



# YOUTH DIGITAL ACCESS AND LITERACY SURVEY RESULTS

December 20, 2022

# Youth Digital Access and Literacy Survey

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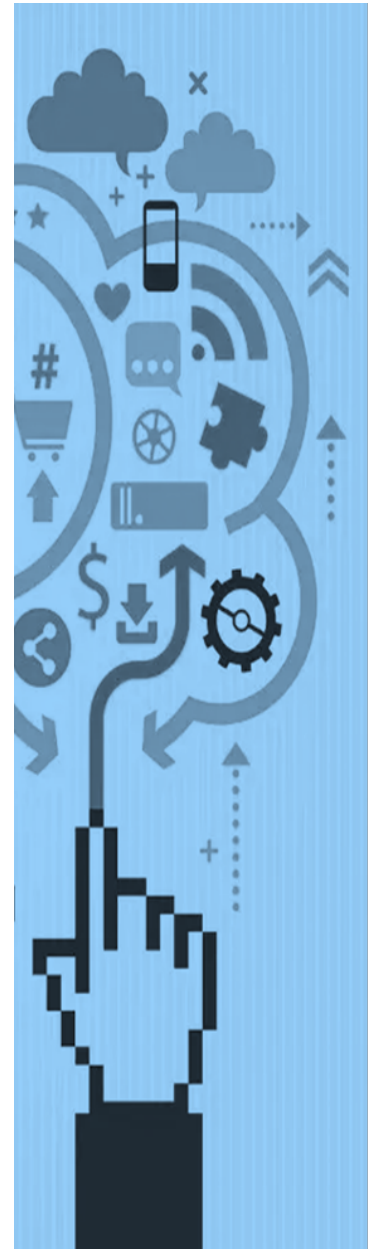
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## Executive Summary

The pandemic brought national attention to the existing digital divide and illuminated the importance of digital inclusion. Awareness of the essential need for connectivity and literacy is now evident throughout Fresno County, California, but the digital experiences of youth ages 12-17 was unknown. In this majority Hispanic yet racially and ethnically diverse county, located in the agricultural heart of California, what digital issues did youth encounter during the pandemic? We needed to hear from them.

Youth Survey Highlights:

- 78% utilized school-supplied Chromebooks or laptops
- 21% couldn't access the internet consistently
- 14% of those ages 12-17 had to wait to access the internet until they had helped siblings with their schoolwork
- Of those who couldn't access the internet consistently, those who first helped siblings had rates 2-1/2 times higher than others without internet inconsistency, further exacerbating their own time to learn
- 34% said they had no trouble with access, with six different issues cited for the remaining 66%
- 44% interpreted for their parents on Zoom/digital platforms or in telehealth appointments some or all the time it was needed
- 19% of students missed school to interpret for their parents and 7.6% missed work
- Students want to learn most how to file taxes electronically, followed by how to digitally search and apply for jobs, and how to do electronic banking

Those living in areas that match or have lower median incomes than Fresno County's average, whose parents speak a language other than English at home, or where digital infrastructure is lacking were even more likely to have learning difficulties during the pandemic. In addition, students know they are not prepared to participate in today's digital world once they leave high school. They ask to be heard with the intention and goal of improving their circumstances and increasing their opportunities.

## Introduction

Like all other regions in the country, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, school districts across Fresno County, California, pivoted to on-line schooling. Schools provided Chromebooks, laptops, and hot spots to those who did not have them. We learned in real time what did and did not work and the importance of digital access and literacy. Just because students had a computer at school didn't mean that it was possible to use it for online learning at home. Lack of digital infrastructure in their neighborhoods and lack of adequate speeds were barriers. Obstacles also included parent's lack of technical and software knowledge to access school portals, or the lack of knowledge on the use of virtual platforms to conduct school meetings, banking, file taxes, or access healthcare. When the pandemic hit community-based organizations (CBOs) became the de facto real-time trainers in the communities they served. CBO staff mobilized quickly and learned what was needed through on-the-job mistakes and successes. Stories were shared. Data was missing. Solutions needed to be found.





