

SPRING 2021

CONNECTIVITY REPORT

Assessing the Digital Divide and Remote Learning Across 22
Kansas City School Districts

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LEANLAB
EDUCATION

OVERVIEW

BACKGROUND

LEANLAB Education is a Kansas City based nonprofit whose mission is to launch transformational education innovations that have national impact. Over the last 7 years, LEANLAB has focused its work on collaboratively developing education innovations (technologies and services) in partnership with the communities they serve—parents, students and educators.

INTRODUCTION

When the onset of COVID-19 first began in March of 2020, school leaders across the metro were forced to transition to virtual, or distance learning. A digital divide, the gap between students with computer and internet access and those without, became more and more apparent. LEANLAB Education made it a priority to partner with Kansas City schools to assess the internet connectivity and technology needs in Kansas City households for students to equitably participate in distance learning.

GOALS OF THIS REPORT

1. *Assess current needs for internet connectivity for public school students in the Kansas City area.*
2. *Illuminate progress made toward closing the digital divide since the spring.*
3. *Present timely reports of the remaining need to key funders and influencers who can create change.*

SCHOOLS ASSESSED

Between March 2020 and April 2021, LEANLAB sent Kansas City Missouri and Kansas City Kansas school systems new surveys to assess their continued needs in regards to the digital divide. The adjacent chart shows all participating schools by type. Our goal was to assess internet connectivity progress from 2020 to 2021.

| TYPE | SCHOOL NAME | SPRING 2020 | FALL 2020 | SPRING 2021 |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|-------------|
| Rural/Suburban Public | Belton School District | 280 | 600 | 50 |
| Rural/Suburban Public | Clinton County School District | 21 | 0 | 5 |
| Rural/Suburban Public | Fort Osage School District | 1267 | Unsure | No Data |
| Rural/Suburban Public | Independence School District | 5300 | Unsure | 0 |
| Urban Charter | Academie Lafayette | 0 | | No Data |
| Urban Charter | Academy for Integrated Arts | 25 | 0 | No Data |
| Urban Charter | Allen Village | NA | 0 | No Data |
| Urban Charter | Brookside | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Urban Charter | Citizens of the World | 75 | 15 | 100 |
| Urban Charter | Crossroads Academies | 95 | 0 | No Data |
| Urban Charter | DeLaSalle | 50 | 20 | Unsure |
| Urban Charter | Ewing Marion Kauffman School | 80 | 20 | 0 |
| Urban Charter | Frontier | 50 | 0 | 0 |
| Urban Charter | Genesis Charter School | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Urban Charter | Gordon Parks Elementary | 38 | 4 | 0 |
| Urban Charter | Guadalupe Centers Education System | 291 | 35 | 0 |
| Urban Charter | Hogan Preparatory Academy Inc. | 150 | 0 | 0 |
| Urban Charter | Hope Leadership Academy | 111 | 0 | 0 |
| Urban Charter | Kansas City Girls Preparatory Academy | 20 | 40 | 0 |
| Urban Charter | Kansas City International Academy | 35 | 24 | Unsure |
| Urban Charter | KIPP | 50 | 50 | No Data |
| Urban Charter | Lee A Tolbert | 95 | 0 | 0 |
| Urban Charter | Scuola Vita Nuova | 50 | 0 | 0 |
| Urban Charter | University Academy | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Urban Public | KCKPS | 4800 | 284 | Unsure |
| | Totals | 12,883 | 1,092 | 155 |

OUTSTANDING NEED

STUDENTS IN NEED OF CONNECTIVITY

Based on the survey results, as of early Spring there were 12,883 students in need of internet connectivity solutions across the 25 school systems that participated in the Spring 2020 study. 1,100 of these students were from Urban charter schools, 6,857 students were from rural public schools and the remaining 4,800 students were from Urban Public Schools. As of May 2021, the connectivity need has dramatically decreased with 100 students in need in urban charter schools, 55 in rural public schools and 0 students remaining in need in urban public schools (please note the data reflects a fluctuation of schools that participated in the survey).

STUDENTS IN NEED OF DEVICES

The need for devices dropped significantly from the spring to fall in 2020. However, the need has increased since our last assessment. This is, in part, due to the need to repair or replace devices that have now reached the end of their life-cycle because of increased usage in the past year.

