



# CHICAGO CONNECTED



2021 PROGRAM IMPACT REPORT

#### ABOUT KIDS FIRST CHICAGO.

Kids First Chicago's (K1C) mission is to dramatically improve education for Chicago's children by ensuring high-quality public schools are accessible to every kid in every neighborhood.

We believe that those closest to our students - **families, community members, and educators** - are best equipped to design policies and solutions that will improve equity and lead to stronger outcomes for our students, our communities, and our city.

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Acknowledgements

JUNE 2021

# DEAR FRIENDS,



Like everyone, the COVID-19 pandemic profoundly shifted my family's world. My four children began learning from home, like all 340,000 students in Chicago's public school system. My work as a parent liaison at DePriest Elementary, along with my children's experiences, showed me firsthand that access to the internet — already a critical need before the pandemic — was compounded in communities like mine.

I shared these major concerns with Kids First Chicago (K1C), where I serve on the Parent Advisory Board.

**The K1C team listened to me and hundreds of other Chicago Public Schools (CPS) parents, and then they rolled up their sleeves and got to work on finding a solution.**

From appearing with my family in the Chicago Connected promotional video (which was retweeted by President Barack Obama!) to serving on Chicago Connected's guiding team, I have been involved every step of the way. Together K1C, CPS, the City, parents like me, and many other public and private partners worked together to bring this groundbreaking initiative to life.

(Above) K1C Parent Advisory Board Member Claiborne Wade with his family.  
Photo courtesy of Chicago Connected program

**"MICHELLE AND I WANT EVERY KID IN CHICAGO TO GROW UP KNOWING EVEN BETTER OPPORTUNITIES THAN WE HAD — AND THAT REQUIRES FULL AND EQUITABLE ACCESS TO THE BEST TOOLS AND RESOURCES. WE'RE HAPPY TO HELP CHICAGO CONNECTED REACH EVERY KID IN THE CITY. THIS IS WHERE I FOUND A PURPOSE AND A FAMILY — AND IT'LL ALWAYS BE OUR HOME."**

FORMER PRESIDENT  
BARACK OBAMA

Twitter

As parents, we know our children best and are best positioned to see what they need to succeed — ***especially in times of crisis.***

The success of Chicago Connected, which is well on its way to providing 100,000 students with free internet access, is proof positive that parent voice is essential to ensuring that the district and the city serve our children equitably.

I'm glad to have a seat at the table as we work together to ensure that all kids have access to a high-quality education.

Sincerely,

**CLAIBORNE WADE**

Austin Community Area Parent

# CREATING — CHICAGO CONNECTED

CHICAGO CONNECTED | 2021 PROGRAM IMPACT

“WE HAD FAMILIES WE WERE TALKING TO WHERE BOTH [PARENTS] HAD RECENTLY LOST EMPLOYMENT. THEY HAD FOUR KIDS THEY WERE TRYING TO MAKE SURE WERE GETTING THEIR REMOTE LEARNING, HAD THEIR DEVICES, WERE ABLE TO GET ONLINE. AND THEY’RE TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHETHER OR NOT TO PUT FOOD ON THE TABLE OR GET THE INTERNET.”

DANIEL ANELLO,  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER  
KIDS FIRST CHICAGO

*NBC5 CHICAGO*





**110,000**  
STUDENTS WITHOUT  
INTERNET

**1 OUT OF 5**  
STUDENTS WITHOUT  
ACCESS TO INTERNET

## "IT'S THE NUMBER ONE THING THAT WE NEED RIGHT NOW..."

BECAUSE NO INTERNET, NO WIFI —  
WE CAN'T CONNECT TO OUR LOVED  
ONES. WE CAN'T CONNECT TO ANY  
RESOURCES THAT WE MIGHT NEED.  
WE CAN'T CONNECT TO OUR SCHOOLS.  
OUR KIDS CAN'T SEE THEIR FRIENDS OR  
FAMILY MEMBERS. WE CANNOT MAKE  
ANY APPOINTMENTS. WE CAN'T LOOK  
UP INFORMATION AND KNOW ABOUT  
ALL THESE RESOURCES OUT THERE  
FOR US. SO [CHICAGO CONNECTED IS]  
USEFUL."