## **One Powerful Solution: Collective Action**

After months of informal conversation, in late 2020 a group of CBOs was convened, with the support of a Fresno Cradle to Career facilitator, to create a collaborative Digital Literacy Coalition. The high level goal was to build a community informed, networked solution to providing connectivity, devices and digital literacy supports. To that end the group inventoried and organized training competencies, developed curriculum, and leveraged the trusted relationships they have in communities throughout the county.

Simultaneously, local government, public agencies, schools, and business partners were coming together around infrastructure needs including routing of fiber, placement of towers and adequate speeds. In fact, speed testing data was making it clear that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) maps showing almost 100% access to broadband was not a reality for students and families trying to navigate distance learning, telehealth, employment applications and more. Ultimately, the infrastructure group and the Digital Literacy Coalition merged their work under the umbrella Fresno Coalition for Digital Inclusion.

Knowing that American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars were coming to the County, The Digital Literacy Coalition created a proposal to expand digital literacy training and supports. The proposal was submitted to the County Board of Supervisors in August 2021.

## **Missing Data: Digital Access Impacts on Youth**

Fresno Cradle to Career through its national network StriveTogether was introduced to a Youth Impact Assessment tool from Kids Impact Initiative as part of a joint project called “Shifting Power and Resources to Center Youth” (SPARCY). The impact tool was used to assess the inclusion of youth voice and the impacts on youth in the Digital Literacy ARPA proposal. It became clear that not enough youth voice had been included to determine curriculum needs or solutions. This information was shared with the Digital Literacy Coalition and the group agreed that getting youth input on the reality of their experiences and needs was essential.

## Survey Design

As the pandemic slowly began winding down a combined survey was developed to gain perspectives from youth and adults on their digital experiences. Using SurveyMonkey, questions were designed to inform a useful curriculum and learn what incentives motivate attendance at training sessions. The questions were developed from stories heard from schools and community-based organizations and spaces for additional comments were included. Youth review was also part of the development process. Most of the questions allowed multiple responses. To determine respondents general location within the county, zip codes and school names were requested. This allowed individual schools to review their student responses. Though this level of interest was unanticipated we were able to supply valuable information to each school.

## Outreach

In May 2022, the survey link and flier were shared with some youth-serving community-based organizations and Digital Literacy Coalition members and they publicized it using fliers with a QR code and links shared on a monthly pandemic-related Zoom call for community-based organizations and agencies. The most successful strategy began in August 2022 as students came back into classrooms. Working with principals and teachers through outreach to high schools resulted in a Fresno C2C backbone member spending time with a specific class during periods throughout the day. Activities included presenting the purpose of the survey, providing the survey link, and having students take the seven-minute survey immediately on a voluntary basis. Those schools that chose to distribute the survey themselves did not see as high a response rate as those who had a classroom visit.

The survey is still open as we try to expand the adult perspective response. **This “point-in-time” report focuses on the youth results for those ages 12-17.** Of the 1,058 county-wide responses through December 15, 2022, 927 are from youth ages 12-17 (88% of total responses.)

### ***Point In Time Survey Participation:***

**928** Responses ages 12-17

**18** Middle and High Schools  
Represented

**95%** Confidence Level (3.2% margin of  
error for k-12 students)

## Limitations

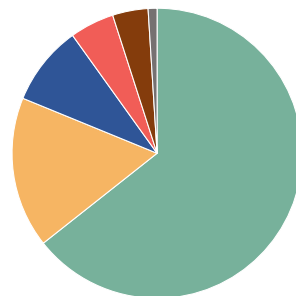
School outreach concentrated on the county’s middle to lower income areas, which are the northwestern, central, and south Fresno, and rural communities in general. The high schools drawing from higher income households in the north and northeast portion of the metropolitan area tend to have better infrastructure and funds to manage issues. Deeply rural areas on the outskirts of the county are not yet reached.

