



SUPPLEMENT TO
**DEFEATING THE
DIGITAL DIVIDE**



ABOUT US

Kids First Chicago (K1C) believes that those closest to our students – families – are best equipped to co-design policies and systems that will improve equity and lead to stronger outcomes for our students, our communities, and our city.

HOW WE WORK

We believe that the best way to serve people with marginalized identities is through proximity and deference. Proximity through representative staff, direct engagement, and deep ongoing reflection and empathy-building work. Deference through putting the priorities and perspectives of marginalized parents at the center of everything we do.

We are committed to the regular self-reflection and empathy-building work required to unpack our own racial bias and acknowledge the role that it and discriminatory systems have played in oppressing educational outcomes for children in Chicago, especially children who identify as Black and/or Latinx/a/o. We believe our history matters and our legacy is embedded within education and subsequent life outcomes.

“BEFORE CHICAGO CONNECTED, I DID NOT HAVE THE INTERNET. I RELIED ON MY PHONE AND MY MOM’S INTERNET SERVICE. AND THEN, THE PANDEMIC HIT. BETWEEN WORKING FROM HOME AND SUPPORTING MY 8-YEAR-OLD SON WITH REMOTE LEARNING, QUALITY INTERNET BECAME ESSENTIAL. THANK GOD FOR CHICAGO CONNECTED!”

—
KENDRA TORRES, CPS PARENT, WOODLAWN

KEY TERMS & CONCEPTS

Broadband. A “broadband” internet subscription refers to having at least one type of internet subscription other than a dial-up subscription. The American Community Survey (ACS) specifically refers to those who said “Yes” to one or more of the following types of subscriptions: broadband (high speed) such as cable, fiber optic, or Digital Subscriber Line (DSL); cellular data plan for a smartphone or other mobile device; satellite; or some other service other than dial up. More information can be found in this [U.S. Census Bureau report](#).

Note. *Roughly 10% of Chicago households have a device but do not have broadband access. Roughly 1% of Chicago households have broadband access but do not have a device. These households would be considered “disconnected” for the purposes of this report.*

Connected. Kids First Chicago defines “connected” when a household reports having a device **with** a broadband internet connection.

Device. We define a “device” as an internet-enabled device, such as a tablet, or other portable wireless computer.

Disconnected. Households without a device connected to broadband internet connection or lacks a device in the household.

Data Source. Data Source. U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 and 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (City-level data accessed via data.census.gov)

INTRODUCTION

This addendum to Kids First Chicago’s (K1C) *Defeating the Digital Divide* report extends K1C’s analysis to include Census data from the 2021 calendar year. Our most recent report looked at 2020 Census data which covered the first six months of the Chicago Connected program.¹ The 2021 American Community Survey (ACS) data, released in December 2022, gives us a deeper understanding of Chicago Connected’s impact on Chicago’s digital divide.

¹ *Chicago Connected was launched on June 25, 2020.*

DIGITAL EQUITY IN EDUCATION

IN THE CORONAVIRUS ERA 2021

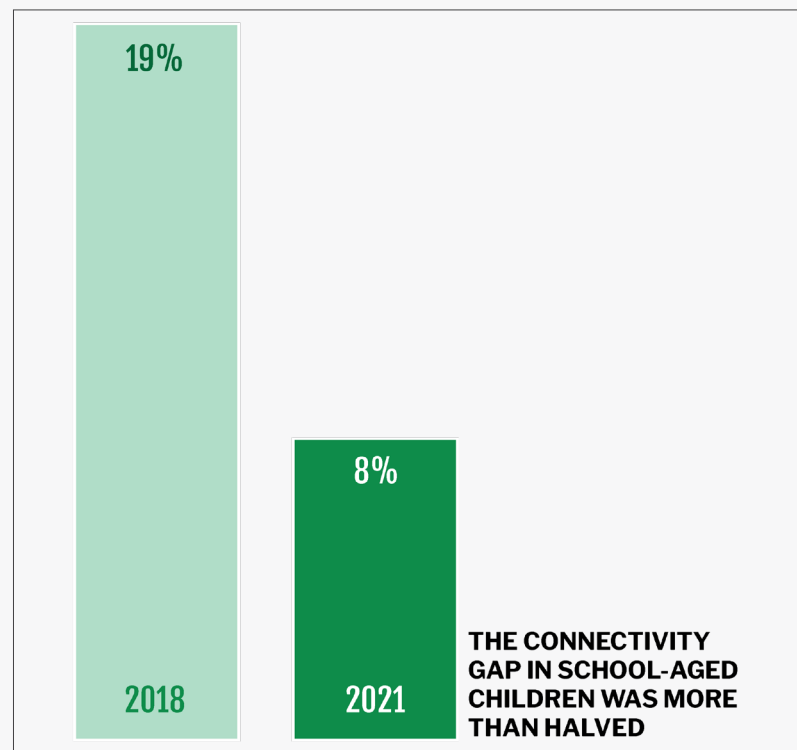
Our analysis of 2021 ACS data shows that the Chicago Connected program helped to **more than halve** the connectivity gap for Chicago’s school-age children — from roughly 110,000 children in 2018 to roughly 46,000 children by the end of 2021 (19% disconnected in 2018 vs. 8% in 2021).

