



## SEF Statement on Digital Equity During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Governors in Alabama, Georgia, Oklahoma and Virginia have [mandated statewide school closures](#) for the rest of the academic year. In the remaining southern states, schools are either closed or recommended to be closed through April or May. As this new reality settles in, schools and families are grappling with how to stay safe, navigate uncertainty, and keep kids learning while at home. Policymakers are reckoning with [digital disparities](#) as nearly 20% of African American children ages 3-18 and 21% of families earning less than \$40,000 per year have no access to the internet at home.

Our team is daily in touch with school and district leaders on the front lines, and we are working to provide solutions that help move our country forward. For example, last week we were proud to [partner with Common Sense Media](#) for its launch of the [WideOpenSchool.org](#) platform which provides a free and open collection of quality online learning experiences to educators and families.

We are [developing and curating COVID-19 resources](#) and keeping equity at the forefront of digital learning conversations. Today, we released the first in a series of publications, [Distance Learning During COVID-19: 7 Equity Considerations for Schools and Leaders](#), an issue brief that provides practical equity considerations and examples of how districts are meeting the needs of their most vulnerable students and families right now.

On the legislative front, we are encouraged to see [efforts to expand broadband access](#) throughout the southern states. Additionally, the federal [CARES Act](#) included \$50 million for libraries and museums to expand digital network and device access; allowances for K-12 schools and institutions of higher education to purchase education technology; \$25 million to support distance learning and telemedicine; \$75 million public broadcasting; and \$100 million to ensure rural Americans have access to broadband. We are disappointed, however, that the CARES Act did not include the requested \$2 billion for the federal E-Rate program which would equip schools and libraries with WiFi devices and expand access to distance learning for low-income students and students of color. We hope that a future COVID-19 relief package will address this disparity.

We have never been more certain of the need to bridge ideas with practice and policy to solve pressing problems. The futures of our children and our country depend on how well we can come together to meet the demands of the current moment and retool our education system to meet the demands of the 21st century. We have an opportunity and obligation to do better.

In community,

Raymond C. Pierce and the SEF Team