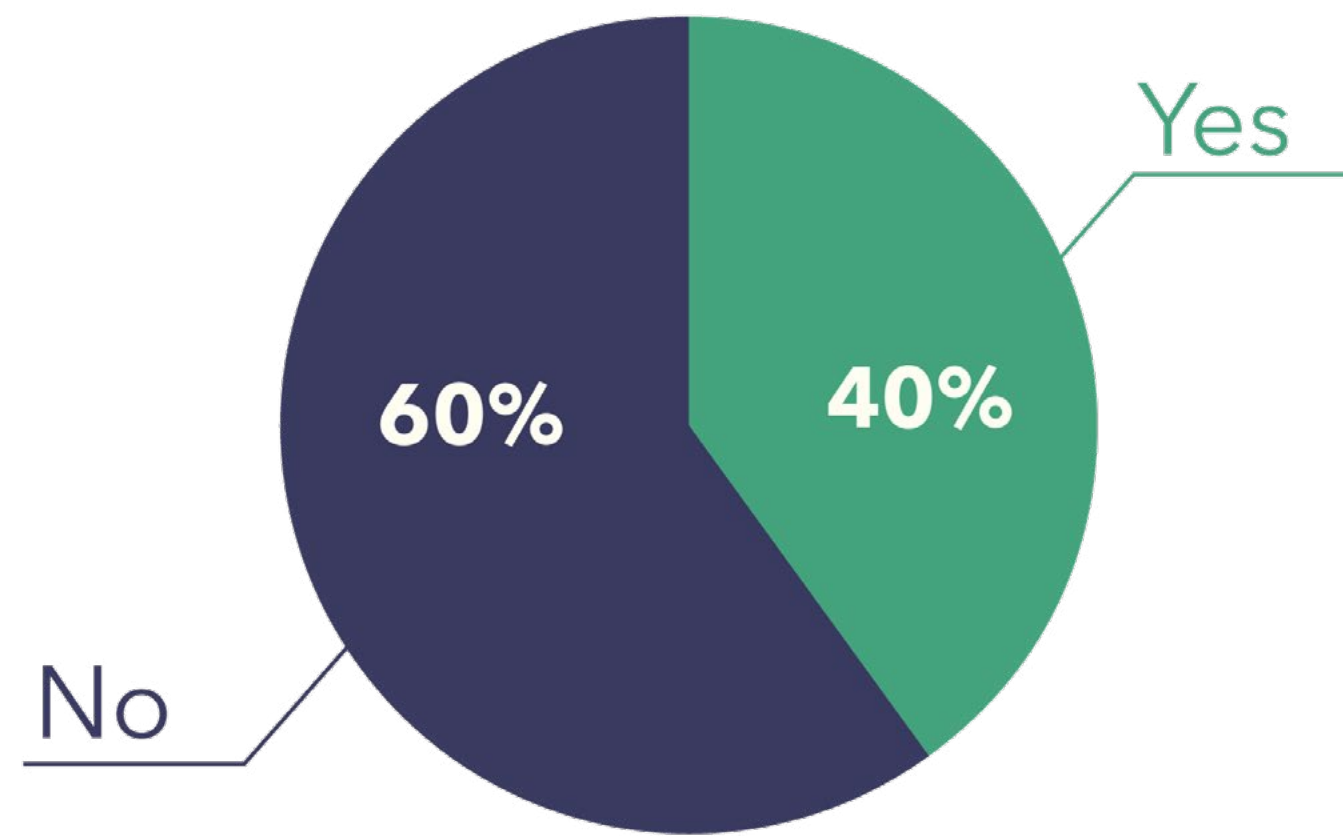
Connectivity Need

| SCHOOL TYPE | SPRING 2020 | FALL 2020 | SPRING 2021 |
|-----------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| Urban Charter | 1215 | 208 | 100 |
| Rural/Suburban Public | 6868 | 600 | 55 |
| Urban Public | 4800 | 284 | Unsure |
| TOTAL | 12883 | 1092 | 155 |