The number of disconnected adults was also reduced in 2021 by 2% (from 15% to 13%) which amounts to a reduction of nearly 30,000 adults in 2021 alone. Relative to 2018, Chicago Connected helped reduce the connectivity gap for adults by 8%, or roughly 160,000 adults, through the end of 2021.

This pattern holds for the number of disconnected households as well. The percentage of disconnected households in Chicago dropped from ~25% in 2018 to ~15% in 2021.

However, this means that we still have about 185,000 disconnected households in the city.

Figure 1. Percentage of Chicago Children (under 18) who are Disconnected, 2018 vs. 2021



Note. The ACS specifically refers to those who said “Yes” to one or more of the following types of subscriptions: broadband (high speed) such as cable, fiber optic, or Digital Subscriber Line (DSL); cellular data plan for a smartphone or other mobile device; satellite; or some other service other than dial up. More information can be found in this U.S. Census Bureau report.

Figure 2. Percentage of Chicago Adults (over 18) who are Disconnected, 2018 vs. 2021

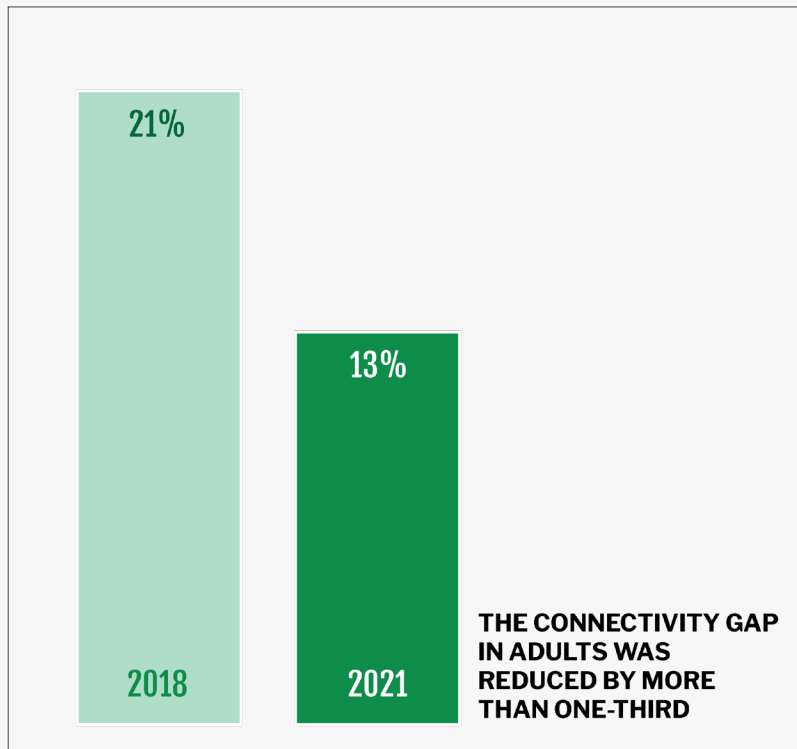
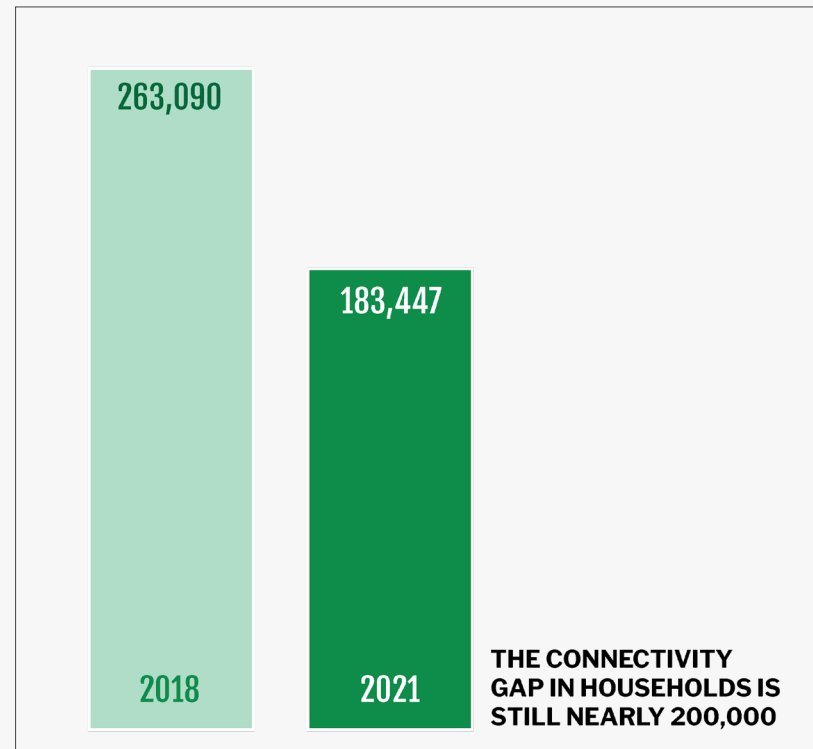