Yesenia Landa  
McKinley Park Parent

## WE ASKED PARENTS WHAT THEY NEEDED

As the world began to rapidly shift  
at the outset of the COVID-19  
pandemic, Kids First Chicago  
hunkered down to do what we do  
best: **ask parents what they need.**

We made hundreds of phone calls  
to Chicago Public Schools (CPS)  
parents to understand how we  
could best support them during this  
crisis. A common theme emerged:  
access to the internet is critical to  
student success — and is an issue of  
educational equity.

## WE RESEARCHED

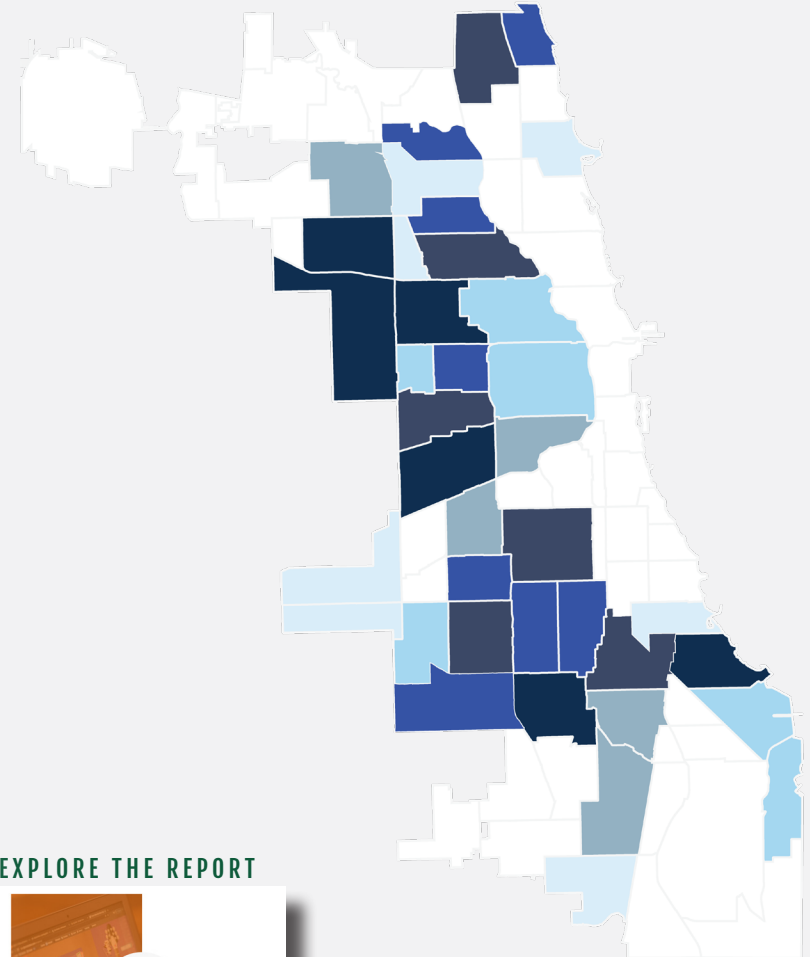
True to our data-driven model, we  
dug into census data to understand  
the scale of the problem that parents  
voiced.

In partnership with the Metropolitan  
Planning Council, we released an  
issue brief, **Digital Equity in the  
Coronavirus Era**, highlighting the  
startling fact that 1 in 5 children  
in Chicago didn't have access to  
in-home internet, and gaps were  
worst in Black and Latinx/a/o  
neighborhoods on the South and  
West Sides.

