



September 1, 2021

Honorable Charles Schumer
U.S. Senate Majority Leader
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the U.S. House
1236 Longworth H.O.B
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable Maria Cantwell
Chairwoman, Committee on
Commerce, Science, and Transportation
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Honorable Frank Pallone
Chairman, Committee on
Energy and Commerce
2107 Rayburn Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, Chair Cantwell and Chair Pallone,

On behalf of [Common Sense](#) and k-12 students and teachers across the country, we are writing to thank you for your significant efforts to close the digital divide, and the Homework Gap in particular, and to strongly urge you to continue your good work in this area by including funding to extend the Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) in the budget reconciliation package that you are preparing right now.

As you well know, the Emergency Connectivity Fund, approved thanks to your leadership as part of the American Rescue Plan in March, addressed - for one year - the persistent k-12 digital divide that has prevented millions of students and hundreds of thousands of teachers from staying properly connected to their education and their classrooms, a concern that existed before the pandemic but which was greatly exacerbated by it. The digital divide has prevented students, and teachers, from utilizing the digital curriculum and education technology needed for resilient, equitable access to education. **But even as kids return to their school buildings this year, the need for robust connectivity at home for education will remain critical.** Access to educational technology, including high-speed internet and grade-appropriate devices at home, is inextricably linked to educational achievement opportunities for every child, in every state. Digital curriculum will be an important tool to support students at home as they labor to progress past this unprecedented amount of learning loss. **In fact, many school districts across the country are preparing for the [permanent inclusion of digital curriculum and educational technology](#) from here on.**

While we applaud your recent progress to commit significant funding for [broadband and digital equity](#) in the pending bi-partisan infrastructure package, **we are concerned that if Congress does not extend the Emergency Connectivity Fund, in the interim, students and teachers will lose the robust and uninterrupted access to home broadband service and devices capable of meeting their digital curriculum needs that the ECF is intended to afford them.** We strongly support using the reconciliation package to continue this program until it is clear that we have closed the digital divide in America once and for all.

The Homework Gap, the gap between students who have adequate connectivity and devices at home and those who do not, is now well understood, based on [Common Sense's extensive research](#) and the research of many other reputable organizations. Thanks to funding from the CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan's ECF, schools are now well positioned to address the gap - to deploy comprehensive programs to assess and address the digital curriculum needs of their students and teachers. **In less than 7 weeks, the FCC received prospective requests from schools and libraries for \$5.137 billion of the total \$7.17 billion allocated for the ECF program. [Requests came from every state and territory](#) and the funds are expected to support 9.1 million devices and 5.4 million home broadband connections, a significant number of homes but still leaving millions of students and many teachers caught in the persistent digital divide.**

Our [research](#) earlier this year found that to adequately support equitable access to education and digital curriculum there needs to be continuing support for students and teachers in the digital divide, otherwise **we risk stalling or reversing the progress made to date in closing the digital divide.** Senators Edward Markey and Chris Van Hollen, Rep. Grace Meng, and 16 additional senators and 39 House members, with the [support of dozens of education groups](#), introduced the Securing Universal Communications Connectivity to Ensure Students Succeed (SUCCESS) Act **to continue funding for the ECF to ensure that students' access to education remains resilient in the face of disruptions to in-person learning, allowing schools to nimbly shift to distance learning if needed due to natural disaster, as related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, or any other crisis.**

For more than 15 years, Common Sense has been a leading advocate for kids and families and a trusted independent resource for parents, teachers, and policymakers. We have long fought for equitable access to learning technology and we appreciate your attention to this issue and for your support for including Homework Gap resources in this budget reconciliation package.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jim Steyer
CEO & Founder
Common Sense

/s/ Danny Weiss
Chief Advocacy Officer
Common Sense

/s/ Amina Fazlullah
Director, Equity Policy
Common Sense

Cc: Members of the Senate Commerce Committee
Member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee