



CONSORTIUM
OF FLORIDA EDUCATION
FOUNDATIONS



COVID Education Innovation in Florida

Digital Equity Project (Hillsborough County)

When the shelter at home order came and with the shift to remote learning, Hillsborough Education Foundation (HEF) immediately aligned resources and personnel to support digital equity for students. A Digital Equity Team was created and tasked with finding solutions to quickly provide internet for students without access. Mobile Wi-Fi devices were deployed on school buses and mobile vans, but significant challenges remained with inadequate signals into cement buildings, limited bandwidth of devices to support multiple students using Zoom at the same time, and the national shortage of Wi-Fi devices.

During this time, the Hillsborough County School District deployed 46,000 computers for student use, but only half of those computers were accessed. Through HEF's Digital Equity Team's discussion with families, it was learned that the primary reasons for not accessing the District-provided devices were lack of internet or lack of knowledge of how to use the technology. HEF realized they needed to do more than just provide internet access--educating students and parents in the use of technology was a critical component of the work that needed to be provided.

HEF expanded Digital Equity Initiatives in October 2020 with a grant through the Children's Board of Hillsborough County for staff to provide education and technological resources for K-5 students participating in eLearning. This funding allowed an increase in staff with four full-time employees, including a Program Director and eLearning Coaches, and part time program assistant. Through this funded program, a referral is made by the student's school by the social worker, eLearning teacher, guidance counselor or administrator, and then an eLearning coach completes a home visit with the family. During the home visit the eLearning coach completes a technology assessment, provides necessary technological equipment (hotspot and computer), educates family members on eLearning applications and gives instruction on basic computer operations and cybersecurity. The eLearning coach follows-up with the family to provide support and ongoing assessment of growth in parent engagement related to their child's learning. This program provides educational opportunities for parents through live webinars, recorded video tutorials and handouts for subjects including: Parent Forums, Canvas, Keeping Kids Safe Online, Microsoft Operating Basics, Tips for Enhancing eLearning for Your Child, Setting up an Email Account, MySpot Sign-up and SDHC Free Office 2016 Download for Families.

HEF simultaneously continues to secure funding to help students who fall outside of the grant restrictions but need internet or a device to complete school assignments. A Digital Access Coordinator, another digital equity dedicated team member, receives referrals from schools and other community organizations. The technology provided by both programs supports internet for a year and a personal computer for the family to keep.

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Other Resources:

[UF Lastinger Center's Virtual Listening Tour 2020 Report](#)

[Tampa Bay State of the Region 2020 Regional Equity Report](#)

The Consortium elevates the impact of Florida's local education foundations through advocacy and providing a collegial community for ongoing learning, shared resources and support. These nonprofit organizations are aligned with nearly every school district in our state and collectively they raise more than \$80 million annually to innovate learning, power potential and celebrate success.

We believe strong collaboration is essential to ensure school success. Our effort to capture, elevate and share education innovations discovered amid the disruption of the pandemic is offered in that spirit.

Our **Top 10 Takeaways: COVID Education Innovation** report can be accessed at educationinnovationspotlight.com