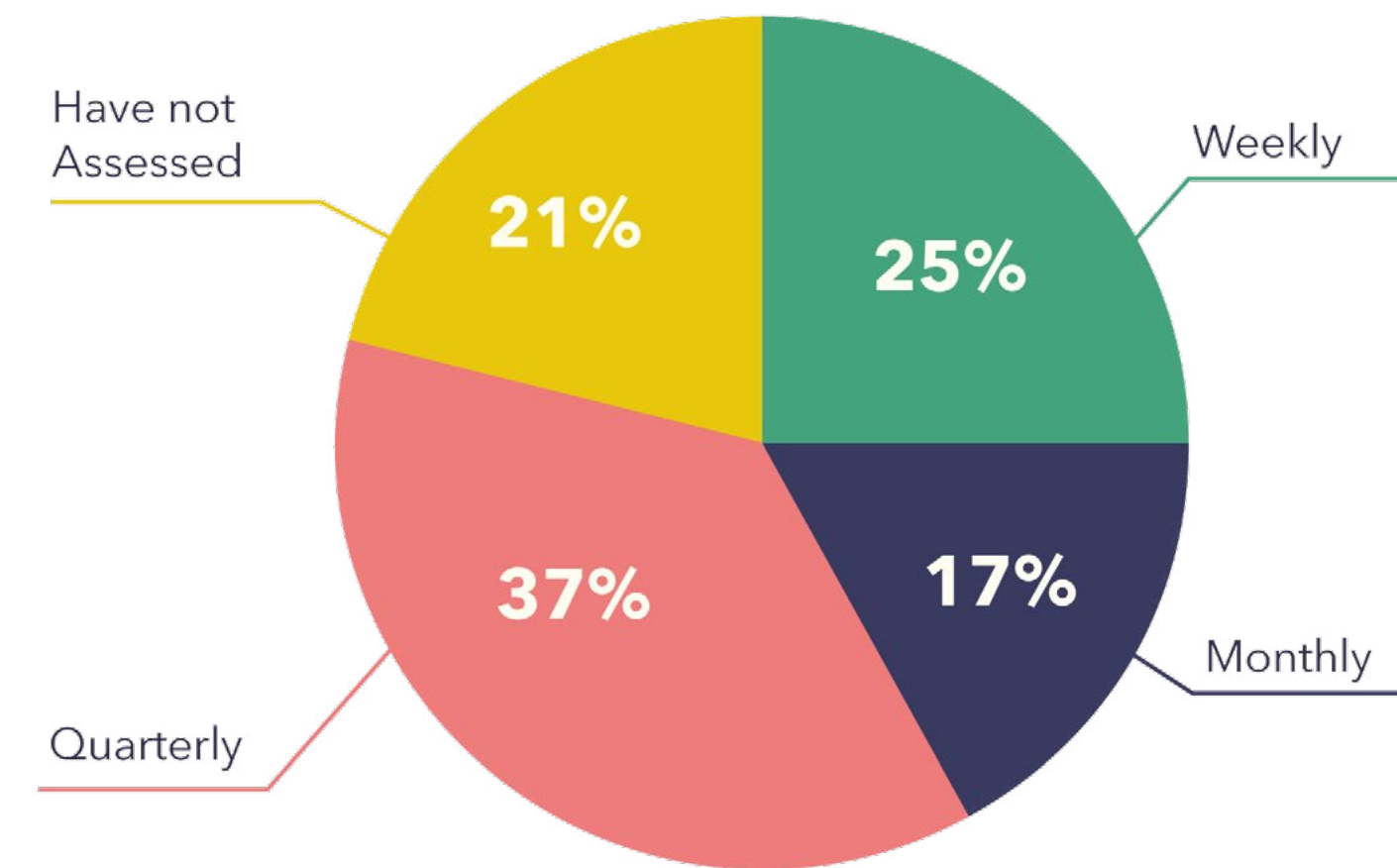
Device Need

| SCHOOL TYPE | SPRING 2020 | FALL 2020 | SPRING 2021 |
|-----------------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| Urban Charter | 144 | 0 | 0 |
| Rural/Suburban Public | 2161 | 180 | 480 |
| Urban Public | 0 | 75 | 0 |
| TOTAL | 2305 | 255 | 480 |

Do you currently have students who need internet connectivity?



