

# Students in lower income schools twice as likely to be learning remotely

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New York school districts with a large share of low-income students are nearly twice as likely than wealthier districts to be teaching remotely this fall, a new report found.

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a sea change in learning methods for New York schools.

Many of the largest districts in the state – most of which educate students in low-income neighborhoods – started the year in a completely remote learning environment.

The situation deepened already existing inequities between school districts and unveiled a lack of technological resources among families living in lower income areas, according to the report released Tuesday by the nonprofit The Education Trust – New York.

“Unless New York state gets remote learning right, the opportunity gaps in our education system will continue to widen, with lifelong consequences for the children and communities who have already suffered the consequences of persistent inequities,” the report said.

Students enrolled in districts with the greatest share of students in low-income households are 1.7 times more likely to be learning remotely than students with the smallest share of students from low income households, according to the group’s analysis of data from the state

Many of the inequities predated COVID-19, but leaving them unaddressed now could lead to more students falling behind later, The Education Trust argued.

Department of Health.



**In her bedroom at home, Lailah Adams, 11, a sixth grader at the Albert Leonard Middle School in New Rochelle, does some math homework from Lisbet Zepeda’s class.**

MARK VERGARI/ THE JOURNAL NEWS

In New York City, about half of all students are learning remotely, according to the state data.

The situation is complicated by ongoing internet connectivity issues.

Schools, because of the pandemic, have the option to either hold in-person classes, hold them remotely or have a hybrid of both. If COVID cases surge, districts are required to switch to online only.

“The reopening guidelines issued by state education leaders represented a positive step on the path to reopening New York’s schools stronger and more equitably this fall,” said Dia Bryant, the group’s deputy director.

“Now it is imperative that all students have access to the resources and support they need to fully participate in learning, whether remote, in-person, or a blend of the two.”

**The technology divide in schools**

The group found that students in the schools with the greatest share of students of color are 1.4 times more likely to be learning remotely than students in schools with the smallest share of students of color.

A separate report recently by Future Ready Schools, a network of nonprofits and research groups, found 38% of all New York households earning \$25,000 or less have no high-speed home internet connection, according to its analysis of 2018 Census data.

Students living in shelters often can’t access the internet at all, and some don’t have devices to log into their remote classrooms.

Families in both rural and urban areas may rely on cell phone plans or low-quality home internet connections to submit schoolwork from home, which can be expensive and time-consuming, experts said.

A number of school districts, including Rochester, Syracuse and New York City, lent Chromebooks or iPads to students for the year, and some parents in those districts have found time in their schedules to guide their children through remote learning from day to day.

Even if students in affluent areas are learning remotely, their parents can often afford to maintain high-quality internet access, hire tutors and provide other educational resources to enrich their school days, school groups said.

In some neighborhoods, as as many as 40% of schoolchildren can’t afford the level of high speed broadband needed for remote learning, said Bob Master, political director for the Communication Workers of America Northeast, during a recent webinar on broadband access in New York.

The Education Trust data showed that 50% of students are learning in-person, whether full time or on a hybrid schedule, and the other half are remote only.

“The disproportionate reliance on remote learning for students who were underserved even before the pandemic raises significant educational equity questions for state policymakers,” the group said.

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**Jacob Sepulveda, a fifth grader, works in the dining room of his home as remote learning continues in Rochester.** SHAWN DOWD/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

**Jane O’Neill, of Falls, helps her fifth-grader James learn from a remote setting at the family’s business in Middletown.** NANCY ROKOS

In the “Big 4” districts – Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Yonkers – 82% of all students are remote, with only Yonkers reporting significant hybrid learning this fall so far.