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Home Internet a Key to Student Success, Study Finds

California's cable industry spends about \$2 billion annually to upgrade and build out high-speed networks using private investment dollars. But while 5G technology points to a future with faster Internet, many rural parts of the state lack the fiber infrastructure the technology requires.

DEC 10 / BY NEWS STAFF (/AUTHOR/NEWS-STAFF)

While the vast majority of urban California households have internet service, only about one in three rural households in the state are connected online, according to a new study.

A new EdSource analysis of data from the **California Public Utilities Commission** (<https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/>) (CPUC) shows that 78 percent of urban households have internet access.

The gap between students who have access and those who don't — the “homework gap” — threatens educational opportunities for rural students, according to the EdSource report (**the full version of the report** (<https://edsource.org/2019/disconnected-internet-stops-once-school-ends-for-many-rural-california-students/620825>) is available online).

“Lack of access to computers and the internet limits learning, making it more difficult for children to keep up or develop the skills that are necessary for academic and professional success,” says a report by **Common Sense Media**

(<https://www.common sense media.org/>), a nonprofit that champions safe technology use for children and families. “Students without broadband access are disadvantaged when their teachers are not able to assign homework that’s most relevant to or useful for them.”

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Income is the biggest factor affecting the rate of broadband subscriptions, according to a June report by the CPUC.

“But for low-income residents in rural California,” the EdSource report says, “the problem is often compounded by having fewer internet service providers and prices to choose from — or no broadband options at all.” Broadband service can be more expensive in rural areas, according to **Sunne Wright McPeak** (<http://www.cetfund.org/aboutus/board/McPeak-Sunne>), president and CEO of the **California Emerging Technology Fund** (<http://www.cetfund.org/>) (CETF), a statewide nonprofit that works to accelerate the deployment and adoption of broadband.

Tulare County is one of the state’s poorest and has among the lowest rates of broadband subscriptions in California, says a 2019 report by the **Public Policy Institute of California** (<https://www.ppic.org/>).

“In June 2014, California lawmakers allocated \$26.7 million to fund the Broadband Infrastructure Improvement grants, which help schools upgrade their internet connections,” the EdSource report notes. “In 2015, the grants received \$50 million in additional funding. ... In 2017, legislators passed a new version of the California Internet for All Now Act, which allocated \$330 million to build broadband infrastructure and boost connectivity around the state.”

California’s cable industry spends about \$2 billion annually to upgrade and build out networks using private investment dollars, said **Carolyn McIntyre** (<https://www.calcable.org/connect/staff/carolyn-mcintyre/>), president of the **California Cable and Telecommunications Association** (<https://www.calcable.org/>).

But while 5G technology points to a future with faster internet, many rural parts of the state lack the fiber infrastructure the technology requires.

McPeak advises caution about the population not keeping pace with technology.

“Complicating all of this is this rush to 5G,” she says in the EdSource report. “They are trying to redeploy in urban areas and are leaving rural areas behind. This will be the next generation of the technology divide.”