How frequently do you assess your student's connectivity needs?



WE WOULD ANTICIPATE THAT THE NEED FOR INTERNET/CONNECTIVITY WILL GO DOWN DURING THE 2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR, SO LONG AS THE CONDITION OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CONTINUES TO IMPROVE THIS SUMMER AND FALL.

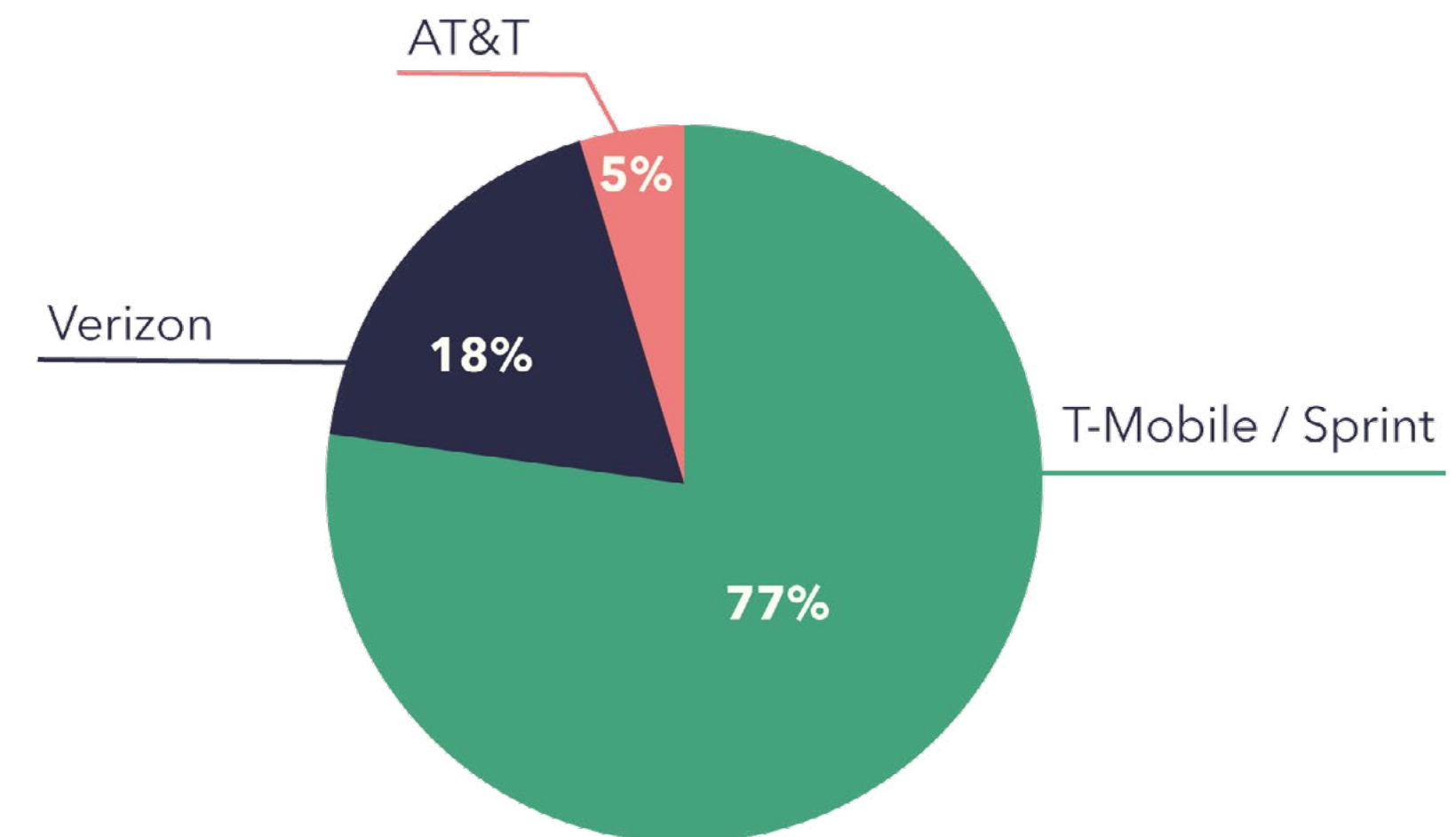
CURRENT EFFORTS

SCHOOL PROVIDED INTERNET FOR FAMILIES

One hundred percent of the schools that participated in the survey have provided solutions for students since distance learning began in March of 2020. Of those schools, Urban charter schools provided 2,082 devices, Urban Public schools provided 4,000 devices and Rural Public schools provided 1,165 devices to students .

