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As schools close due to the coronavirus, some U.S. students face a digital ‘homework gap’

BY **BROOKE AUXIER** AND **MONICA ANDERSON**



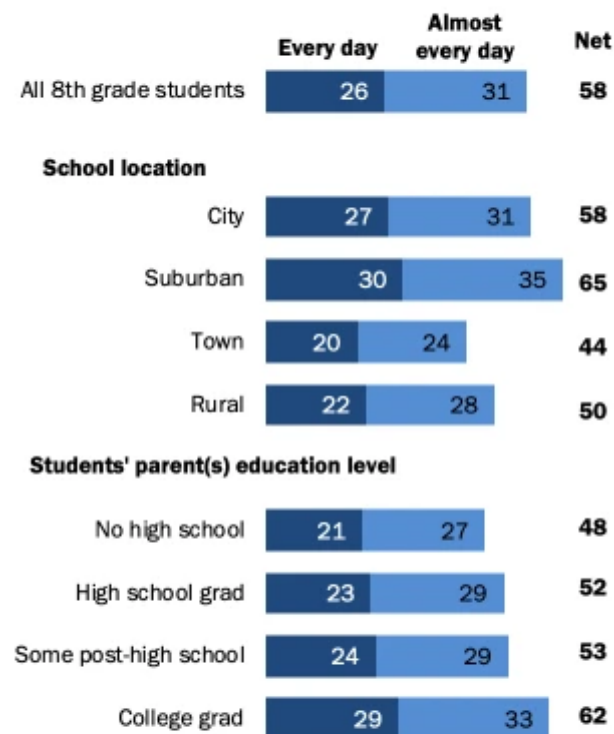
A high school sophomore in Brooklyn, New York, checks into a class from home after her school announced it would be closed due to concerns about the new coronavirus. (Andrew Lichtenstein/Corbis via Getty Images)

As K-12 officials in many states [close schools and shift classes and assignments online](#) due to the spread of the [new coronavirus](#), they confront the reality that some students do not have reliable access to the internet at home – particularly those who are from lower-income households.

Here are key findings about the internet, homework and how the digital divide impacts American youth.

Roughly six-in-ten eighth graders in the U.S. say they use the internet for homework every or almost every day

% of eighth-grade students in the U.S. who say they use the internet at home for homework ...



Note: Parent education level is student-reported. Information about school location and funding status was obtained from a survey of 600 administrators at the schools included in the assessment. Those who gave other answers or did not give an answer not shown. Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2018 Technology and Engineering Literacy assessments.

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1 The majority of eighth-grade students in the United States rely on the internet at home to get their homework done. Roughly six-in-ten students (58%) say they use the internet at their home to do homework every day or almost every day, according to a new Pew Research Center analysis of data from the [2018 National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\)](#). Just 6% of students say they never use the internet at home for this purpose.

There are differences in these patterns by community type and parents' education level. Roughly two-thirds of students attending suburban schools (65%) say they use the internet for homework every day or almost every day, compared with 58% who attend schools in cities, 50% of those who attend in rural areas and 44% of those attending schools in towns. Students whose parents graduated from college are more likely to use the internet for homework at home. Some 62% of these students use the internet at home for homework,

compared with smaller shares of students whose parents have some post-high school education (53%), have only a high school education (52%) or have no high school education (48%).

