

SURVEY REPORT: Q3 2020

# BUSINESS LEADERS ON THE HOMEWORK GAP

 **BUSINESSFORWARD**  
FOUNDATION

# INTRODUCTION

Business Forward works with more than 100,000 business leaders across the U.S. We cover a range of issues, including education reform, health care, tax reform, trade, infrastructure, clean energy, intellectual property, and immigration. We organize local round-tables, Washington fly-ins, national conference calls, and training webinars. We also help business leaders work with local media, publish op-eds, and submit testimony to government agencies.

For the past two years, we've worked with mayors, school boards, and state and local officials on education reform, with particular emphasis on how to prepare graduates for the "future of work." Nearly 10,000 business leaders participated in this programming.

As the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, we shifted to distance learning, with particular emphasis on how to ensure that students from low-income households have adequate access to laptops, a broadband connection, online classes, and digital training to make the most of them. Experts refer to this challenge as the "homework gap." To help communities close the homework gap, we produced an issue brief on potential solutions and conducted briefings with policymakers on funding options for distance learning in ongoing COVID-19 relief legislation.

This survey report features some of the testimony our business leaders provided in surveys and during our briefings. We have organized their comments into seven common themes:

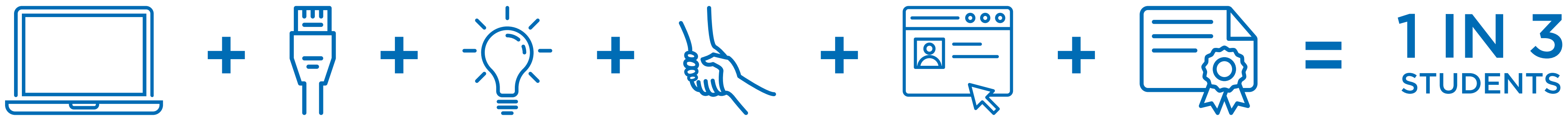
1. **Global Competitiveness**
2. **Future of Work**
3. **Level Playing Field**
4. **Rural Digital Divide**
5. **Long-Term Return on Investment**
6. **Individualized Learning**
7. **Companies Get Involved & Other Solutions**

If you are interested in helping schools in your community deliver quality distance learning, we are here to help. Please contact us at [info@businessfwd.org](mailto:info@businessfwd.org).

# HOMEWORK GAP 101

1. America's K-12 schools performed poorly before COVID-19. The pandemic just made it worse.

2. To learn from home, a student needs a laptop, broadband, digital literacy, parental assistance, a school offering online curriculum, and teachers who know how to use it.



3. This past semester only about one in three students met all of these requirements: 44 million of America's 56 million K-12 students were unable to learn online, in real-time, and be graded and tracked by their teachers.<sup>1</sup> Educators call this the "homework gap," but "gap" doesn't capture the scale of the problem.

4. Preliminary estimates suggest students will return in fall 2020 with roughly 70% of the learning gains in reading and 50% of the learning gains in math relative to a typical school year.<sup>2</sup> And most teachers will have no way of knowing what lessons each of their students actually learned.

5. To close the homework gap, we must address each of its underlying "gaps" simultaneously: affordable laptops and broadband, curriculum designed for distance learning (and the future of work), and digital training for students, parents, and teachers.

6. It's a massive undertaking that will require significant investment and coordination, but the tools we build and deliver in response to COVID-19 could level the playing field for students from low-income families, improve our workforce, and grow our economy.

# GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

“

Closing the “homework gap” will also ensure that the workforce of the future is well educated, and U.S. education standards do not slip too much farther behind the rest of the world during the COVID-19 period.

”

- ALLISON POST HARRIS  
ATTORNEY,  
MARTENSEN WRIGHT PC  
SACRAMENTO, CA

“

Developing our own pool of high level STEM talent is critical to maintaining our position in the world’s economic rankings as more and more foreign born people return home to establish their own businesses, taking intellectual property with them.

”

- CHRISTOPHER ALDRIDGE  
WEST BLOOMFIELD, MI

“

Closing the homework gap allows our students the fundamentals to make sure our U.S. children stay competitive with their peers in establishing the tools to strengthen and grow the US economy.

”

- MICHAEL SOLOMON  
CEO,  
7TH TRUMPET CLOTHING  
PLAINFIELD, NJ

“

Today’s students in the U.S must have every competitive edge to compete with their foreign peers as they prep for college and enter the workforce. Without these basic digital tools, we will continue to fall behind in STEM education and fail to be a world leader in technology, innovation and entrepreneurship.

”

- DAVID PRYOR JR.  
WASHINGTON, DC

“

If all children have an equal opportunity to learn, they’ll be better qualified to fill skilled jobs. The country and economy will flourish.

”

- MARY ADKINS  
GALVESTON, TX

“

We must educate all our children to have a competitive and productive workforce.

”

- DARCY SKARADA  
KELSEYVILLE, CA

“

Our future students need all the help to be future leaders and global competitors.

”

- DERRICK MOORE  
CEDAR HILL, TX

“

The pandemic has disrupted countless kids’ education and our country simply cannot afford to waste any more time. Education = economic growth and competitive success.

”

- JUSTIN M. CRASTO SR.  
PRINCIPAL,  
IT REVENUE MANAGEMENT CORP.  
BEDFORD, NY

# FUTURE OF WORK

“ The “New Economy” is coming sooner than we thought. In fact, it’s here, and the only way to participate is online and that requires broadband and a laptop. ”

- JOSEPH GRAHAM  
NORMAN, OK

“ Without these fundamental skills, kids will never have the chance to develop the advanced skills needed in the 21st-century workforce. This impacts individuals, organizations and our entire economy. ”

- TOM PIPAL  
SENIOR PARTNER,  
PIPAL, HALL ET AL  
PARKER, CO

“ We need solutions, not robots. Without every creative mind educated we will not grow our way out of the huge hole we are in. ”

- CINDY OLSON  
VENICE, CA

“ Closing the “homework gap” has the potential to produce a greater number of ideas to [fix] America’s problems by having input from educated minds. Those with the tools are more likely to succeed than those who are not equipped with 21st century tools. ”

- ADRIANA CLARK  
PROJECT DIRECTOR,  
SOUTHEAST REGION SBTRC  
NORTH MIAMI BEACH, FL

“ Flexible students become resilient employees and that workforce will bring efficiency, productivity and value-added work habits. We are on the brink of a quantum shift in customer service and customer centric workforce roles. Our students must be prepared to shape and assume those roles. ”

- VERNON MOORE  
WARSAW, NC

“ Our workforce is the most important part of our economy and without educational equality, our workforce is lacking in the tools they need to be their best. Our future needs our help. ”

- CAREY BAKER  
PARKER, CO

“ It will strengthen the workforce if and only if the educational system is aligned with the tech needs to fill jobs that need to get filled, especially those that are empty due to skills mismatch. And for other jobs that are forecasted to get created in the future, with COVID 19 as one of many catalysts. ”

- RUSSELL KENNY  
PRESIDENT/CEO,  
R K 2 ENTERPRISES, LLC  
GREENWICH, CT

## LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

“ [C]losing the homework gap [will] create an inclusive environment for the creation of well qualified workforce components... We must... enable every American to achieve their highest potential. ”

- BENJAMIN BACON  
OWNER,  
PLANE SPACE DESIGN  
SAVANNAH, GA

“ Right now, the gap between private school and public school education is widening as well, so children whose parents can afford to pay for education are receiving an even better (and more) education than those who cannot. ”

- ALLISON POST HARRIS  
ATTORNEY,  
MARTENSEN WRIGHT PC  
SACRAMENTO, CA

“ [C]losing the “homework gap” will... help ensure equality in education by providing what has not been defined as a necessity for a sustainable life in this context. ”

- JESSICA BROWN  
INNOVATOR,  
PILIFE  
HOUSTON, TX

“ [We must] level the playing field from which to develop knowledge, skills, confidence, motivation to attain competency, dependability across the board. ”

- CARMEN DE OCAMPO  
DIRECTOR OF FUNDING & BUSINESS DEV.,  
PRIME GLOBAL FUNDING GROUP  
BOCA RATON, FL

“ It’s critical that we close the “homework gap” to ensure educational equity. ”

- BETH GELFOND  
MARKETING CONSULTANT  
NEW YORK, NY

“ Online learning and support can be a wonderful adjunct but must have the resources behind it to ensure equity across the socio-economic spectrum. Resources need to be put in place to make sure that students and families have the tools and knowledge to make the most of alternative learning options. ”

- KJERSTIN KLEIN  
CCO,  
WILLI'S SKI AND BOARD SHOPS  
PITTSBURGH PA

“ [S]chool board[s] and our leaders need to make the initiative to fix the systemic problem that has faced our black children nationwide; every child should have a laptop at home no matter what, this is the IT age and we need to equip our children with [the resources] necessary to learn and compete in this era. ”

- DELSIA BROOKS  
CEO,  
PANGEA GRILL INC.  
LOXAHATCHEE, FL

## LEVEL PLAYING FIELD (CONTINUED)

“ Adequate broadband is critical for students to do online research and collaborate with other students, especially for those in rural communities. Without it, students are disadvantaged and will fall further and further behind. ”

- DAVID PRYOR JR.  
WASHINGTON, DC

“ Closing the “homework gap” will go towards leveling the field for all students to complete their education successfully and go towards the quality education our students are expected to receive. ”

- KYISHA ROSS  
ANN ARBOR, MI

“ Closing the homework gap will enable all students to be on the same level playing field. It is important that all students receive the same tools and advances so that they can be an equitable part of society. We all win when all of our children have the proper education. ”

- SANDRA WILLS  
PRESIDENT,  
THE GRAPHICS HOUSE, LLC  
ATLANTA, GA

“ Giving children in low-income households better education increases the chances that they will be able to break out of the vicious cycle of poverty. ”