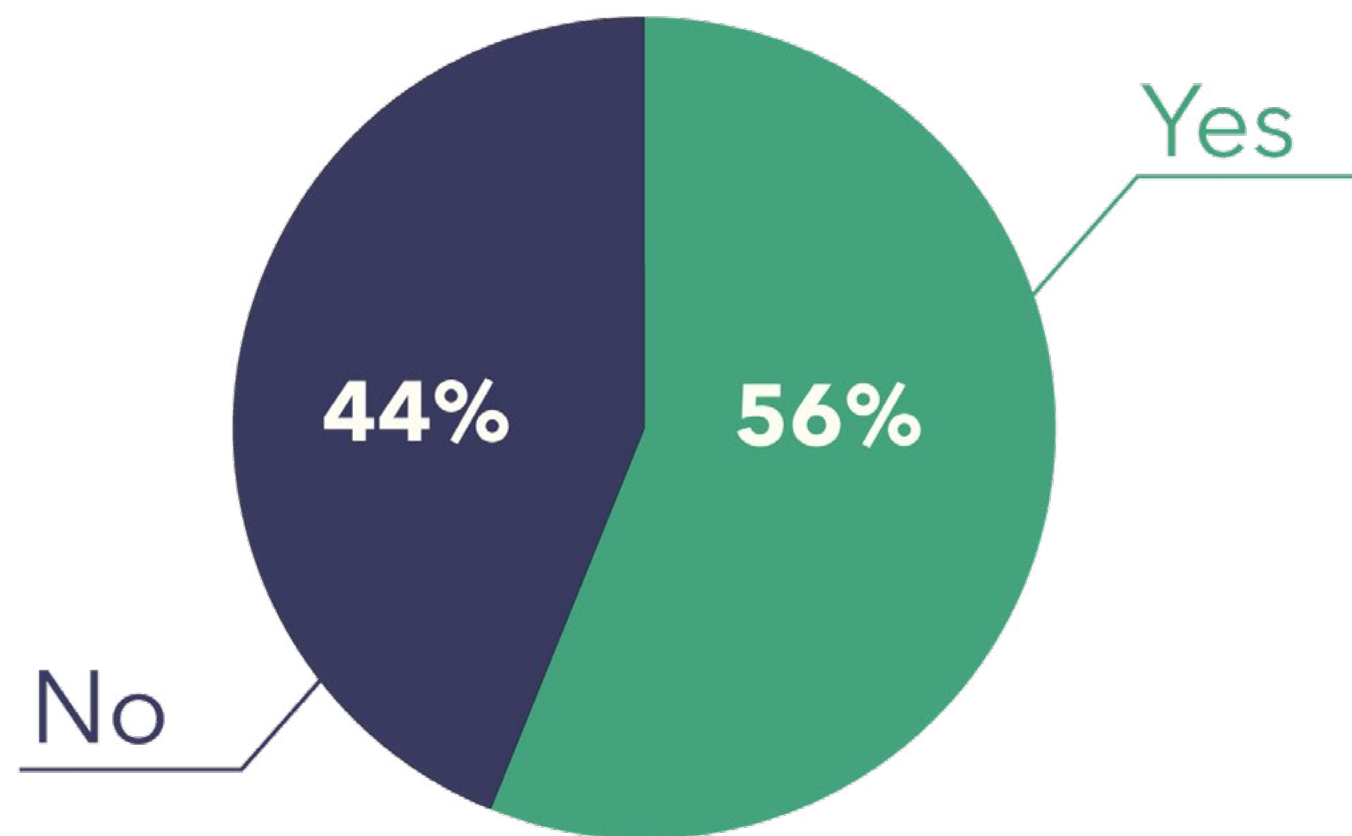
| SCHOOL TYPE | DEVICES PREVIOUSLY PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL |
|-----------------------|---|
| Urban Charter | 1165 |
| Rural/Suburban Public | 2082 |
| Urban Public | 4000 |
| TOTAL | 7247 |

Which internet or connectivity provider was used to connect students?

