Achieving Digital Equity for California's Students

October 28, 2021

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PPIC PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE OF CALIFORNIA

Digital access is critical to student learning

- Access to broadband has never been more important
  - In spring 2020, nearly all California schools switched to distance learning, and most students had remote instruction in 2020–21
  - Even with in-person instruction, digital access at home is vital
- Equity gaps persist
  - More than 40% of low-income students not fully connected
  - About 30% of Black and Latino students not able to participate in distance learning

Research questions

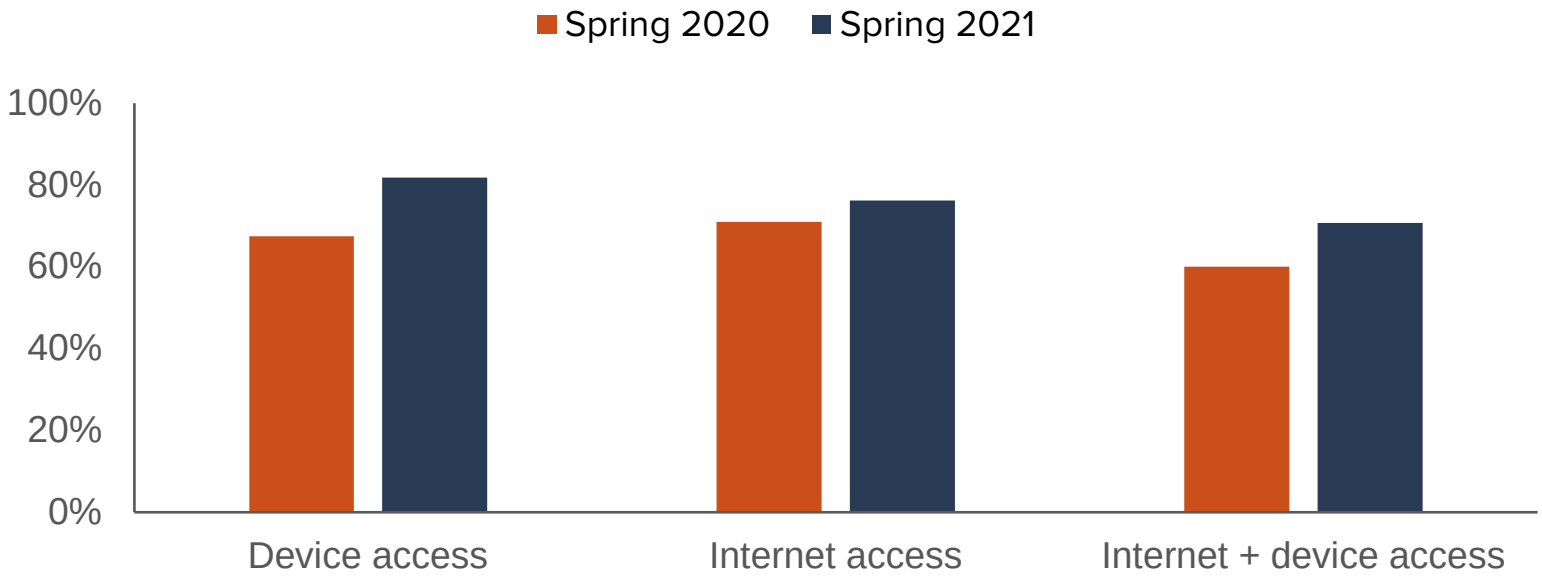
- How have digital equity gaps changed from 2020 to 2021?
  - In which areas has the state made the most progress?
  - Which areas need more improvement?
- What tools are available to federal, state, and local policymakers to close the remaining gaps?
- Are there local programs that model long-term solutions to address digital equity gaps?

Data from the Census Household Pulse Survey

- Sample includes 35,847 unique California households with children enrolled in school, from April 2020 to May 2021
  - Was internet available for educational purposes?
  - Was a device available for educational purposes?
- Equity factors:
  - Race/ethnicity (Asian, Black, Latino, white)
  - Household income (low income: < $50k; high income: > $100k)
  - Educational levels (no BA; BA or higher)

