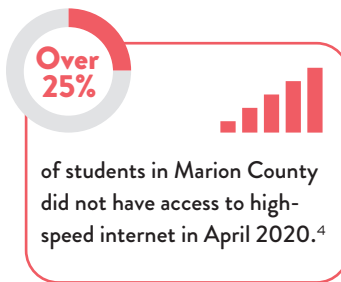
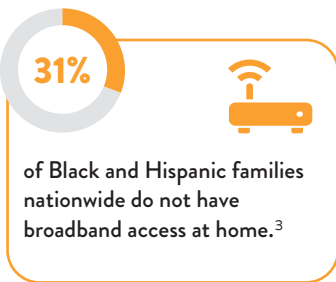
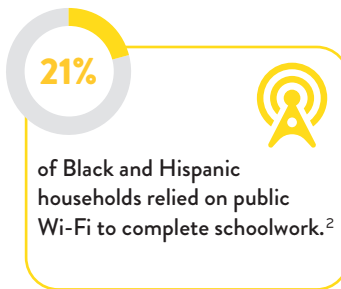
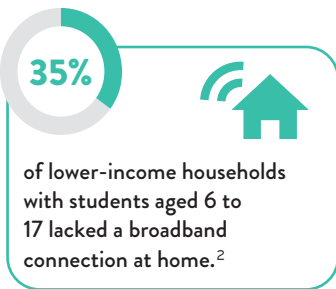


THE NEED FOR HIGH-SPEED INTERNET

School curriculum increasingly requires computer-based learning, which is why internet access is critically important to students in the 21st century. Despite this, **research in 2019 suggested 40 percent of school facilities in the U.S. lacked broadband**, and many students remained disconnected at home.¹



This so-called “**homework gap**” widened further due to COVID-19 – so much so that when Indianapolis schools shifted to remote learning in 2020, many students found themselves struggling to continue their education.

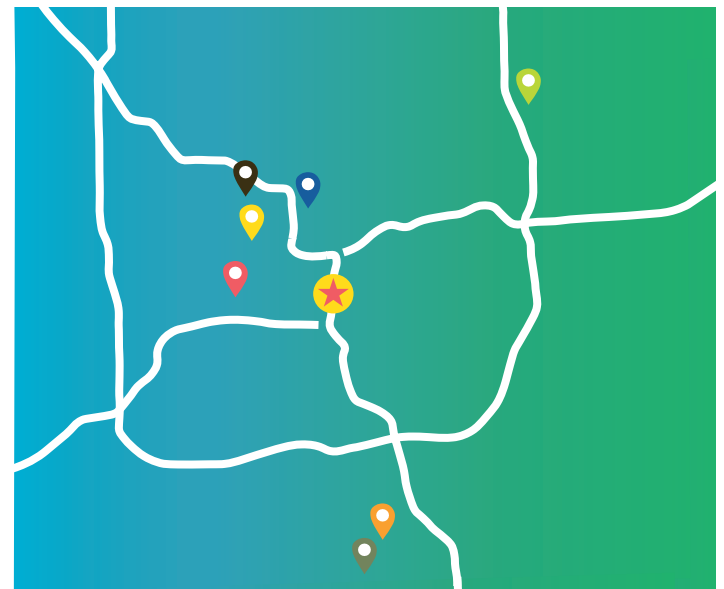
Now, as many schools have returned to in-person instruction and some form of digital instruction remains the new normal, closing the homework gap is still an urgent priority. That is why Marion County leaders are working to ensure every K-12 and post-secondary student in the county, regardless of family income, can access the internet and learn to their full potential.






To that end, they launched the **Marion County Dedicated eLearning Network Pilot**, or **IndyNet**, which enables broadband connectivity for K-12 and higher education eLearning for students from low-income households.

Energy Systems Network (a CICP initiative) and Indiana 5G Zone are implementing the pilot across seven sites in Marion County with network infrastructure and services in students’ homes provided by SBA Communications. The network pilot was established in April 2021 and will sunset in August 2022.