## # OF CHILDREN

### UNDER AGE 18 WITHOUT BROADBAND ACCESS

Community areas with the highest concentration of children  
without access to broadband are predominantly concentrated  
on the South and West Sides.



### EXPLORE THE REPORT



# OF CHILDREN WITHOUT BROADBAND  
0.5K 5.0K

## WE PARTNERED

**We quickly found committed partners at Chicago Public Schools and the City of Chicago who were eager to consider a durable solution to address the need at scale.**

We worked with the City, CPS, philanthropic partners, community-based organizations, and internet service providers (ISPs) to co-create a new program that would provide a long-term solution to the digital divide.

**“BEING THE FATHER OF CHILDREN WHO ARE IN SCHOOL, REALIZING THAT WE WERE ABOUT TO PIVOT TO REMOTE LEARNING, YOU IMMEDIATELY REALIZE THAT FOR 100,000 KIDS IN CHICAGO, NOT ONLY IS COVID-19 A HEALTH CRISIS BUT AN EDUCATION CRISIS.”**

KEN GRIFFIN  
PHILANTHROPIST  
AND CEO OF CITADEL

*Wall Street Journal*

## PROGRAM FUNDERS & PARTNERS

Chicago Connected would not be possible without the generous support of:

- Ken Griffin, Philanthropist and CEO of Citadel
- Crown Family Philanthropies
- Chicago Community COVID-19 Response Fund
- Illinois Tool Works
- Pritzker Traubert Foundation
- JPB Foundation
- The Chicago Community Trust
- The Joyce Foundation
- MacArthur Foundation
- President Barack Obama and Mrs. Michelle Obama

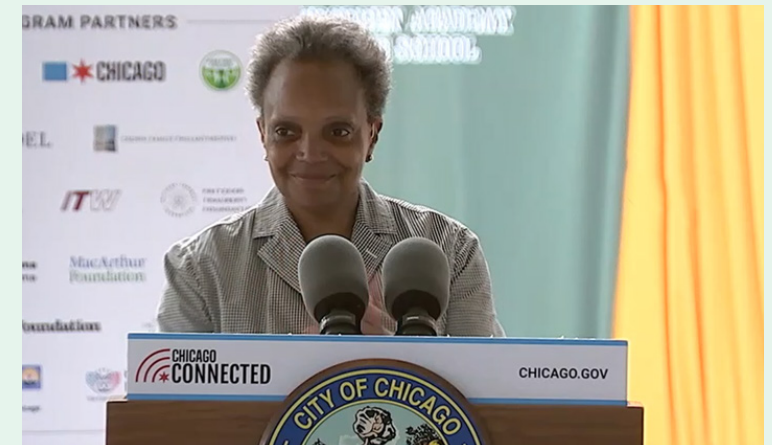
**35**  
COMMUNITY-BASED  
PARTNERSHIPS FUELING  
CONNECTIVITY

**\$50,000,000**  
INITIATIVE OVER  
4 YEARS

**\$20,000,000**  
IN PHILANTHROPIC  
FUNDING  
IN YEARS 1 & 2

JUNE 25, 2020

## WE IMPLEMENTED



On June 25, 2020, Mayor Lightfoot announced *Chicago Connected*, the most ambitious internet connectivity program in the country to support student learning.



Kids First Chicago continues to support the core implementation of the program. We oversee outreach and digital literacy support for 35 community-based organizations, steward progress reporting and impact analysis, and share learnings with other cities and districts looking to replicate Chicago Connected, which has been adopted as the national exemplar to close the digital divide.

*(Top) Chicago Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot announces Chicago Connected at a citywide press conference on June 25, 2020*

*(Lower Right) Chicago Connected Program Logo*

# PROGRAM — IMPACT TO DATE



DESCRIBE THE PROGRAM IN ONE WORD

“THE FIRST THING THAT CAME TO ME WAS EXCEPTIONAL. AND THAT WAS BECAUSE OF THE WAY THAT IT IMPACTED MY LIFE — WITH US HAVING EXPERIENCED THE FINANCIAL LOSS THAT WE DID, WHICH WAS HUGE, WE TOOK A HUGE FINANCIAL HIT. IT GAVE ME SOME RELIEF TO KNOW THAT THIS IS SOMETHING THAT WE DID NOT HAVE TO SACRIFICE... AND I’M HUMBLLED BY THAT OPPORTUNITY. I JUST WANT TO COME ON AND SAY, THANK YOU.”

YAKIRA WILLIS  
GREATER GRAND CROSSING PARENT

## 64,000 STUDENTS SERVED

Chicago Connected has served nearly 64,000 students in 42,000 households over the last year. The program continues to expand and improve, responding to family feedback and student need to ensure that internet access is not a barrier to remote learning for students of all ages.

**93%**  
DESIGNATED AS ECONOMICALLY  
DISADVANTAGED

**29%**  
ARE ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
LEARNERS

**13%**  
ARE IN TRANSITIONAL LIVING  
SITUATIONS (STLS)

**20%**  
ARE DIVERSE LEARNERS

## SERVING THE HIGHEST-NEED FAMILIES

Initial eligibility for Chicago Connected was designed to ensure that families with the highest need were first in line for free internet services. This was determined using a combination of factors, including eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch status, Medicaid qualifications, and programmatic factors such as being a diverse learner or English language learner.

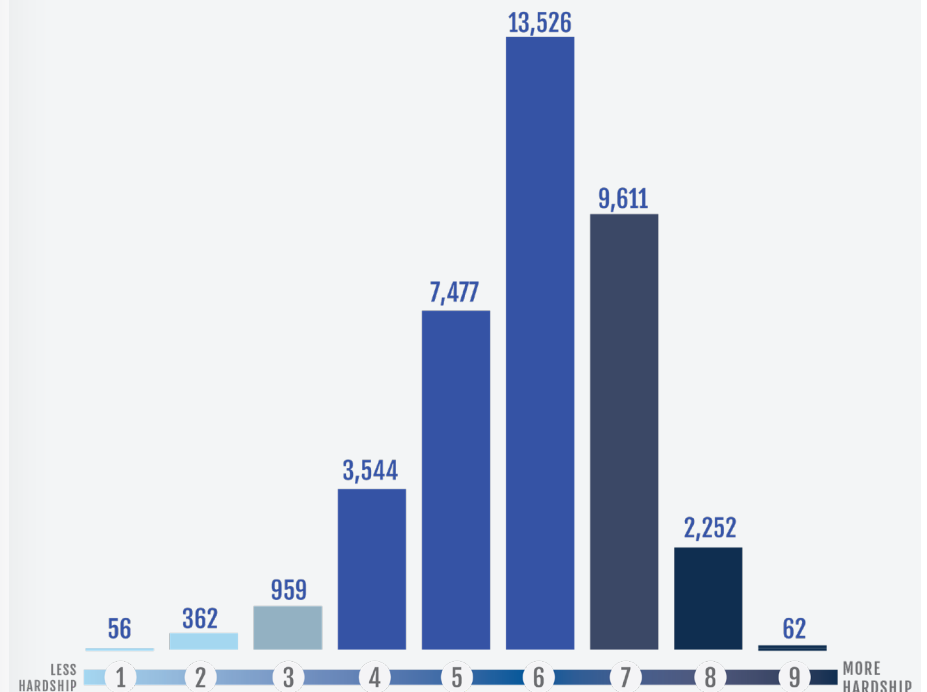
**It worked!** Students in households with higher needs, as indicated by an eligibility score, signed up for the program at higher rates.

## DIVING DEEPER ELIGIBILITY & FAMILY HARDSHIP

In November 2020, eligibility criteria for the program expanded significantly. The original system summed up weights of individual indicators from 0-9, with a higher score indicating more need. Originally, families who scored above 4 were prioritized. Now, any student who qualifies for free and reduced-price lunch—a score of 1—is also automatically eligible for Chicago Connected — **which means that nearly 228,000 students have access to this program.**

Today, we use the scoring system to better understand the level of hardship Chicago Connected families face.

## HOUSEHOLD PARTICIPATION BY ELIGIBILITY/HARDSHIP SCORE





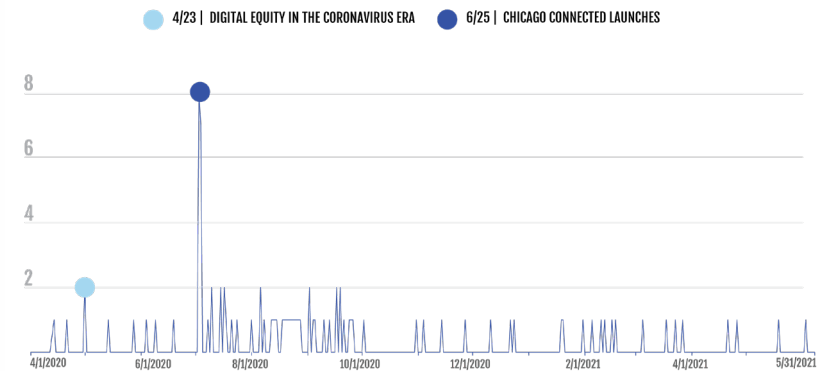
## PROGRAM BENEFITS

**EXPANDED ACCESS.** Through a partnership with the Big Shoulders Fund, an organization that serves more than 70 under-resourced Catholic schools in Chicago, along with continued support from funders and ISPs, nearly 3,000 additional K-12 students are eligible to participate in the initiative.

**IMPROVED ATTENDANCE.** As of late January 2021, students with redeemed activation codes for wired service had an attendance rate of 91.2%, which was 0.5% points higher than the overall district attendance rate at that time, despite the fact that they are more likely to face barriers to consistent remote learning attendance.

Attendance remained lower for students in households with more hardships, suggesting that these students will need more support to make up for unfinished learning in the next school year.

### 15 MONTHS OF STEADY MEDIA PLACEMENTS



**BEYOND INTERNET ACCESS.** Chicago Connected enables students to access online classes and resources, but the program extends beyond internet access alone to provide Chicago Connected families with the knowledge and know-how that they need to effectively navigate the digital universe.

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) distributed over 200,000 devices to high-need students to enable learning, and the Chicago Connected partner community-based organizations (CBOs) are providing digital literacy training on how to use the internet, supporting families as they navigate the web, access virtual school, and take advantage of many other resources enabled by connectivity.

**NATIONAL EXEMPLAR.** Chicago Connected has been lauded as the national exemplar in closing the urban digital divide. From advising more than 20 cities on their own programs to the model's replication in Philadelphia and Miami, the impact of Chicago Connected has been felt beyond our district.

The program has received significant attention both locally and nationally, garnering 54 media placements, including the Wall Street Journal, Axios, and USA Today.

# FAMILY & STUDENT EXPERIENCE

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE PROGRAM?

“OH, A MAJOR HELP. EVERYTHING, OBVIOUSLY, IS VIRTUAL, THEIR CLASSWORK THAT THEY DO, CONNECTING WITH THE TEACHER, CONNECTING WITH THEIR FRIENDS AFTER BEING IN SCHOOL. FOR ME AS A PARENT, LITERALLY I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO ATTEND EVERY MEETING, EVERY PARENT WORKSHOP. IT’S JUST, THANK GOD FOR THE WIFI! IT’S BEEN GREAT. IT’S GIVEN ME A LOT OF OPPORTUNITY TO ACTUALLY CONNECT AND REACH A LOT OF PEOPLE. SO I THINK IT’S GREAT.”

YESENIA LANDA  
MCKINLEY PARK PARENT



**4,865**  
RESPONDENTS

**3**

LANGUAGES

**80%**  
BLACK OR LATINX/A/O

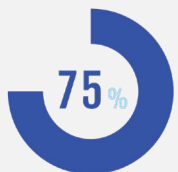
## ONE YEAR LATER, WE ASKED FAMILIES

Kids First Chicago surveyed more than 25,000 Chicago Connected families, and nearly 5,000 newly connected families responded, to share their feedback on how the program was working for them and what barriers existed to accessing high-speed internet.

The survey was representative of families enrolled in Chicago Connected, with 4,865 respondents in English, Spanish, and Simplified Chinese. 4 of 5 respondents identified as Black or Latinx/a/o, and 3 in 4 reported an annual income of less than \$35,000.

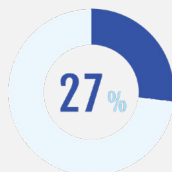
27% of respondents reported that they did not have internet access prior to Chicago Connected. Of these, nearly 3 in 4 said that it was because the cost of internet connectivity was prohibitive.

### FAMILY INCOME



3 OUT OF 4  
FAMILIES SELF-REPORTED AN  
ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME OF  
LESS THAN \$35,000

### COST WAS REPORTED AS #1 BARRIER TO INTERNET ACCESS



NEARLY 1 OUT OF 3  
FAMILIES REPORTED NOT  
HAVING ANY INTERNET SERVICE  
BEFORE CHICAGO CONNECTED



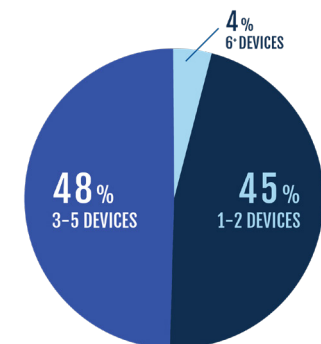
NEARLY 3 OUT OF 4  
WHO DIDN'T HAVE INTERNET  
SAID IT WAS BECAUSE COSTS  
WERE TOO HIGH

## HOW MANY DEVICES CAN STREAM VIDEO AT ONCE?

ABOUT

**HALF**

OF PARTICIPANTS SAID THEY  
COULD STREAM VIDEO ON 3 TO 5  
DEVICES WITHOUT INTERRUPTION



**IS IT FAST ENOUGH FOR REMOTE LEARNING?** The survey included an embedded speed test to easily measure respondents' internet speeds. The majority of respondents reported that their internet was fast enough to stream video on multiple devices at the same time. 45% reported being able to stream live video on 3-5 devices simultaneously without disruptions.

**Note.** Initially approximately 33% of families reported slow browsing speeds three or more days per week. After the survey was conducted, both Comcast and RCN doubled internet speeds for Chicago Connected families, ensuring that families have enough bandwidth to learn online and much more, and demonstrating the program's commitment to continuous improvement.

**PROGRAM COMMUNICATION AND SET-UP.** In an effort to reach families, CPS devised a multi-pronged communication strategy including direct mail, phone/text, and email. Over 94% of families learned about the program from CPS, demonstrating the effectiveness of their strategies.

Once entering the set-up phase, nearly 70% reported no issues faced during sign-up. 61% who self-installed their equipment were satisfied with instructions. Of those who chose to have a technician visit their home, 89% said the technician was in compliance with COVID-19 guidelines.

### HOW ARE FAMILIES USING THE INTERNET OUTSIDE OF REMOTE LEARNING?

82% reported using the internet to access the district's remote learning content, and 71% of families use the internet outside of schooling to communicate over email and search for information online.

This demonstrates a clear need for digital literacy resources for families to ensure not only access to education but also to the myriad other resources available on the internet. For example, 44% of respondents wanted to earn a new degree and 37% wanted to get a new job in the next five years.

### DIGITAL LITERACY.

The Chicago Connected Digital Literacy Guiding Team curates best-in-class digital resources tailored to the needs of Chicago Connected families. After survey results showed that 67% of respondents were interested in technology training as part of Chicago Connected, the Guiding Team launched a three-pronged approach to serving families' digital literacy needs: self-paced resources, live trainings from local community-based organizations, and access to citywide, one-on-one tech support.

**"THANK YOU FOR THIS BLESSING AND RESOURCE! BOTH OF MY CHILDREN NEEDED INTERNET DUE TO THE PANDEMIC IN MARCH 2020. MY DAUGHTER HAD A SUMMER VIRTUAL COURSE AND SHE HAD TO HAVE IT TO PASS HER CLASS. GOD PROVIDED A WAY FOR US AGAIN! THANK YOU TO ALL THE PHILANTHROPISTS [WHO MADE THIS POSSIBLE]."**

Monica Miller  
East Garfield Park

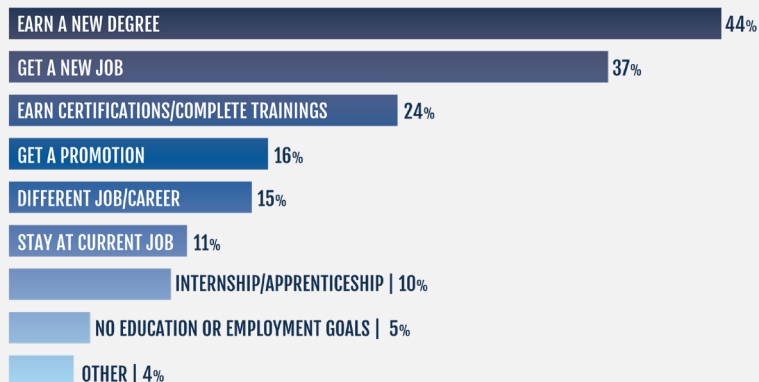
# 82%

MORE THAN THREE OUT OF EVERY  
FOUR FAMILIES VIEWED THE  
PROGRAM FAVORABLY

### OVERALL SATISFACTION & PROGRAM GROWTH

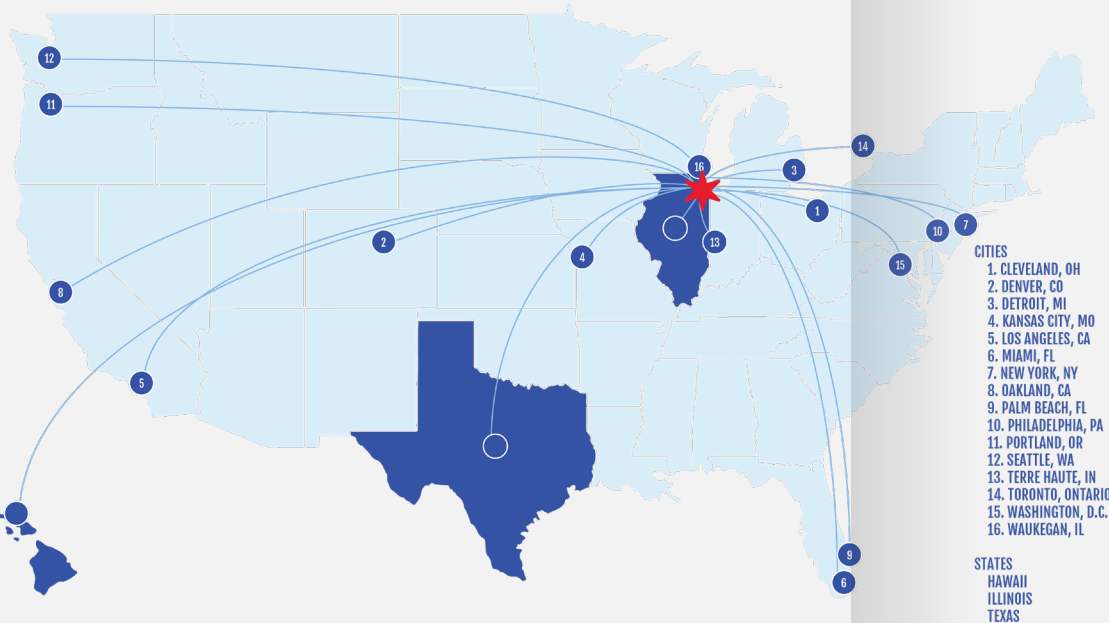
Overall, respondents reported positive experiences with Chicago Connected. Only 3 in 10 experienced issues when signing up. More than 4 in 5 respondents were neutral, satisfied, or very satisfied with their customer service.

