

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 28, 2018

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos:

We write today to express our appreciation for the Department's completion of the Every Student Succeeds Act-mandated study on the homework gap, entitled Student Access to Digital Learning Resources Outside the Classroom. The homework gap is one of the most pressing education and workforce issues we face today, and is particularly prevalent in rural and lower-income areas where students are already at a greater risk of being left behind in today's digital world.

The report showed plainly that while the nation as a whole has made important strides in connecting students in their homes, more work remains to be done to close the digital divide. In particular, we note that the study revealed that, as of 2015, 19% of children overall lacked home Internet access, with black, Hispanic and American Indian/Alaska Native children lagging behind their white peers significantly. The report also found that students residing in remote and rural areas faced significant homework gap obstacles, citing studies that found that 35% of student homes in those areas lacked fixed broadband. While these and other numbers that the report provides may have improved in the past few years, it is highly likely that significant home connectivity gaps and disparities remain.

Based on our review of this report, we believe that states and localities could benefit significantly from the Department performing additional, actionable research that will assist them in pinpointing specific geographic or socio-economic homework gap pockets. This would provide state and local entities with the granular knowledge and data they need to move forward with closing these gaps and ameliorating these disparities. Specifically, we urge that the Department conduct new research that seeks up-to-date data that:

1. Illustrates how the barriers and challenges that students who lack home internet access face impact the instructional practice of educators.

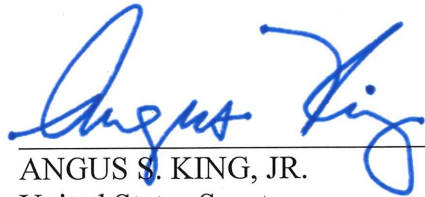
2. Updates the current report's reasoning for school-aged children having no or limited access to fixed or mobile wireless service. While the report addressed some causes, such as affordability and availability, policymakers require continuous data on those reasons and how they can be addressed.
3. Determines for school-age children with limited access what broadband speeds they are utilizing and assesses whether those speeds are sufficient to satisfy online and digital education needs.
4. Determines whether, and if so where, states, counties, cities or school districts offer programs to connect to broadband unserved and underserved students, including wi-fi on school buses and hotspot lending programs. Identifying the types of programs used, the number of students served, and the costs incurred to operate such programs would also be useful information.

We appreciate your efforts in solving once and for all the homework gap and look forward to working with you on this most important matter. We hope that the forthcoming Fast Response Survey System 109 survey will answer some of these remaining questions and that the Department will continue to undertake further research until it has fully investigated the topics outlined in section 9210 of the Every Student Succeeds Act.

Sincerely,



PETER WELCH
Member of Congress



ANGUS S. KING, JR.
United States Senator



DAVID B. MCKINLEY, P.E.
Member of Congress



SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO
United States Senator