## Fresno Context

Fresno County has a majority Hispanic population and is located in the heart of the agricultural region known as the Central Valley in California. The county is geographically large (6000 square miles) and has roughly 1 million residents, the 4<sup>th</sup> largest school district in the state and 32 school districts in total. The urban greater Fresno-Clovis area holds half of the population and had the dubious distinction in past years of having one of the nation’s top two neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. Across the county 70% of residents live in urban areas and 30% in rural locales. The county is home to Mexican indigenous or immigrant residents and Central American immigrants through different influxes for decades, along with Southeast Asian, Afghan, and other refugees. More than 100 languages are spoken in the largest school district. The county’s wealth disparities show Whites have 10X greater wealth than Blacks, 8X greater than Latinos, and 2.6X greater than Asians.

  
**59%**  
of the  
Population  
is under 35

  
**38%**  
of the Youth  
Experience  
Poverty

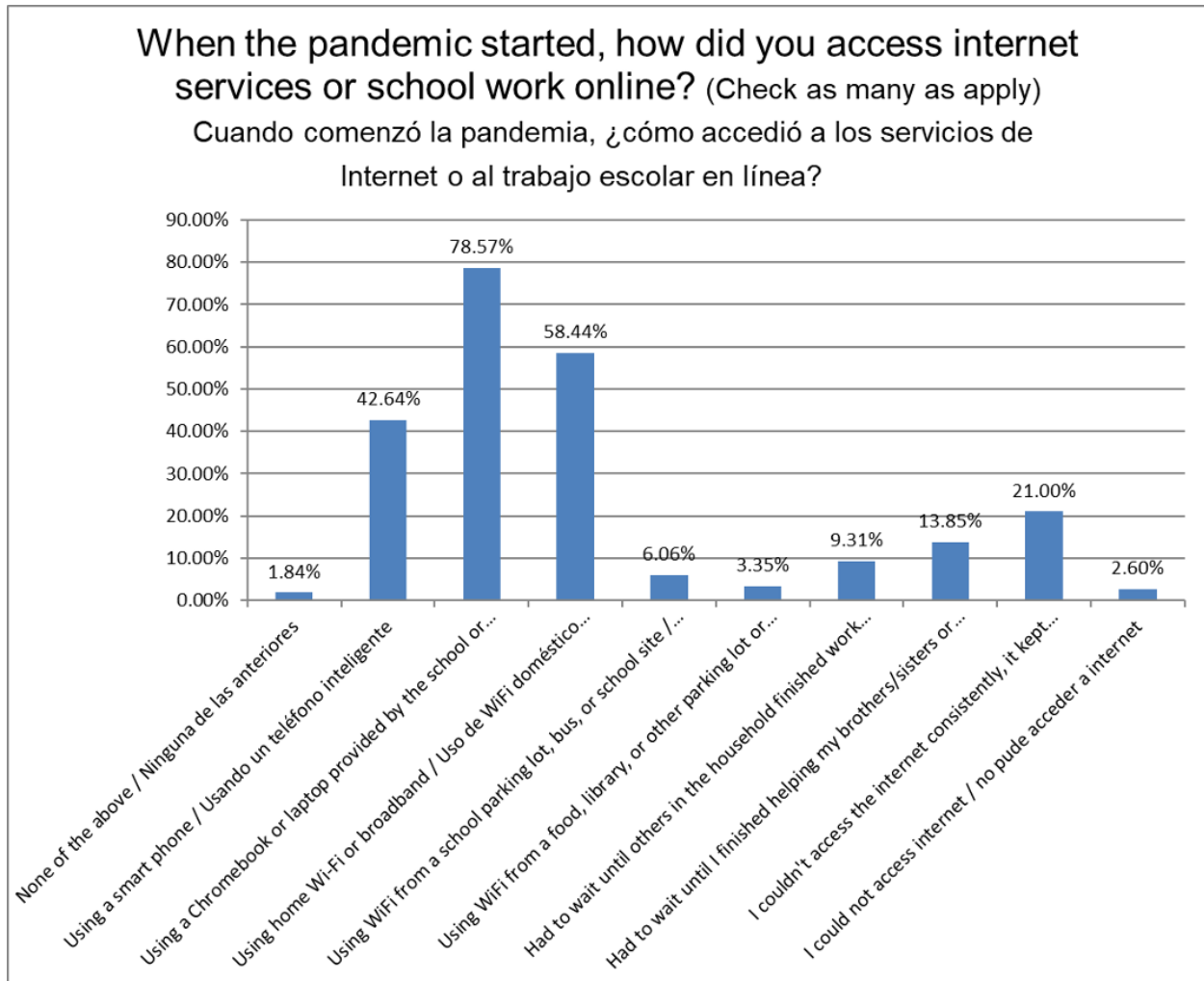


**Youth By Demographic**

- 65% Latino
- 17% White
- 9% Asian
- 5% Black
- 2% Two Races
- >1% American Indian

## Results

When the pandemic started, 78% said a school provided Chromebook or laptop was used. The majority (58%) used home Wi-Fi or broadband and 43% also or only used a cell phone. Respondents on average provided about 2-1/2 selections to the question, so the ability to discern cell phone use as their only means of access is limited.





Of those who couldn't access the internet consistently (194), 88% were using school Chromebooks or laptops and had high percentages who needed to wait until they helped younger brothers or sisters (37%) or others in the household finished work or school (25.5%). This group had the most trouble with accessing school portals (60%).