Figure 3. Total # of Disconnected Households, 2018 vs. 2021



LITTLE IMPROVEMENT IN LAPTOP OR DESKTOP OWNERSHIP

AS WE SAW IN OUR *DEFEATING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE* REPORT, THE NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS THAT DO NOT OWN A LAPTOP OR DESKTOP CONTINUES TO BE SUBSTANTIAL.

As of December 2021, approximately 260,000 households in Chicago – nearly 1 in 4 of all households – did not own a laptop or desktop. The decrease in this number between 2020 and 2021 was marginal: we saw a decrease of about 1 percentage point or roughly 2,500 households from ~260,000 in 2020 to ~257,000 in 2021.

CONCLUSION

This addendum highlights the substantial impact Chicago Connected has had on closing the digital divide. Our analysis of the available 2021 data demonstrates that disconnected households continue to drop. However, the pace at which it is dropping is slowing. Those disconnected households – that have yet to be reached – demand additional effort and focus on behalf of government agencies, community-based organizations, businesses, nonprofits, and internet service providers.

These households tend to be lower-income and face additional obstacles (i.e. employment and housing instability, lack of childcare, lack of access to quality healthcare, etc.). Closing this gap will require more than just addressing internet connectivity; it will also require addressing systemic and structural barriers that affect our most marginalized Chicagoans.

We continue to emphasize the device gap – nearly 260,000 Chicago residents do not own a laptop or desktop computer. As we noted in the *Defeating the Digital Divide* report, we strongly believe that every Chicago household should own a laptop or desktop to fully participate in modern life.

“IF ALL YOU HAVE IS
ACCESS ON YOUR PHONE,
YOU’RE UNCONNECTED.”

—
EVAN MARWELL
CEO OF EDUCATIONSUPERHIGHWAY
IN THE 74 MILLION, OCTOBER 2022

CONTACT

If you are interested in learning more about Kids First Chicago's digital equity analysis, please contact:

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Kids First Chicago is proud to be part of a coalition of partners who are working to eradicate Chicago's digital divide. We gratefully acknowledge our leading donors who make it possible for us to lead parent- and data-informed initiatives like Chicago Connected, and our many public and private partners who have generously contributed to this groundbreaking initiative.

LEARN MORE

[*kidsfirstchicago.org/defeating-the-digital-divide*](https://kidsfirstchicago.org/defeating-the-digital-divide)





THANK YOU



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