California School Districts and the Emergency Connectivity Fund

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PPIC PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE OF CALIFORNIA

California's educational digital divide may be at a turning point

- Historic digital barriers persist: infrastructure, affordability, digital literacy
- Federal pandemic Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) targeted to help close the gap for underserved populations
- How well did it work?

What is the digital divide and why does it matter now?

- Inequities in access to online learning during pandemic
  - Race/ethnicity, income, geography
- Continued reliance on online tools today
  - Instructional tools
  - Homework platforms
  - Parent communication
- PPIC examining local, state, and federal efforts to close the gap

Emergency Connectivity Fund

- Eligible applicants:
  - School districts
  - Individual schools
  - Library consortia
  - Individual libraries
- Eligible purchases:
  - Internet connectivity service
  - Equipment for internet connectivity
  - Connected devices

What did our research examine?

1. What kinds of districts applied to the ECF?
2. How much money did they procure?
3. What did districts do with the funds?
4. How well were they able to meet their students' needs?

What did we learn about district participation?

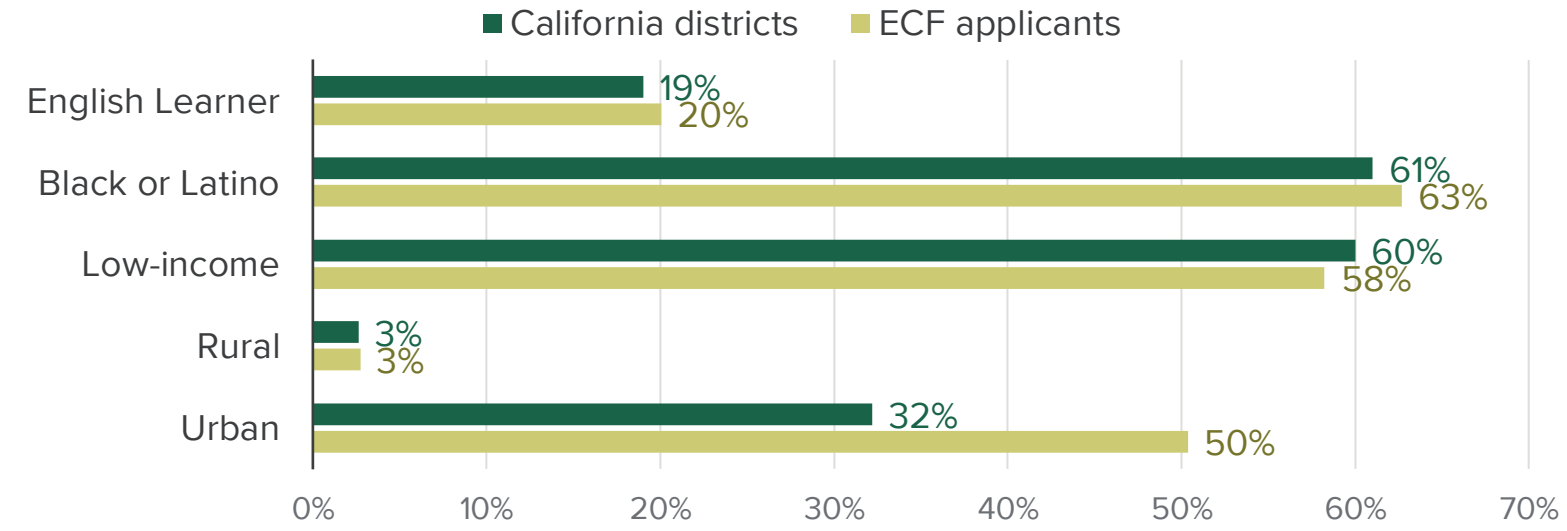
- 3,357 unique applications from California
  - 2,206 unique district applications
  - 576 unique applicant districts
  - Districts secured $895 million
- CDE match for demographic data
  - 465 fully identifiable districts in CA

What populations do we focus on?

- English Learners (>25%)
- Black or Latino Students (>75%)
- Low-income Students (>75%)

How did applicant districts reflect student populations?