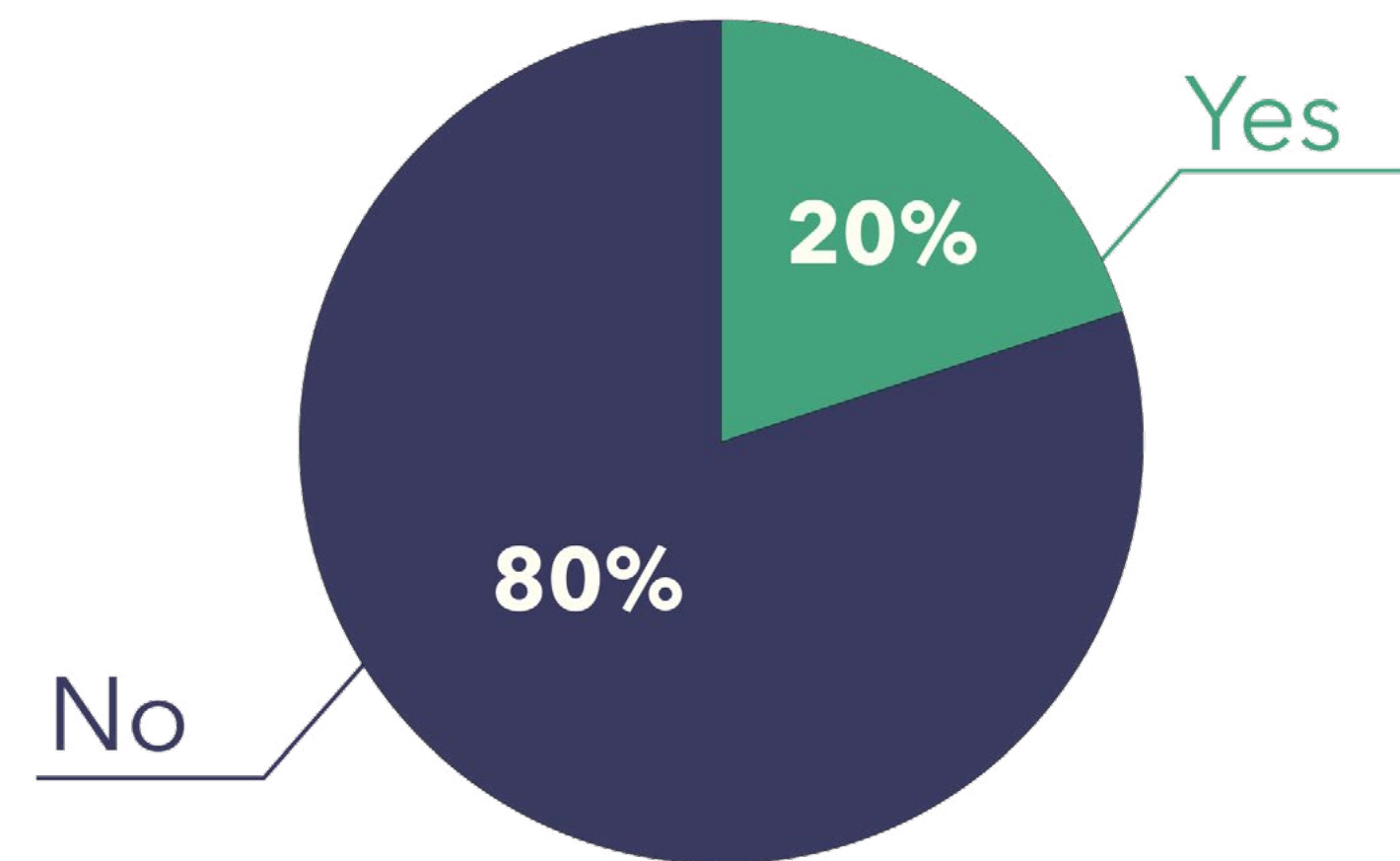


LONG-TERM PLANS

Has your school district created a long-term connectivity and/or virtual learning plan?