Of the 24 who could not access internet at all, 58% used a cell phone and/or a school Chromebook/laptop, 25% used a school site, bus, or school parking lot for access, and 20% used a library, fast food, or other parking lot to access the internet. This group had the most trouble getting onto the internet and 54% had to rely on their phone. Internet was either not available in their area (25%) or it cost too much (37.5%).

Overall, only 34% of teen respondents said they had no trouble with the internet. The percent having trouble with various issues (percent equals more than 100% due to multiple answer selections):

- 35% accessing school portals
- 29% getting on internet
- 15% using a cell phone for access
- 15% with emails
- 6.5% because it wasn't in their area
- 6% with medical telehealth appointments
- 5.5% because it cost too much

“We didn't have working internet in my house, so the school sent us these small hotspots. They weren't the best and didn't work all that well sometimes, but regardless it worked at providing a connection.”

*“I had internet but all of my 4 siblings on the same Wi-Fi with phones and computer tabs loading made our internet suck and horrible.”*

## Language Impact

English (63%) and Spanish (59%) are the dominant languages spoken at respondent's homes. Four different Southeast Asian cultures and languages comprise 6% with Hmong the dominant and Lao, Vietnamese, and Khmer also included. Mixteco (considered a separate language by some and a dialect of Oaxaca, Mexico by others, but not Spanish) is spoken at home by 2%. Punjabi is also 2%. Hindi and American Sign Language were also represented. It appears that 24% speak two languages at home, given the greater number of selections as compared to respondents.

The impact of language became apparent with the 396 students (44%) who indicated their parents needed help with interpretation for Zoom/Microsoft Teams meetings and/or medical telehealth appointments. Although not specifically asked, it is highly likely that a parent needing interpretation is not comfortable with digital navigation unless they have been trained in their own language. Fresno County community-based organizations conducting digital training in other languages before the pandemic were few and reached only a small percentage.

