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**KIDS FIRST  
CHICAGO**

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### **Defeating the Digital Divide: A Continued Role for Chicago**

*New analysis from Kids First Chicago calls for renewed attention and investment*

Chicago, IL – Today, Kids First Chicago released a new analysis of Chicago’s efforts to bridge the digital divide. This past summer, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) marked the fourth anniversary of the launch of **Chicago Connected**, a landmark initiative that has significantly improved digital equity across Chicago. Since June 2020, Chicago Connected has provided free, high-quality internet access and digital learning resources to over 100,000 students, nearly one in three enrolled in CPS.

“Closing the digital divide is not only essential to Chicago families right now but will also provide countless opportunities for a brighter, more prosperous future,” said Claiborne Wade, a Kids First Chicago’s Parent Advisory Board member and part of the Chicago Digital Equity Coalition.

Despite the success of local efforts, the federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), which was inspired by and modeled after Chicago Connected, ended on June 1, 2024, due to a lack of Congressional funding. At its conclusion, ACP had enrolled approximately 351,000 households in Cook County – roughly one in six – illustrating a clear and persistent need for robust digital inclusion strategies.

Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson has committed to extending the Chicago Connected program through June 2025. As federal programs wane, local initiatives like Chicago Connected become increasingly crucial.

“We commend Mayor Johnson for his commitment to ensuring that every Chicagoan has access to the digital tools necessary for success in the 21st-century landscape,” said Daniel Anello, CEO of Kids First Chicago. “However, we must do more to connect our most vulnerable students and newly eligible families, not just those who Chicago Connected already serves.”

### **New Insights from Kids First Chicago**

Kids First Chicago has updated its ongoing analysis of the area’s digital connectivity in the *Defeating the Digital Divide* series by incorporating findings from the 2022 American Community Survey (ACS) and the Year 3 survey of the Chicago Connected program. The data show a significant reduction in the digital divide:

- **Children under 18:** From 2018 to 2022, the percentage of disconnected children decreased from 19% to 7%. This translates to reducing the number of disconnected children from approximately 110,000 to 40,000.

- **Adults over 18:** Connectivity among adults improved, with the disconnected percentage dropping from 15% to 12% between 2018 and 2022. This change represents a decrease of nearly 30,000 disconnected adults.
- **Households:** From 2018 to 2022, the percentage of disconnected households decreased from 25% to 15%. Despite these decreases, approximately 170,000 households remain disconnected, highlighting the ongoing need for community-focused interventions.

### **Closing the Digital Divide for All CPS Students**

Kids First Chicago emphasizes three recommendations to close the digital divide for all CPS students:

1. **Expand and Establish Chicago Connected as a Permanent CPS Program:** Chicago Connected should be made a permanent CPS program and expanded to include newly eligible families, ensuring all students continue to have free high-speed internet access.
2. **Re-engage Community-Based Organizations in Chicago Connected:** Community-based organizations, proven highly effective at connecting CPS's neediest students, should be re-engaged as partners to support program enrollment.
3. **Close the Device Gap for CPS Students:** To address the shortage of devices among CPS students, we must redouble partnerships with nonprofit refurbishment companies and increase donations from government and businesses.

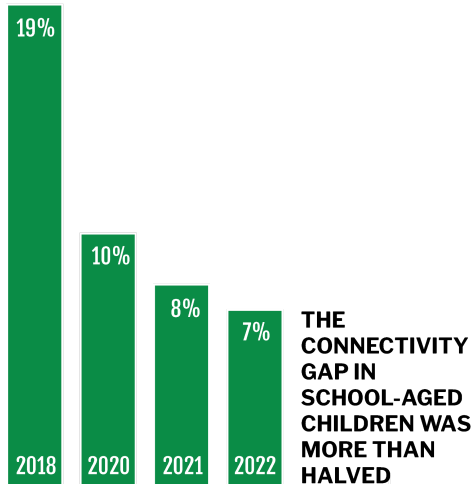
Signaling the need for continued attention on this issue, Reyna Rodriguez, Digital Learning Program Manager at Northwest Center said, "The digital divide will never close unless we continue advocating for students who remain disconnected. This issue not only affects them as students but also prevents them and their families from reaching their full potential. We, including CPS, community-based organizations, government agencies, and philanthropy, must collaborate to provide these students with the necessary resources to become their best selves. They are our future."

Read the full report at [kidsfirstchicago.org/digital-divide](https://kidsfirstchicago.org/digital-divide).

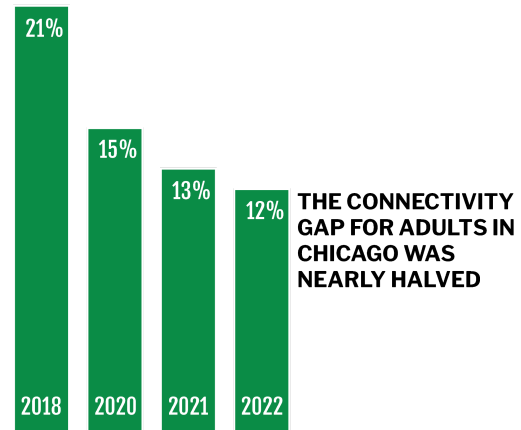
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## Figures at a Glance

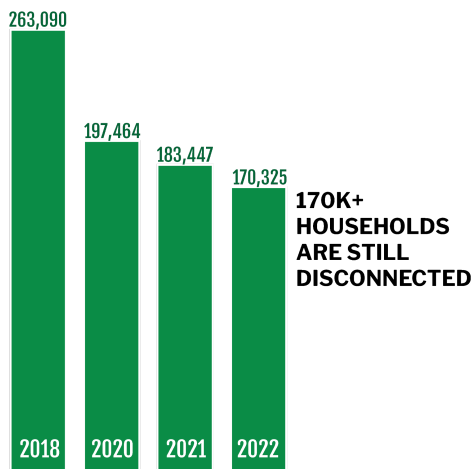
**Figure 1. Illustrates the improvements in children connectivity, 2018 to 2022**



**Figure 2. Illustrates the improvements in adult connectivity, 2018 to 2022**



**Figure 3. Total Disconnected Households, 2018 to 2022**



### ABOUT KIDS FIRST CHICAGO

Kids First Chicago's mission is to dramatically improve education for Chicago's children by ensuring their families are the respected authorities on what their kids need and decision-makers in their kids' education. We do this by partnering with families to support them in gaining the resources, access, and voice they need to achieve their vision for their children. K1C provides transparent and rigorous education analysis to families, educators, and policymakers alike to inform data-driven and inclusive decision-making about the future of Chicago's public schools. Visit [kidsfirstchicago.org](https://kidsfirstchicago.org).