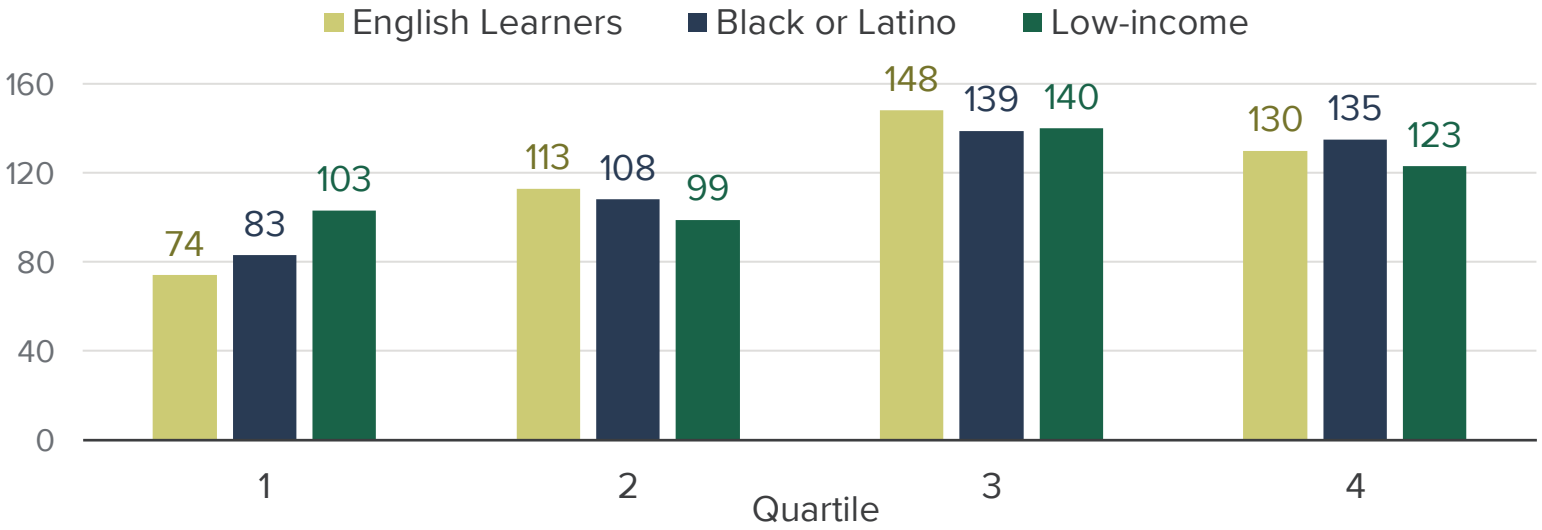
ECF applicant districts generally represent California's student population



Source: Authors' calculations using ECF data, 2021–22; CDE data, 2021–22.

How did underserved districts respond?

Historically underserved districts represented the majority of ECF applicants



Source: Authors' calculations using ECF data, 2021–22; CDE data, 2021–22.

Which district types got the money?

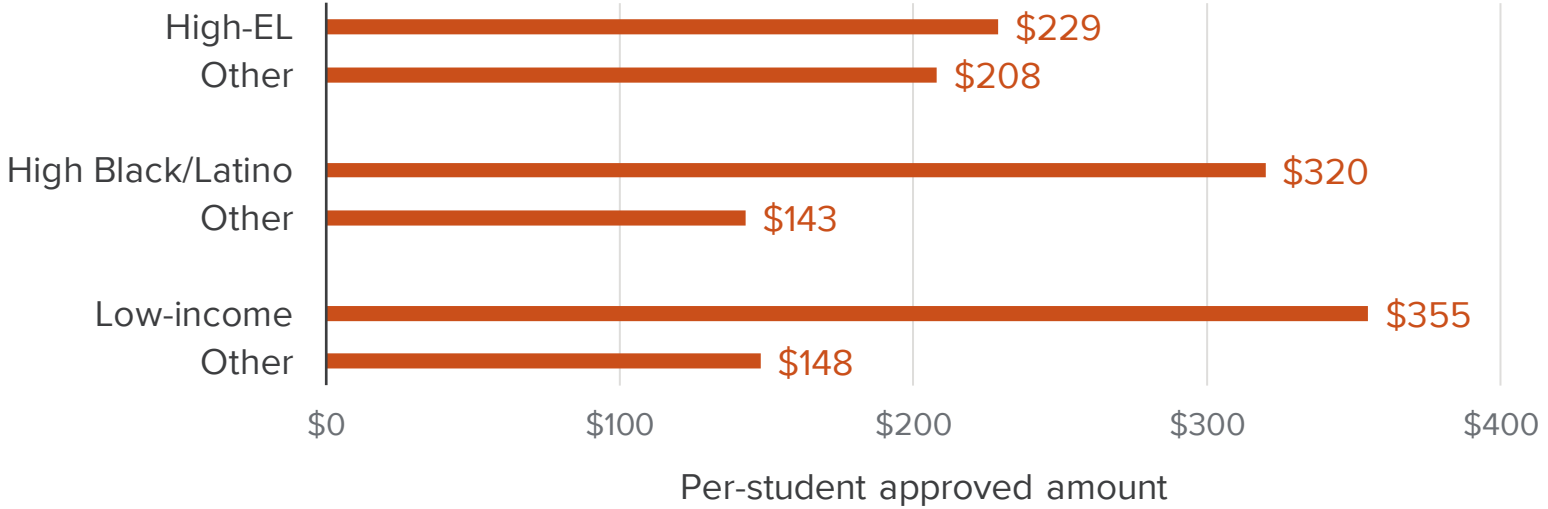
Historically underserved districts secured a majority of the ECF money for California

Type of district	High EL	High Black/Latino	Low-income	Total
Applications submitted	565	618	475	1,810
Total amount approved	$209,896,112	$511,204,416	$447,046,560	$858,828,592

Source: Authors' calculations using ECF data, 2021-22; CDE data, 2021-22.

