



DIGITAL POLICY GLOSSARY

Key Terms for Education Policy Leaders

ExcelinEd Policy Toolkit - 2022

Now more than ever, digital policies have moved to the forefront of education because they relate to how we ensure that students and teachers have access to the devices and internet speeds they need to learn at home and at school. As the federal government begins to roll out new investments to expand access to broadband services across the country, it is critical that state policymakers and education leaders use the same language to participate in collaborative discussions and develop well-informed digital policy strategies. We hope these key terms provide a fundamental knowledge to facilitate that conversation to implement a comprehensive approach to expanding digital access across their state.

KEY TERMS GLOSSARY

Affordability is just what it sounds like - the ability for individuals to afford broadband *and* devices. A recent federal initiative, the [Affordable Connectivity Program](#) (ACP), aims to increase affordability for lower-income families. ExcelinEd offers free, **customizable** [resources](#) for education policymakers to share information about this program with schools and districts in their states.

Broadband describes high-capacity internet access service that is always available, through methods such as fiber, DSL, satellite or Wi-Fi. It does not include dial-up internet. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) defines broadband as having capacity for at least 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload (you might see this written as 25/3). That capacity is sufficient for most internet activities, such as browsing websites and streaming videos. However, higher capacities—for upload speed in particular—may be necessary in households with multiple people conducting videocalls at the same time. For this reason, recent federal grants are setting the bar at 100 Mbps download/20 Mbps upload.

Community Anchor Institutions (CAI) are physical locations where individuals can go for digital literacy training or that can serve as hubs for digital access by distributing devices or connectivity solutions, like Wi-Fi hotspots. As defined in federal grant applications, these include public schools, libraries (local and state), public housing complexes, community colleges or other institutes of higher education, and any other nonprofit or governmental community support organization. CAIs are eligible for digital-related funding under certain federal and state broadband grant programs.

Coverage Maps refer to maps that display whether broadband is available in a community. The FCC [publishes](#) this data, but, unfortunately, there are known challenges with the level of detail these maps display. If just one location in a census block is able to access broadband, the entire block is listed as covered. The FCC is working on new [broadband DATA maps](#) to address this issue, but it is not yet clear when those maps will be available. Some states—including [Georgia](#), [Tennessee](#) and [Maine](#)—devoted state resources early on to ensure more accurate maps are available and, consequently, to better target funding efforts for expanding access. Additionally, the American Community Survey [publishes](#) consumers' perceptions of their access to broadband.



Devices in this context refer to desktop, laptop or tablet computers, but not smartphones. Smartphones are not well-suited to in-depth educational activities, such as writing an essay, conducting a research project or writing a lab report. This limitation holds true in other fields beyond education, and it is why having a smartphone alone does not constitute “access to a device” when we talk about digital access and digital inclusion.

Digital Access encompasses multiple components that need to be in place for individuals to use broadband for social, economic or educational purposes. Access to broadband refers to whether at least one internet service provider offers broadband to the individual’s location, typically their residence. This is what most people mean when they say “access.” However, affordability and having an appropriate device are other requirements for having full digital access.

Digital Adoption is when individuals actually subscribe to broadband services. Some students’ families may have access to broadband and be able to afford it but choose not to purchase it because they do not see a need to have it in their household or for other personal reasons.

Digital Equity occurs when all people and communities have the digital access they need to fully participate in social and economic activities.

Digital Inclusion is a broad term that includes both digital access and digital literacy, as well as training available to promote digital literacy, for all individuals in the U.S.

Digital Literacy means the skills to use technology to find information you need, evaluate its usefulness, create and organize information, communicate with others and maintain your digital privacy and security. This is sometimes referred to as “digital skills.”

E-Rate is a federal program through the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) that began in 1996. It provides discounted internet and other telecommunication services to schools and libraries.

Internet Service Provider (ISP) refers to entities that provide broadband services. These entities include traditional ISPs such as AT&T, Comcast, Verizon and other private companies and non-traditional ISPs such as an electric cooperative, nonprofit organization, public-private partnership, public or private utility or local government.

Underserved Community is one in which some sort of broadband is available for most locations, but the broadband does not meet certain requirements for capacity (100 Mbps download/20 Mbps upload according to federal grant guidance) and latency.

Unserved Community is one in which most locations do not have access to broadband with capacity for at least 25 Mbps download/3 Mbps upload.



Sources

Notice of funding opportunities for [BEAD](#) and [DEA](#) federal grants

FCC [description](#) of e-rate