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TO: Nebraska School Leaders (Superintendents and Tech Coordinators)
DATE: September 9, 2020
RE: Digital Equity and Home Internet Access

The purpose of this memo is to inform Nebraska schools of efforts underway to support the collection of high quality data sets about home Internet access and to urge schools to move forward with collecting this data as part of the return to school and Digital Equity Outreach Month.

This information collected will enable education leaders to:

● 	Understand the impact that home digital access has on learning outcomes
● 	Target available resources to students in need of access
● 	Determine the most effective connectivity solutions
● 	Assess options for state and federal funding to close the digital (Homework) gap
● 	Meet emerging Federal CARES Act reporting requirements

Background

Schools across the nation are attempting to understand the true scope and nature of the home access gap and data collection is a critical first step in addressing this challenge. School districts in Nebraska need to collect data that moves from understanding the estimated percentage of students without adequate access to the Internet to understanding which students do not have access and what the service options are for these students. To this end, many schools have been working to gather information on student home Internet access already as part of the registration and enrollment processes for the 2020-21 school year.

The question of student home Internet access has become critical for schools to plan strategies for continuous learning. Schools have varying levels of confidence in their understanding of the true levels of access to the Internet their students have. This is partially due to the fact that this information is often collected via home surveys which may be anonymous or response rates are so low that they are not representative of the school or district population. Additionally, because of the inherently technical nature of questions surrounding Internet access, the answers families provide may not be entirely accurate.

Data Elements and SIS Updates

The NDE has communicated a list of the new Digital Equity data elements to be collected through ADVISER and has worked with the Student Information Systems (SIS) vendors to include the data elements that support collecting and reporting the data as well. The data elements to report are provided at the bottom of this message and the certification status of SIS vendors is available at https://www.education.ne.gov/dataservices/2020-2021-adviser-vendor-certification/

Digital Equity Outreach Month

As a means to support the timely collection and reporting of the data, as well as celebrate successes already achieved, **Digital Equity Outreach Month is set for September.** The NDE is encouraging schools to take action by directly connecting with families, to understand and support their home digital access needs.

To support action this month, NDE will be co-hosting a webinar on **September 17, 2020 at 10:00 a.m. CDT** to review the data elements and resources available. The webinar with EducationSuperHighway (ESH), our nonprofit partner whose mission is to increase broadband access for K-12 students, will also share tools and resources to support school districts with addressing connectivity challenges, including a *Home Access Needs Assessment Playbook* created by ESH.

Register Now

As part of Digital Equity Outreach Month, NDE will be communicating additional opportunities for schools to share their ideas and progress around digital equity data collection. We encourage you to connect your school to this effort by registering for the kick-off event.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a renewed urgency for closing the digital divide in America's education system. With schools having to quickly pivot to online learning, it is more important than ever to ensure access to an Internet connection and a dedicated learning device for students at home. NDE remains committed to advocating for these resources on your behalf so we can close this equity gap.

Digital Equity Data Elements

Note: See the original NDE Bulletin item on August 12, 2020 for a list of these elements, also available on the ADVISER Resources website.

Indicator Name	Question	Response Options
Internet Access In Residence	*Can the student access the internet on their primary learning device at home?*	• **Yes** • **No - Not Available** • **No - Not Affordable** • **No - Other**
Internet Access Type In Residence	*What is the primary type of internet service used at the residence?*	• **Residential Broadband** (e.g., DSL, Cable, Fiber) • **Cellular Network** • **School Provided HotSpot** • **Satellite** • **Dial-up** • **Other** • **None**
Internet Performance	*Can the student stream a video on their primary learning device without interruption?*	• **Yes - No issues** • **Yes - But not consistent** • **No**
Digital Device	*What device does the student most often use to complete school work at home?*	• **Desktop/Laptop** • **Tablet** • **Chromebook** • **Smart Phone** • **None** • **Other**
Device Access	*Is the primary learning device a personal device or school-provided? Is the primary learning device shared with anyone else in the household?*	• **Personal - Dedicated** (one person per machine) • **Personal - Shared** (sharing among others in household) • **School Provided - Dedicated** • **School Provided - Shared** • **None**