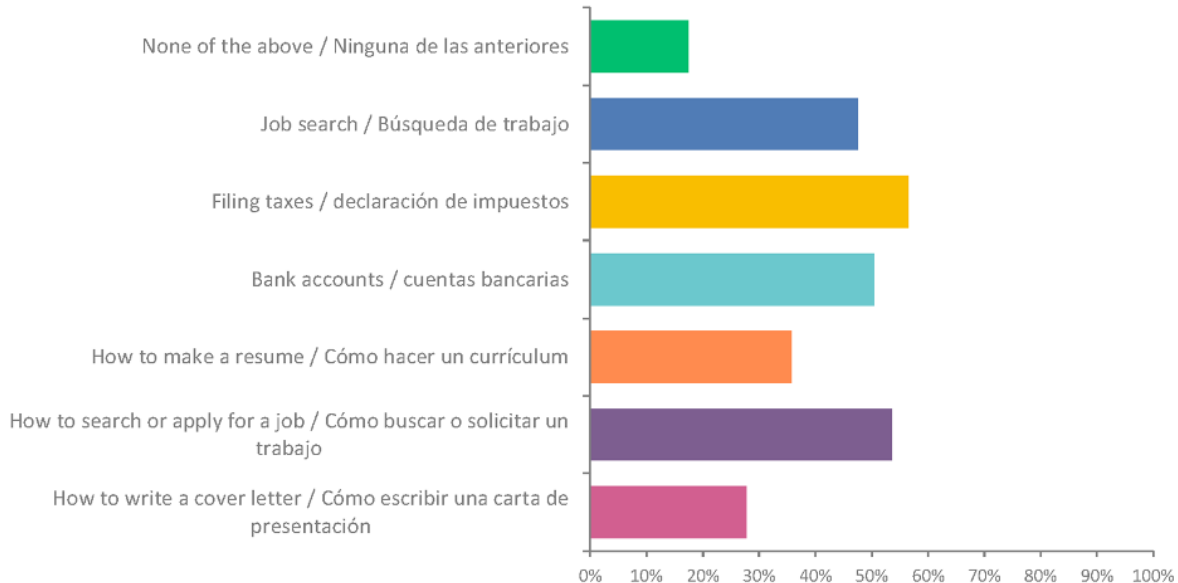
The most important impact of interpretation for parents while on digital platforms was **19% of the teens missed school to interpret and 7.6% missed work.** More were able to arrange times for the interpretation so that it did not conflict with school (30%) and 12% did so without missing work.

*“If they needed me in the moment I was in class, I’d leave for a moment until they are done, then go back to my class and that would take a while.”*

## Desired Digital Needs

What do you feel you need that is not provided in school regarding digital access or use? (Check all that apply.)  
¿Qué siente que necesita que no se proporciona en la escuela con respecto al acceso o uso digital? (Marque todo lo que corresponda)  
Youth Ages 12-17 Only

Answered: 911 Skipped: 12



The comments carried the “real life” theme further, sometimes leaving the digital space completely. They ranged from “all the adulthood challenges” to “how to balance out bills” to “what we need to help students learn about DMV and permit stuff.” One wanted to know how to publish a book online as a hard copy. Another wanted to learn about credit scores. Another wanted to learn how to “do our own signature.” One lamented missing driving lessons because of the pandemic. Another wanted to know how to pay taxes and how to save money to become a U.S. Citizen. One suggested “investing” while another suggested learning “how money works”. As one said, **“All of the above.”**

*“Some of these things we do get but it’s only for certain student[s]. For example I am in Doctors Academy so we get access to Colleges and learn about different jobs and such but I know not everyone else can get that type of knowledge at my school.”*

## Summary

When there was inadequate digital infrastructure and internet speed with working parents and younger siblings in the household, teen students had increased attention diverted from learning. Adding those households that also required interpretation for parents on digital platforms, attention was further sidetracked. Those students living in areas with lower median incomes pre-pandemic, and/or where digital infrastructure is already lacking are even more likely to have school learning challenges. Compounded diversion and environmental factors result in compounded learning challenges and losses. Students know they are not prepared to participate in modern society's digital world once they leave high school. They are requesting more information to help them better understand the state of digital access and inequity throughout the county and to help them develop practical digital skills to better navigate society and adulthood.



## Acknowledgments

All Children Thrive

Cradle to Career Fresno County

Fresno County Digital Literacy Coalition

Fresno County Superintendent of Schools

Fresno County Superintendent of Schools Health Youth Corps

The Children's Movement of Fresno County

Kids Impact Initiative

### Students at the following schools:

Buchanan High School

Cambridge High School

Cantua Creek Elementary

Caruthers High School

Central High School

DeWolf High School

Edison High School

Fowler High School

Hoover High School

Kerman High School

McLane High School

Patino High School of

Entrepreneurship

Riverdale High School

Roosevelt High School

Sanger High School

Sanger West High School

Sunnyside High School

Washington Union High School

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For more information: [connectfresno.org](http://connectfresno.org)



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