



## Broadband and equity for all now

By Glores- Flores-Garcia

The coronavirus pandemic has led to the closing of schools and businesses for several months, exposing the deep Digital Divide facing many of our parents, students in k-12 and those in community colleges. El Concilio of San Mateo County and Hagar Services Coalition are partnering to close the Digital Divide in San Mateo County by asking local public and private agencies to join us partnership to help get the word out to all so that eligible constituents of this county can have access to Affordable Internet and Computer Offers.

All new partnerships will join with the statewide nonprofit The California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) whose mission is to close the "Digital Divide" in California, particularly targeting the underserved communities, so that parents can be secure



that their children will not be left behind. The goal is to provide affordable Internet options that increase the number of low-income households with Internet services at home. Internet access at home is critical to achieving academic and economic success and access health and human related services such as housing, employment, trainings, food, housing, health and other basic resources.

COVID-19 has exposed and amplified the impact of the Digital Divide as well as overall systemic injustices. We are focusing on a critical need that grows larger every day. One in eight California

households are either not connected or have only substandard connections to high-speed Internet at home. This Digital Divide is inextricably linked to the pernicious, persistent Achievement Gap and its twin -- the Opportunity Gap

In addition, the nonprofit student advocacy organization Education Trust-West reported in early April, after school closings were in place, that of 1,200 K-12 California parents surveyed:

- 38% of low-income families and 29% of families of color are concerned about access to distance learning because they don't have a reliable home Internet connection.

- 50% of low-income and 42% of families of color lack sufficient devices at home to access distance learning.

In San Mateo County, we know in 2019 that the Ravenswood City Elementary School had 86% of their

enrollment participated in the Free Lunch Program. If we ever need more evidence of the need for this service, we certainly have it now to understand how critical it is to make broadband infrastructure improvements and technology investments not only for the wellbeing of our students but all. The COVID-19 health crisis, recent wildfires and other disasters underscore why every resident must have a reliable home Internet connection to: communicate during emergencies, access medical professionals online, help isolated populations stay connected and drive economic development activity to save and create jobs.

Rose Jacobs Gibson, former San Mateo County Supervisor and President/CEO of Hagar Services Coalition and Gloria Flores-Garcia, Associate Executive Director of El Concilio of San Mateo County, are asking agencies

to strongly support this partnership to help ensure that there is equal access to computing devices and reliable, affordable home Internet across the board, so that all can feel secure in knowing that no one be left behind for lack of either.

The California Emerging Technology Fund has been working with experienced California education leaders and are asking state legislators, commissioners of the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) and 58 County Office of Education superintendents to "strongly support this and other bold initiatives to help ensure there is equity among all California households.

To find out how you can partner in this effort, contact us at (650)330-7442, hagar-services-coalition@gmail.com or for more information, visit [www.cetfund.org](http://www.cetfund.org),