

## **Connect Campaign: Closing the Digital Divide in San Antonio ISD**

### **A partnership between San Antonio ISD and the SAISD Foundation**

#### **SUMMARY**

San Antonio ISD (SAISD) faced an unprecedented challenge in navigating the COVID-19 crisis given that nearly 90 percent of the families it serves live in poverty. Families look to the school system for not just educational services, but also social services. Within social services, SAISD's two most pressing issues were food delivery and securing both devices and hotspots to ensure that all of our students can connect to their teachers, their classmates and school resources. For the summer months, connectivity to summer learning opportunities is critical as well. SAISD immediately set a plan in place to address both food and device/ connectivity needs.

Just after spring break, the SAISD Academics and Technology teams mobilized quickly and diligently to ensure that there was, and continues to be, asynchronous and synchronous digital content and connectivity to 1) provide robust learning opportunities for students and 2) the tools to deliver the content. At the same time, the SAISD Foundation began rallying the community to raise funds critical for the associated connectivity needed.

While operating in response to this crisis, the opportunity presented itself to close the digital divide for our students now and on a go-forward basis. The District's strategic plans calls for having all schools operate in a 1:1 format with regards to technology, meaning that each of their students has access to a personal device. With this new technology ratio, SAISD is committed to providing the differentiated, blended and individualized learning opportunities needed by its 48,000 plus students. Therefore, the COVID-19 crisis provided an opportunity to accelerate a 3-year-plan to a matter of weeks.

#### **CURRENT STATUS**

Devices:

In the wake of the crisis, SAISD Technology acted quickly to have schools issue the existing inventory on their campuses (Chromebooks and iPads) to students--approximately 17,000 devices. They also secured an additional 30,000 Chromebooks at a cost of just over \$6M (with hopes to reimburse those funds from a future bond). When those additional devices arrived in late March, they expedited delivery to the campuses where devices were issued to students in need. [See video here.](#)

Connectivity:

With devices in hand, SAISD looked to the SAISD Foundation to raise the funds needed for Wi-Fi connectivity which was not able to be supported with current or future bond funds. Without Wi-Fi, the devices were useless for distance learning. Prior to COVID-19, many students who did not have internet in the home utilized school-based internet, libraries and restaurants with free Wi-Fi. Stay at home orders prevented students from accessing these options, making hotspots even more critical. At a time when hotspots were quickly becoming hard to find, SAISD Technology secured 3,500 hotspots which provide unlimited data for two devices in the home

at 4G LTE. These devices have been distributed at the school level and additional devices, with more limited capacity and lower speeds, continue to be issued by SAISD Technology as circumstances for families change and access is needed.

The monthly connectivity fees are being paid for through philanthropic dollars with the goal of providing 12 months of service at a cost of approximately \$25 a month per hotspot, or \$250 for a year of connectivity (after accounting for an expected two-months of coverage from COVID-19 relief funds). The total need is \$1M. Major contributors and funds raised to date can be viewed at [SAISDFoundation.com/donate](https://SAISDFoundation.com/donate) through the end of this school year.

### **MOVING FORWARD**

The need for student learning continues throughout the summer. Accordingly, students who have registered to attend an SAISD school in fall 2020 will be able to keep their devices over the summer and access learning content pushed out from the District.

Although the divide is large, the true long-term need is even deeper. Earlier this school year, SAISD provided thousands of hotspots to high school students through prior grant funding awards, and additional awards enabled a number of middle schools to go 1:1 with technology. Without those additional philanthropic investments, the lift this spring would have been much larger – perhaps insurmountable.

With 12 months of connectivity in place, it is our hope that the collective wisdom and resources of our San Antonio and Bexar County community can come together to provide meaningful long-term solutions to closing the digital divide. The global pandemic has shown a new light the depth of this divide, but **we know that together we can close the divide** for the future success of our students and our community.