For the few areas that parents indicated room for improvement — like reducing wait times and improving customer service for bilingual families — we are actively working with Internet Service Providers to improve.





## INTERESTED NORTH AMERICAN CITIES & STATES



CHICAGO CONNECTED | 2021 PROGRAM IMPACT

“NO STUDENT OR FAMILY SHOULD BE CUT OFF...ESPECIALLY AT THIS MOMENT WHEN OUR DEVICES HAVE BECOME OUR CLASSROOMS, DOCTORS’ OFFICES, AND MORE.”

Barbara Goodman Manilow  
Board Chair  
Crown Family Philanthropies

### MAKING THE CASE FOR UNIVERSAL, NO-COST BROADBAND ACCESS

The creation of Chicago Connected, the longest-term, most comprehensive connectivity program in the nation, is truly groundbreaking. Chicago Connected is eliminating broadband accessibility as a barrier to digital learning—and providing a roadmap for other cities and school districts to follow.

From its initial launch and throughout implementation, Chicago Connected partners have embraced an “open source” approach, sharing lessons learned along the way. More than 20 cities have reached out to Kids First Chicago and its public-private partners to learn more about the program’s creation and model. Philadelphia and Miami have both launched initiatives modeled after Chicago Connected in design and structure. Education SuperHighway featured Chicago Connected as a case study in bridging the urban digital divide.

Chicago Connected serves as a foundation for increased access to broadband as a public utility. At both the local and national levels, policymakers are beginning to acknowledge that access to broadband is an essential part of daily life, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Citizens agree: nearly 90% of Chicago voters voted “yes” when asked if the City should “act to ensure that all the city’s community areas have access to broadband internet.”

Using the scalable model that Chicago Connected offers, the City is currently evaluating additional ways to improve internet infrastructure investments in communities in need and connect more residents citywide. Further, the Biden administration has made digital access a strategic priority at the federal level.

Ultimately, Kids First Chicago envisions a future where lack of access to the internet is no longer a barrier to student success, giving all kids access to the kind of education that will open doors to opportunity and foster greater prosperity—for all.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

Chicago Connected is a partnership program between the City of Chicago, Chicago Public Schools, the philanthropic community, and community organizations. This program would not be possible without the generous support of:



ENGLISH TRANSLATION  
 “THE CHICAGO CONNECTED PROGRAM IS A GREAT TOOL FOR THOSE OF US WHO LIVE IN LOW-INCOME NEIGHBORHOODS TO NOT HAVE TO PAY FOR INTERNET. IT BEING FREE FOR FOUR YEARS IS A GREAT HELP FOR THE WHOLE BACK OF THE YARDS COMMUNITY.”

“ESA PROGRAMA DE CHICAGO CONNECTED ES UNA BUENA HERRAMIENTA PARA NOSOTROS QUE VIVIMOS EN UN BARRIO DE BAJOS INGRESOS. INTERNET QUE SEA GRATIS POR CUATRO AÑOS ES UNA GRANDE AYUDA PARA TODA LA COMUNIDAD DE BACK OF THE YARDS.”

Lorena Lopez  
 Back of the Yards Parent

DESIGNED BY

HALT CREATIVE

**WORLD-CLASS SCHOOLS. WORLD-CLASS CITY.**



**KIDS FIRST  
CHICAGO**



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