

**Access and Affordability Analysis Paper**

Allison R. Deming

School of Information Studies/Syracuse University

IST 618: Information Policy

Professor Paul Gandel

November 7, 2022

## **Access and Affordability Analysis Paper**

There are many ways we approach information access and rights to that access in the United States of America. There may be endless approaches to how that information is accessed and what is permitted when balanced with reasonable privacy of individuals. This openness of the courts might assure fairness and justice, but it is a good opening note in a song of the immense controversy of information access and right.

In the United States, all residents have a right to education from Kindergarten to the end of High School. Once college starts, though, this is over, and the stress of this phase of life is no longer just educational. When I run into a paywall when researching, it hurts my heart. It leads one to ask if all information should be free to access, benefitting students and researchers who may be developing the next significant step in cancer treatment. What is school but the access and ability to learn information? Many brilliant and talented people lack education due to the cost. We support presecondary education for all, so why not community college or state university? If students are willing and prepared, all college and post-graduate education and certifications should be accessible through free or affordable education.

This high barrier to entry through cost has real-world consequences. Xu, Solanski & Fink (2021) point out that vast educational inequalities have been known for many years. As the level of education increases, so do the gaps. While these start as early as Pre-Kindergarten, they become more pronounced as the level of school increases. These are particularly problematic regarding Advanced Placement, Dual Enrollment, and College preparatory programs. My high school was in a poor school district with few resources and a loosely defined college preparation program (which was able to be completed in three years rather than four by anyone). This lack of

preparation led to no college credit as a freshman when many of my contemporaries matriculated as Juniors by the time they started at BYU (where I went to undergraduate education). While I was far from prepared, I was lucky enough to find the resources to help me become a great student, but it took time. It took several semesters, and those semesters rolled into two years of poor grades. While I did not fail many courses then, I could keep my GPA above 2.00 and eventually catch up with everyone else. This situation would be even more complex if I were a minority with few resources or someone who did not understand how to access them (Xu, Solanki & Fink, 2018; Lindstrom, Lind, Beno, Gee & Hirano, 2022).

Another place where there is a lack of equality in terms of resources is that of reliable internet. Some people may say that reliable access to the internet is currently the great equalizer in learning. While there are no free websites for everything you want to learn, there are likely websites for the things you want to know, even if they are behind a paywall. With the coronavirus leading the majority of younger people in the United States to depend on good internet connectivity to receive their education, it became evident that more rural areas were less likely to have reliable internet access. Auxier & Anderson (2020) found that 58% of 8th Grade Students in the United States have to use the internet to turn in their homework almost daily, even post-coronavirus. Roughly 35% of households with school-aged children make less than \$30,000 a year, making access the broadband or reliable internet hard for many, leading students to rely on doing homework on their cell phones (Auxier & Anderson, 2020). This need for affordable and reliable internet for achieving a fundamental educational right in the United States if all students require school.

I learned late that there is a bit of a debate as to whether broadband or high-speed internet should be considered a utility and regulated in the same ways as water, sewer, and electricity.

With an increase in the number of people required to work from home at least part-time and what is required of students still in their required education years, I believe this is a good idea. The Pew Insititute went on to find more concerning discrepancies than just those of students with or without internet for home, but also racial differences linked to income (Horowitz, 2020). Students who are minorities are more likely to have trouble turning in their homework than their white counterparts and are more likely to come from households making less than \$30,000 a year (Auxier & Anderson, 2020; Horowitz, 2020).

COVID was a time in which havoc rained down on our children. Not only was there a virus they feared, with many experiencing family deaths, but the cultural foundation of their lives, school, went from being social and in person to distant and online overnight. This lead to increased depression and anxiety, along with the lack of ability to get help through normal channels. The only lifeline at all to the outside world was the internet. Problems quickly arose, however. In my home, I was teaching from home, and my husband was working from home, and per the usual custody arrangement, we had three children trying to do homework on the same fiber optic connection. Even being lucky enough to be able to afford and live in a place with access to fiber optic internet, the connection constantly was unstable and going out with an amount of usage to which it was not adept. This scene repeated in each similar home in my neighborhood, yet we were the lucky ones regarding the internet. We all had access and the opportunity to purchase the best available internet and the ability to afford it (\$100 a month)

This option is unavailable in other locations, especially when it involves a more diverse population (Chen, Byrne & Velez, 2022; Domina et al., 2021).

More things led to knowing whether a student would succeed during COVID than how it directly affected them and their families. For example, if they stayed socially engaged with other

families and students, they were more likely to have positive outcomes as students (Domina et al., 2021). This social structure and support help contribute to a positive home environment that is somewhat learning-centric and shows parents who are involved in their children's social life and education, which are also important in predicting positive academic outcomes (Chen, Byrne & Velez, 2022). What determines whether parents are present in their children's academic lives? The ability to monitor and understand the work they need, in addition to time and availability to work with them. This availability was something many children of healthcare workers and those on the front lines lost during COVID.

As schools are entering into in-person instruction in almost all districts, it is essential to determine what we learned from COVID and what gained perspective; Those things were indispensable at the time but were not necessary to continue. The first thing that comes to mind is whether we should consider the internet a school supply, much like textbooks. Everyone knows that students cannot learn without teachers and books, which the state provides. In recent years those things provided by the state have decreased. For example, the school supply list now includes basic toiletries like a four-pack of toilet paper and the same in Kleenex. I believe the internet is as essential as these items the state should provide. As a homeowner, I understand that this would increase taxes, but it would also add to the success of our community. This essential product would benefit everyone long-term, with more students graduating. This high-speed internet accessibility change would lead to higher-paying jobs within the community that contribute to school taxes. Bridging the gap would take a while, but the benefits outweigh the costs.

## References

- Auxier, B., & Anderson, M. (2020). As schools close due to the coronavirus, some US students face a digital 'homework gap.' *Pew Research Center*, 16, 1-8.
- Chen, C. Y.-C., Byrne, E., & Vélez, T. (2022). Impact of the 2020 pandemic of COVID-19 on Families with School-aged Children in the United States: Roles of Income Level and Race. *Journal of Family Issues*, 43(3), 719–740. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X21994153>
- Domina, T., Renzulli, L., Murray, B., Garza, A. N., & Perez, L. (2021). Remote or Removed: Predicting Successful Engagement with Online Learning during COVID-19. *Socius*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023120988200>
- Horowitz J. M. (2020). *Lower-income parents most concerned about their children falling behind amid COVID-19 school closures*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/15/lower-income-parents-most-concerned-about-their-children-falling-behind-amid-covid-19-school-closures/>
- Lindstrom, L., Lind, J., Beno, C., Gee, K. A., & Hirano, K. (2022). Career and College Readiness for Underserved Youth: Educator and Youth Perspectives. *Youth & Society*, 54(2), 221–239. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X20977004>
- Xu, D., Solanki, S., & Fink, J. (2021). College Acceleration for All? Mapping Racial Gaps in Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment Participation. *American Educational Research Journal*, 58(5), 954–992. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831221991138>