The pilot also will equip partners with the insights necessary to develop a county-wide network solution. The pilot has engaged a **Community Advisory Board** to manage issues such as network governance, financing and engaging the community in the pilot. Those managing the network will assess its impact and effectiveness through surveys and data-tracking and will share those outcomes with updates throughout the project. The Community Advisory Board is actively seeking funding to stand up a countywide network this fall based on the demand for internet access across Marion County. In addition to eLearning, managers of the pilot also are testing the network’s use for telehealth, which is a critical service for low-income residents to access.

PILOT SITES: MARION COUNTY



-  George Washington High School
-  Winchester Village Elementary School
-  Harrison Hill Elementary School
-  Riverside High School
-  Southport Elementary School
-  Vision Academy
-  Ivy Tech Community College’s Indianapolis Campus

FUNDING SOURCES FOR INDYNET:

\$750,000 Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation

\$730,000 City of Indianapolis (CARES Act Funding)

\$330,000 Lilly Endowment Inc.

COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD

Michael Bottorff, Chief Technology Officer, MSD of Lawrence Township

Ashley Cowger, Executive Director of Strategy & Integration, Indianapolis Public Schools

Claire Fiddian-Green, President & CEO, Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation

Tim George, EVP for Innovation & Collaboration, Central Indiana Corporate Partnership

Peter Hanscom, Vice President, Marketing & Digital Engagement, United Way of Central Indiana

Kent Hatcher, Chief Financial Officer, MSD of Perry Township

Ryan Heater, Chief of Staff, Indiana Utilities Regulatory Commission

Sean Hendrix, Managing Director, Indiana 5G Zone and Chief Technology Officer, NineTwelve

Shanika Heyward, Director, Innovation & Technology, Indianapolis Public Library

John Keller, Chief Technology Officer, Indiana Department of Education

Patrick McAlister, Director, Office of Education Innovation, Office of the Mayor, City of Indianapolis & Marion County

Dean McCurdy, Interim Provost, Ivy Tech Community College

Paul Mitchell, President & CEO, Energy Systems Network

Elliott Patrick, Chief Information Officer, City of Indianapolis & Marion County

Ellen Quigley, Vice President of Programs, Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation

Shawn Smith, Superintendent, MSD of Lawrence Township

Andrew Strobe, Chief of Staff, Indianapolis Public Schools

Anne Valentine, Vice President of Government Relations, United Way of Central Indiana

Shannon Williams, Executive Vice President, The Mind Trust

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY IN THE PILOT

The Community Advisory Board quickly recognized the critical need for reaching out to those who stand to benefit from IndyNet, and tasked two community nonprofits, The Mind Trust and United Way of Central Indiana, with leading these community engagement efforts. The groups created collateral and a website with information and a sign-up form. Residents also can sign up via paper forms in case they don't have at-home internet.

The organizations hired a street team of Neighborhood Education Advocates (NEAs) who share information about IndyNet with people who could benefit and sign people up on the spot. They've reached prospective users through schools, libraries, churches, public events, neighborhood canvassing

and phone banking. These outreach efforts launched in December 2021, and they've generated additional sign-ups for IndyNet. They have also helped identify other Marion County families outside the pilot coverage area interested in signing up, demonstrating the need for broader access and expansion across Marion County.

For those who do qualify for the pilot, technicians come to their houses to install the boxes so they can access the network. Families who live within the zones near the school access points can participate in the pilot via their school devices for academic-oriented purposes, even if they do not attend the school that is the access point.

SOURCES

¹ The Pew Charitable Trusts (2019, July 26). *America's Digital Divide*.

² Pew Research Center (2020, March 16). *As schools close due to the coronavirus, some U.S. students face a digital 'homework gap.'*

³ Future Ready Schools (2020, July 20). *Students of Color Caught in the Homework Gap*.

⁴ Indianapolis Mayor's Office of Education Innovation (2020, April). *Preliminary Needs Assessment Results*.