



## Digital and Technology Equity and Access Critical for Student Success

**NYS PTA appreciates the Executive Budget for low cost highspeed broadband, and also fully supports S.3184 (Mayer)/A.5180 (Benedetto).**

Meaningful access to high-quality, free or low-cost broadband is critical for all students. What we know:

- 63% of NYS schools planned to start the school year with hybrid instruction;
- Only 20% of NYS schools planned to provide full in-person instruction;
- 17% of NYS schools indicated they will be providing remote only teaching and learning.

Lack of digital equity is real. According to recent NYS Education Department survey data, more than 215,000 NYS students do not have access to a computer, Chromebook or tablet to use for instruction.

The same survey indicated that 165,000 NYS students lack internet access to fully participate in home/remote instruction and learning.

During the pandemic, we saw schools across the state deploy buses capable of WIFI connections to areas without broadband. Hundreds of thousands of students and families continue to have no reliable access to broadband. Worst yet, libraries were also closed - and still may be closed – prohibiting this avenue of free internet and community resources for families.

Rural areas are disproportionately impacted, and many of our highest-need students – whether they be in urban, suburban or rural communities - often lack the family resources to purchase expensive internet services, assuming they have access.

It is likely some form of remote learning will continue for the foreseeable future. We must do better in supporting our students and families to meet the technology demands of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning.

The Executive Budget proposal requires any broadband provider to offer high speed broadband services to low-income consumers at a rate of no more than \$15 a month, including any taxes or fees. We appreciate this proposal.

However, we are still concerned with the actual lack of broadband access in many communities, and while low cost, some families still may not be able to afford \$15 a month for access.

We also fully support S.3184 (Mayer)/A.5180 (Benedetto). This legislation would establish the E-Learn Fund, to provide free internet to all school children aged 5 to 21 during the pandemic, supported by an assessment on broadband providers.

Our students have sadly always faced digital and technology inequities, which have been greatly exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**NYS PTA urges comprehensive action to see that ALL children and families have access to free high-quality broadband, and that digital inequities are eliminated.**

For more information, please contact Kyle McCauley Belokopitsky, Esq., NYS PTA Executive Director at [execdirector@nyspta.org](mailto:execdirector@nyspta.org), 518-452-8808