Do you plan to implement a hybrid learning model for the 2021-2022 school year?



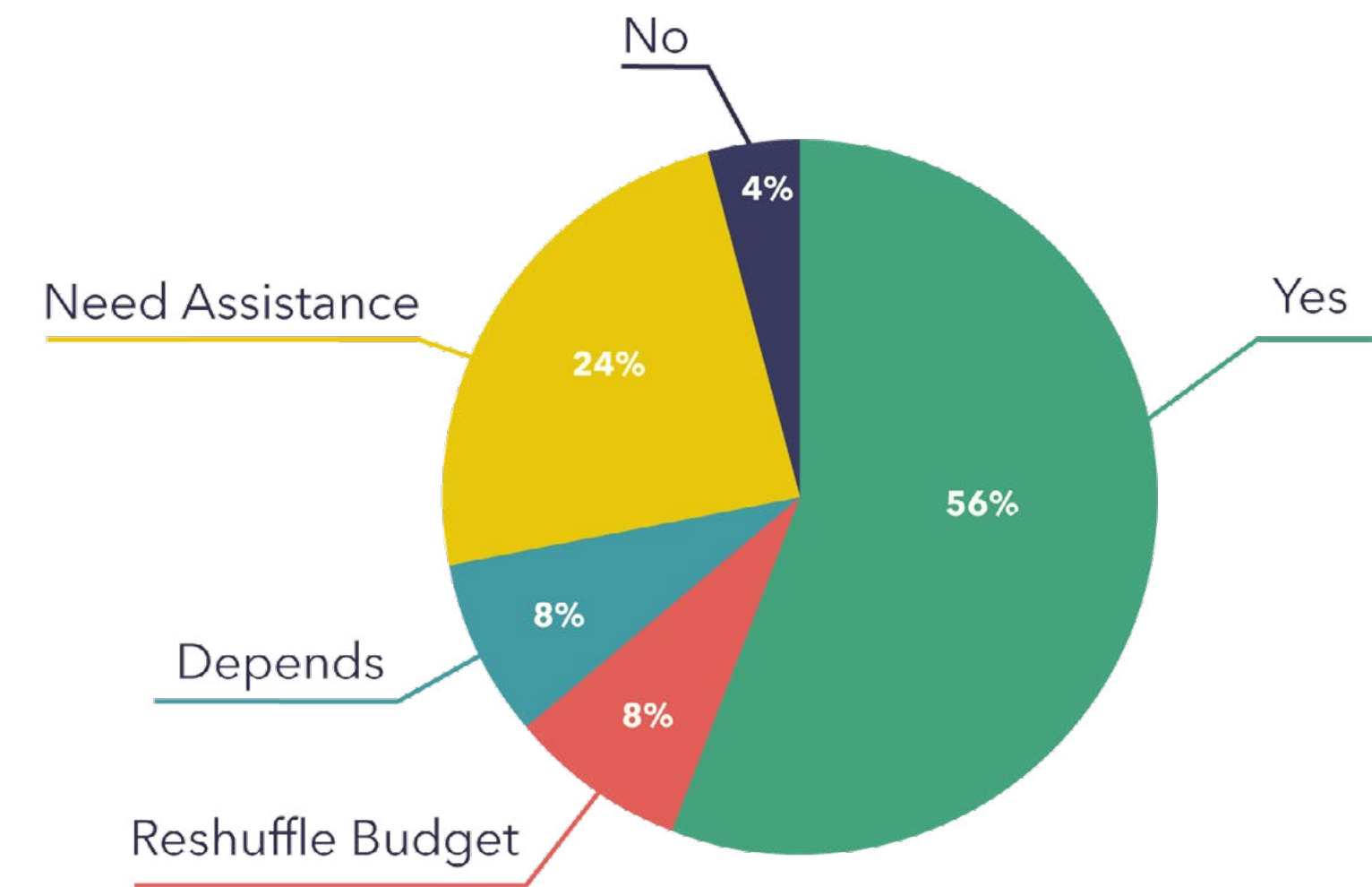
FINANCING INTERNET SOLUTIONS

When surveyed, 56% of schools told us that they are able to provide support for the next year. Another 8% of schools indicated that they will be able to provide internet solutions over the next year; however, this will require them to significantly reshuffle their budget. Additionally, 24% of schools will need assistance to cover the cost and are exploring different grant options. Another 8% were uncertain about the costs due to the uncertainty of the need for remote learning next school year. Finally, 4% of schools indicated that they would not be able to afford the cost.