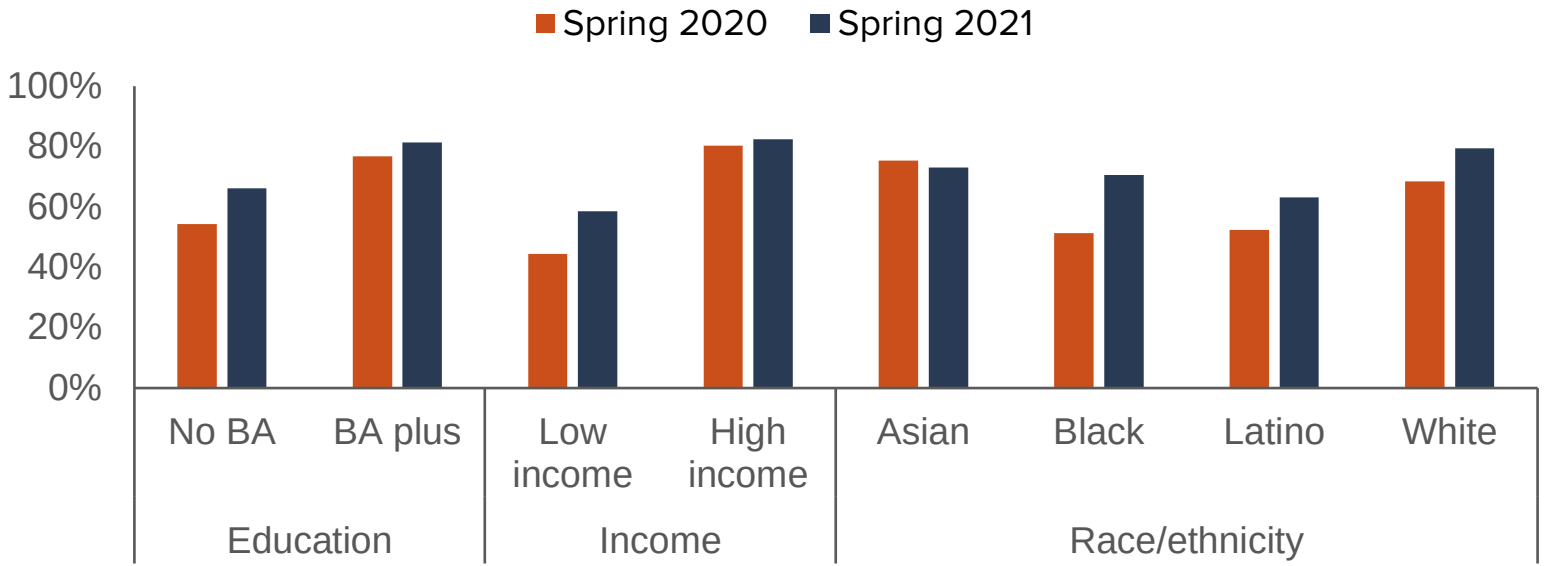
Reliable internet access lags behind device access

% households with schoolchildren



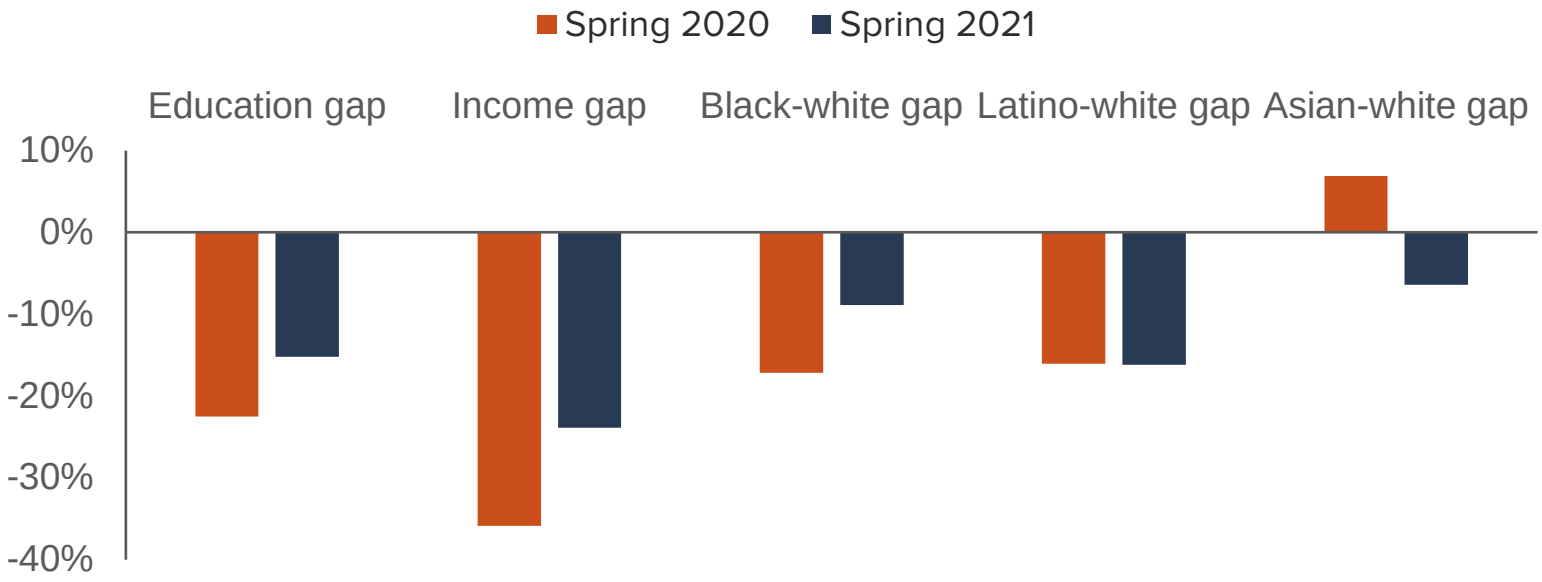
Full digital access rose the most for lowest-access groups

% student households with reliable internet and device access



Major equity gaps persist

Difference in % student households with reliable internet and device access



Federal and state initiatives help close the gap

- Policies to expand infrastructure
  - Rural Digital Opportunity Fund, $20 billion
  - Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund, $10 billion
  - Assembly Bill 156, $6 billion
- Policies to increase affordability
  - Emergency Broadband Benefit, $3.2 billion
  - Emergency Connectivity Fund, $7.2 billion

Local innovations model long-term solutions

- Imperial County Office of Education
  - BorderLink
- Fresno Unified School District
  - Private LTE Network
- Lindsay Unified School District
  - Community Wi-fi Network
- Ventura County Office of Education
  - VCEDNET

Policy recommendations

- Improve efforts to produce granular, accurate, and reliable broadband mapping
- Provide annual reports on student access to the internet
- Assess the need for continued subsidies after the federal emergency program expires
- Coordinate efforts among federal, state, and local stakeholders

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.

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