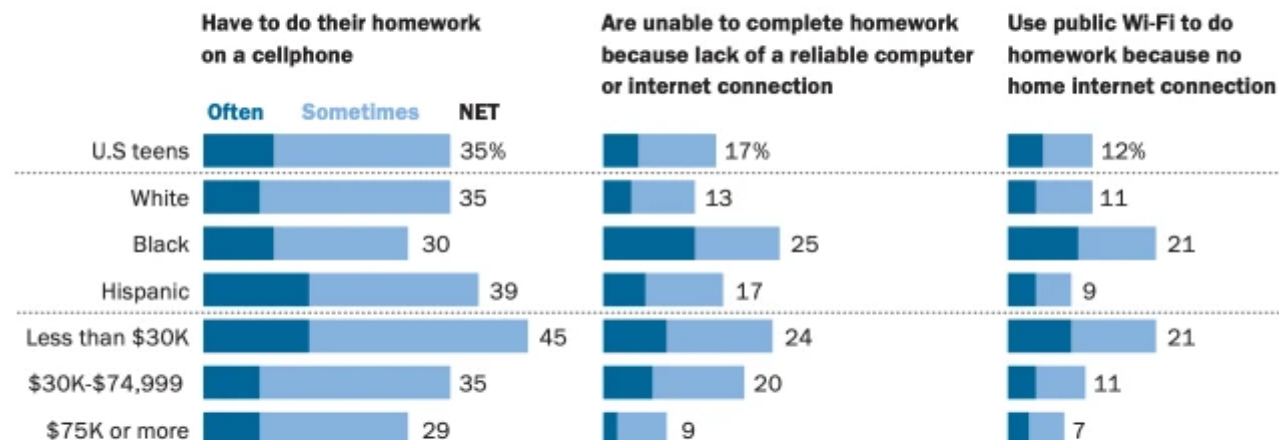
How we did this

2 The “homework gap” – which refers to school-age children lacking the connectivity they need to complete schoolwork at home – is more pronounced for black, Hispanic and lower-income households. Some 15% of U.S. households with school-age children do not have a high-speed internet connection at home, according to a previously published [Pew Research Center analysis](#) of 2015 U.S. Census Bureau data. School-age children in lower-income households are especially likely to lack broadband access. Roughly one-third (35%) of households with children ages 6 to 17 and an annual income below \$30,000 a year do not have a high-speed internet connection at home, compared with just 6% of such households earning \$75,000 or more a year. These broadband gaps are particularly pronounced in black and Hispanic households with school-age children – especially those with low incomes.

3 Some lower-income teens say they lack resources to complete schoolwork at home. In a [2018 Center survey](#), about one-in-five teens ages 13 to 17 (17%) said they are often or sometimes unable to complete homework assignments because they do not have reliable access to a computer or internet connection. Black teens and those living in lower-income households were more likely to say they cannot complete homework assignments for this reason.

Black teens and those from lower-income households are especially likely to be affected by the digital 'homework gap'

% of U.S. teens, by race and ethnicity or annual family income, who say they *often* or *sometimes* ...



Note: Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics; Hispanics are of any race. Those who gave other responses or who did not give an answer not shown.

Source: Survey conducted March 7-April 10, 2018.

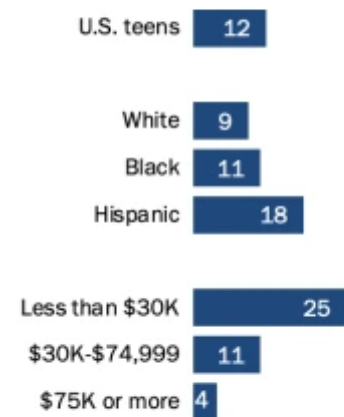
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For example, one-quarter of black teens said they often or sometimes cannot do homework assignments due to lack of reliable access to a computer or internet connectivity, compared with 13% of white teens and 17% of Hispanic teens. Teens with an annual family income below \$30,000 were also more likely to say this than teens with a family income of at least \$75,000 a year (24% vs. 9%).

In the same survey, around one-in-ten teens (12%) said they often or sometimes use public Wi-Fi to do schoolwork because they lack a home internet connection. Again, black and lower-income teens were more likely to do this.

One-in-four lower-income teens don't have access to a home computer

% of U.S. teens who say they *do not* have or have access to a desktop/laptop computer at home



Note: Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics; Hispanics are of any race.
Source: Survey conducted March 7-April 10, 2018.

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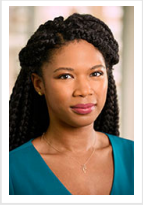
Roughly one-in-five black teens (21%) said they use public Wi-Fi to do schoolwork due to a lack of home internet connection, compared with 11% of white teens and 9% of Hispanic teens. And around a fifth (21%) of teens with an annual family income under \$30,000 reported having to use public Wi-Fi to do homework, compared with 11% of teens in families with a household income of \$30,000-\$74,999 and just 7% of those living in households earning at least \$75,000.

4 A quarter of lower-income teens do not have access to a home computer. One-in-four teens in households with an annual income under \$30,000 lack access to a computer at home, compared with just 4% of those in households earning over \$75,000, according to the 2018 survey. There are also differences by race and ethnicity. Hispanic teens were especially likely to say they do not have access to a home computer: 18% said this, compared with 9% of white teens and 11% of black teens.

Topics [Teens and Technology](#), [Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\)](#), [Internet Activities](#), [Socioeconomic Class](#), [Education](#)

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