the number of students lacking devices or connectivity was reduced to 7,717. While the Department could ensure school districts had financial resources, school officials reported that the major obstacle they faced involved supply-chain issues, due to a waiting list to procure a limited supply of devices. Data reported by school districts and other entities as of March 3, 2021 indicates that the number of students lacking devices or connectivity has been reduced to zero.

“While schools have met challenges they never envisioned, we know there will be a renewed demand for new devices that will be needed for next school year, and we want to help districts prepare,” said Dr. Allen-McMillan. “We remain committed to working with schools to ensure that students continue to have access to the technology they need to connect with their classroom.”

Additional information regarding the Department's Digital Divide Data Collection can be found on the Department’s website (https://www.nj.gov/education/grants/digitaldivide/techsurveys.shtml).

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