School leaders are continuing to grapple with the cost of providing internet solutions to students for another year. Whether or not schools can afford to provide internet access for students, they are all treating connectivity as a necessity. Many schools are reshuffling their budgets and looking for funding through grants from the CARES Act and other internet service providers (AT&T and T-Mobile). One school leader noted that “ We have to, but we are seeking funding for this service through grants and donations”

The cost for schools to continue to provide internet connectivity is \$480,400. The majority of that cost is at urban charter schools (\$440,400). Kansas City Kansas Public Schools indicated that they were still uncertain what their total cost would be for the next year. Among those schools that provided a dollar amount to their connectivity costs, the average cost per school was \$34,229.

Can you afford the financial cost of keeping your students connected to the internet for the next 12 months?



Cost of Connectivity

| SCHOOL TYPE | Cost |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Urban Charter | \$440,400 |
| Rural/Suburban Public | \$40,000 |
| Urban Public | Unsure |
| TOTAL | \$480,400.00 |

RECOMMENDATIONS

Schools are not the best advocates to guide this work, nor do they have the resources to fulfill the needs

Schools have notably run the race this year to fulfill the needs of families' internet and connectivity needs. In the Spring of 2020, there was an overwhelming need of 2,305 students that were in need of devices for remote learning. At the last report in Spring of 2021, that need has dramatically dropped to 480 students. As we applaud schools for taking the time to listen to their families, reallocate budgets, partner with internet service providers and move into online instruction with little notice; we feel there is more to do. Schools have overcome so many obstacles to continue the learning for students. However, if more resources were available we may have an even better view of closing the digital divide here. Where do these resources lie and who should continue to advocate for the digital divide?

Advocates for closing the digital divide may not be best appropriated from within the school environment. Schools have taken large hits in academic knowledge this school year and will

need to continue to build and repair the learning loss. While schools are focusing on training teachers in differentiation, building skills and personalizing learning due to the many levels of needs in their classroom, Schools may not be able to continue to prioritize connecting all students.

In short, schools have a serious lack of resources for schools to continue to make this a priority in schools. Schools are navigating, covid safe classrooms, rigorous cleaning and an increase in social and emotional learning with resources that were already limited. The role of advocating for digital divide, would be better placed upon the community. The complexities of the digital divide pain points can not rest solely in the school's lane; it is instead a pain point for the entire community. According to our 2021 Spring Connectivity Survey responses, administrators have invested in additional training and professional development for teachers, hired additional staffing, and purchased virtual platforms to ease the transition to remote learning.

While schools have solved pain points in a reactive phase, we will need more sustainable proactive solutions to continue to meet the needs of families in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Community Partners could now take the lead and offer solutions for the digital divide in the community.

Community Partners can begin by spreading the awareness of the resources that are available already. For example, our Connectivity Guide discusses the EBB, Emergency Broad Band Program that launched on May 12th needs awareness before funds run out. Families that are disconnected and out of touch with schools may not even know of the various services that are available within the community already. We need the help of the community to outreach to families what resources are available, who qualifies for the resources and how to get signed up to get those resources. We need community partners to get the word out about the resources that are available; by housing events that inform and assist families to enroll in services that they need.



CONCLUSION

The results of the connectivity needs survey provide a real look at how schools have truly advocated for their students and found a way to keep educating amidst a worldwide pandemic. While schools have taken on the burden of navigating teaching remotely and managing resources for families; schools need time to get back to their original purpose; educating our students.

School districts across the metro have emphasized the challenges of providing internet and technology for students. From a year of finding affordable hotspots, to finding ways to keep families connected to the internet and the rise of devices that will need to be serviced or replaced.

To achieve sustainable digital equity, we will need to implement a dynamic, multi-faceted strategy—one that leverages philanthropy, innovation and public policy. We must continue philanthropic emergency relief efforts, while building urgently toward a more sustainable future.