Which districts got the most per student?

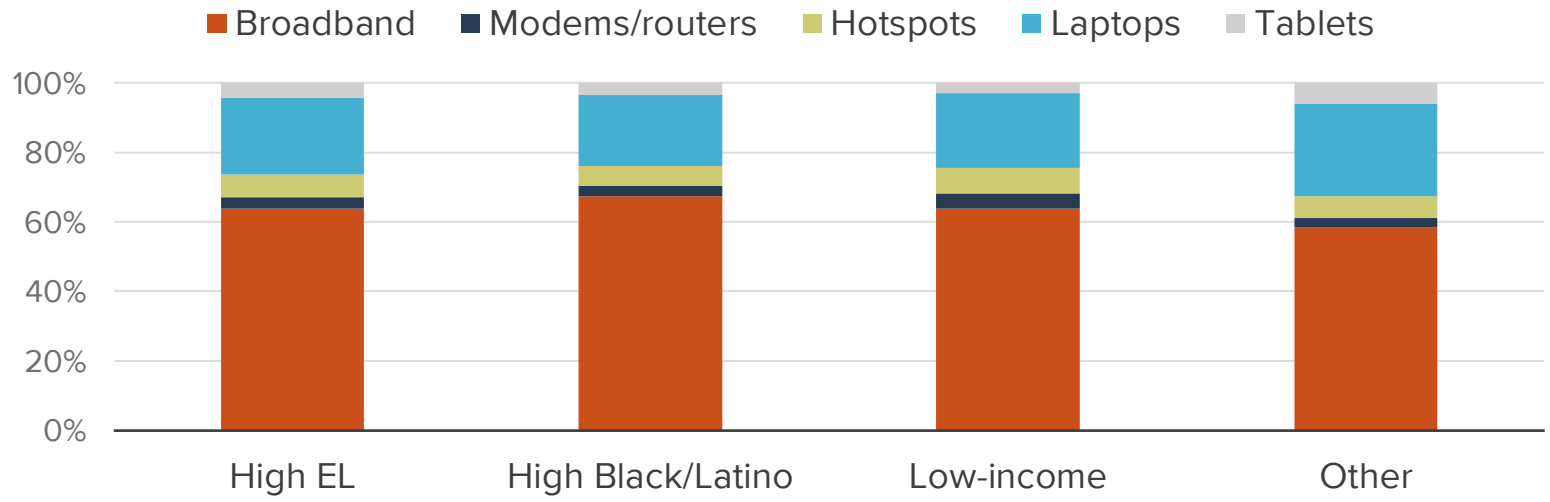
Historically underserved districts were awarded higher levels of per-student funding



Source: Authors' calculations using ECF data, 2021-22; CDE data, 2021-22.

What did districts do with the funds?

Connectivity purchases dominated ECF applications from districts of all kinds



Source: Authors' calculations using ECF data, 2021–22; CDE data, 2021–22.

How well did they meet students' needs?

ECF funding unlikely to meet all of students' needs for both connectivity and devices

Number of students	High EL	High Black/Latino	Low-income	Other
In need (start of pandemic)	22,609	20,943	16,861	43,364
Will have access (with ECF funding)	16,710	15,396	12,521	30,457
Will still lack access (after ECF)	2,089	3,189	2,738	4,224

Source: Authors' calculations using ECF data, 2021–22; CDE data, 2021–22.

What was ECF's impact on historically underserved student populations?

- Encouraging take-up among districts
- Secured high levels of per-student funding
- Focused on connectivity more than devices
- There is work left to do

What resources remain?

Several federal and state funding programs still available for improving access

- NTIA Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD)
- FCC Rural Digital Opportunity Fund
- NTIA Digital Equity Programs
- NTIA Tribal Broadband Connectivity
- USDA ReConnect; Rural Development Broadband
- California Senate Bill 156

Notes on the use of these slides

These slides were created to accompany a presentation. They do not include full documentation of sources, data samples, methods, and interpretations. To avoid misinterpretations, please contact:

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Thank you for your interest in this work.