- FREYA HARRIS  
ATLANTA, GA

## RURAL DIGITAL DIVIDE

“ Most of [my town’s] students are bussed in - from the surrounding rural areas. Many of these children come from pretty meager means... Many of our students ... lack broadband, a home computer, and their parents have to work 2-4 jobs just trying to make ends meet. ”

- MARY SHAFFER  
BOYNE CITY, MI

“ [This] gap impacts youth but also the future of rural America. Without the tools to compete the youth in these areas will be left behind. We can do better and must. ”

- TOM MORTENSON  
PRESIDENT,  
MPG  
DETROIT LAKES, MN

# LONG-TERM RETURN ON INVESTMENT

“

Lack of preparation for jobs and careers reduces the size of the potential workforce and creates an underclass that, in time, will be largely unable to support itself financially. Both of these consequences are a drag on our economy.

”

- ELIZABETH JOHNSON-QUAYLE  
WYANDOTTE, MI

“

Closing the homework gap would enable us to have a better-educated, better trained and more diverse workforce with the ability to unleash creativity, unlock economic potential and spur growth.

”

- GERRY BUNDLE  
MANAGING MEMBER,  
STANDHOPE ADVISORY SERVICES  
CASSOPOLIS, MI

“

Just look at the numbers that are left out of the chance to add value. It simply makes common sense to develop a sustainable growth strategy here in the U.S. for all who wish to take part. An open workforce will allow this to happen.

”

- JOE REDDIX  
PRESIDENT/CEO,  
THE REDDIX GROUP, LLC  
HANOVER, MD

“

Education is mandatory for creating growth in all areas of life. With so much knowledge available on the internet, every student should have access to computers and the internet, so education can be available, and school lessons constantly be reinforced by parents, which is where education begins. Access to the internet creates greater opportunity to continue studying anytime at home.

”

- DARRYL DIXON SR.  
CEO,  
DIXON'S DEVELOPMENTS, LLC  
SOUTHFIELD, MI

“

The better educated a nation's population is, the more economic stimulation and less social ills that this nation will experience.

”

- BRYAN BENNETT,  
KENNESAW, GA

“

[Closing the homework gap will] assure the quality of education now and [in] the future.

”

- ANGELO STURINO,  
HARWOOD HEIGHTS, IL

“

We need to ensure that low income families have equal access to computers and broadband to give them a fair chance at academic success. This investment should pay dividends in the future with better educated high school graduates who will be better prepared for post high school education in colleges or tech schools and/or the workforce.

”

- EDWARD BURNELL  
TAMPA, FL



# INDIVIDUALIZED LEARNING

“ The only way to ensure that lessons and concepts are being comprehended is through the completion of tasks on an individual level. Homework shows where a subject matter may need to be reviewed for a better understanding. In households where there is no one to assist or tools are not provided a student is set up to fail in the educational landscape. ”

- MARQUETTE GRANT-BRAGG  
OWNER,  
AFTER 3 EXCLUSIVE CHILD CARE  
NEW YORK, NY

“ [Better online learning] gives every child a chance to learn, grow, and gives each student a platform to be creative in advancing out of whatever situation they come from. ”

- ALICE ROBINSON  
JACKSONVILLE, FL

“ Hybrid learning, in-person and online, is the new normal. All students matter and must be equipped equally to enable education. ”

- SERGIO GASCON  
MONTEREY PARK, CA

“ This initiative will make it possible for all students to be able to continue their education in a Covid or non-Covid situation since much of our society is built around our technological communication and those that do not have access are at a disadvantage under any circumstances. ”

- KENNETH WEBER  
IRVING, TX

“ [W]e need an improved and workable system to teach students to think on their feet... ”

- KATHY SPERA  
TYLER, TX

## COMPANIES GET INVOLVED & OTHER SOLUTIONS

“

We need “private” volunteers or paid individuals to work with every single low income student. No exception. At our college we could find thousands of professors and students to volunteer. All we need to do is ask.

”

- RAY RICKMAN  
CO-FOUNDER/EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
STAGES OF FREEDOM  
PROVIDENCE, RI

“

Closing the gap can be initiated through corporations creating suitable programs for adolescents projects within the schools. Adopt a school district and implore curriculum that are business / trade based for the growth of the economy.

”

- KAY WILSON  
CEO,  
POCRR  
GARLAND, TX

“

Make sure those without are given a laptop, and that commissioners & mayors in cities without broadband include funds in their budget to provide for those. Install immediately before school begins. [For] those who have no parents to assist [them], offer it though volunteer tutors.

”

- VICKIE RHONE,  
POMPANO BEACH, FL

[INFO@BUSINESSFWD.ORG](mailto:INFO@BUSINESSFWD.ORG)

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[BUSINESSFWD.ORG](http://BUSINESSFWD.ORG)

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1155 CONNECTICUT AVENUE NW  
SUITE 1000  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036

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202.861.1270

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