

Literacy Minnesota – Digital Equity Community Report
Crookston Public Schools

We live in a very rural part of MN where 19% Crookston Public School District's population lives under poverty. In March, at the beginning of the pandemic two common issues that we faced as we moved towards distance learning were access to the internet and access to devices.

Thanks to the help of local internet providers, they provided free internet for families that currently didn't have access to that service. In total, 4 providers made internet available for students. We also asked parents to sign up their children for a device that could be lent out to them during the distance learning transition.

In August, we received COVID-19 relief funds. Part of those funds were used to purchase Ipads and Chromebooks for EVERY student in the district. Teachers were provided 2 workshop days to work on Google Classroom, SeeSaw, Digital Whiteboard and other tech programs. Each device was set up for all students with the apps and login information, making it easier for parents and students to access their classrooms digitally and get their work done. Most recently, the district purchased hotspots and we have enough on hand to provide families with these in case they are unable to sign up for an internet account through a local provider. This is a great success as all students have access to a device that will meet their educational need while keeping their dignity as all students are receiving it, not just students in need. This is one way for all of them to not feel singled out due to their finances.

Our school district recently hired a Latinx/Hispanic Liaison in August. This position has been tasked with helping us identify and create an action plan to help move towards a school district that is meeting the needs of our BIPOC students. This year, the Liaison created LAC, Latinx Advisory Committee, made up of parents and alumni, who meet monthly with the Superintendent and one School Board Member to discuss the issues that our Latinx students face and ways to work together to solve them.

One way we have been able to reach out to students is by having the Assistant Principal, Native American Liaison, Latinx/Hispanic Liaison, and School Counselor work alongside teachers to identify students that have not been logging in to their classrooms and try to connect with the student or parent to find out what barriers they may be facing when it comes to distance learning. This approach does allow a more personal connection, but does not reach every student that needs to be identified as we rely on teachers and administrative assistants to help identify those students or families.

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We also rely on our local news media, both newspaper and radio, to communicate any messages to our community. This unfortunately leaves out any families that are not English-speaking households.

Some of the recommendations I would make to my district is to provide a helpline or volunteers for parents that had questions on what their expectations are for logging in and connecting with their teachers. Although the devices were pre-loaded with the apps needed, that does not mean the parent or legal guardian is tech-savvy in how to work them. Teachers were given two days to assimilate with the apps and are given support throughout the year. The parents and guardians don't have that option.

Language is another barrier our district needs to work on. Many, if not, all of our communications are in English including our website. Our district needs to work on finding ways to better track and identify families that are non-English speakers and find solutions to getting the message in the language they speak. We also need the right software to provide Closed Captioning on our videos.

I believe we will continue to provide devices for all students and hotspots for families that do not have access to internet due to homelessness, socioeconomics or legal status. I believe the adaptations will prove to be permanent until we need to update the devices. That is the downfall of technology, it is ever evolving and it is expensive to keep up with, which leaves districts like ours, with high poverty and rural, at a disadvantage.