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Response to Request for Information
Public Education Committee
Texas House of Representatives

Interim Charge 2: Determine if any barriers exist in providing a digital learning environment for all children, including an evaluation of the competitive marketplace for blended learning products and services. Evaluate the effectiveness of the Technology and Instructional Materials Allotment (TIMA) in providing districts the resources necessary to equip students with instructional materials and technology, including in the review all programs and initiatives funded by set asides from the TIMA.

Question 1: Part one: Can a map, detailed list, or other resources be provided that shows where there are gaps in available internet coverage? If so, please provide.

Review of the Problem of Offline Learners
As a result of COVID-19, school districts across the country began relying on students' access to technology and high speed internet to remotely deliver lessons and keep students and teachers connected in Spring 2020. Fall 2020 is not that different, with xxx districts estimated to be delivering virtual only or hybrid school models.

As we would expect, some families, communities, and schools are better connected than others. While many Texas schools have done an incredible amount of work to make at-home, computer-based learning a viable option, we must not forget that millions of Texan households still lack access to high-speed Internet.

Specifically, about 17% of children in Texas reside in households that either do not have an internet subscription in their home or they do not have a computer; that's 1,255,594 children statewide who may face difficulties in new online learning environments.[1]

[1] U.S. Census Bureau (2018). TYPES OF INTERNET SUBSCRIPTIONS BY SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS, 2014-2018 American Community Survey 5-year estimates. Retrieved from https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=internet&g=0400000US48&tid=ACSST5Y2018.S2802&hidePreview=true

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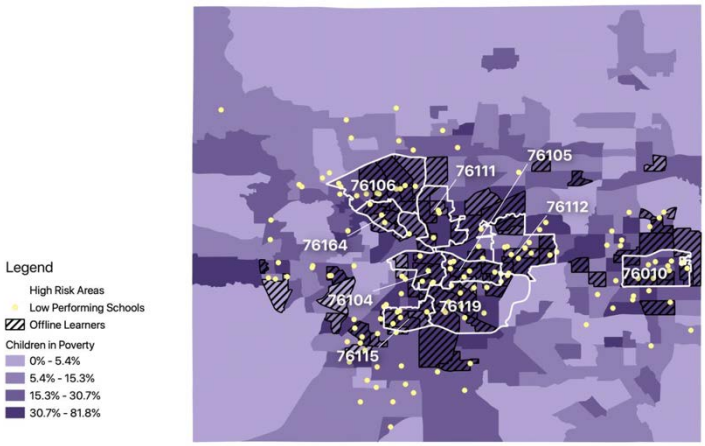
About the Offline Learner Maps

Using 2018-19 CHILDREN AT RISK school rankings data and American Family Survey data from 2018 5-Year Aggregate data, CHILDREN AT RISK created the Offline Learner Maps to highlight areas that have multiple barriers facing children and families attempting to adjust and learn in this new reality.

The purple map shows the level of child poverty in each county (pictured here, Tarrant County), with the darkest purple indicating areas of highest child poverty. Darkest purple is the top quartile (1/4) of percentage of children living below the poverty line.

Identifying Offline Learners, Tarrant County



"Lack of Access to Online Learning" is defined as the percentage of children with no access to a computer or no internet subscription, including broadband, dial up, or wifi. The **black dashed areas** are the areas with the lowest level of access to online learning. The yellow points show the presence of low-performing schools based on the 2018-19 C@R School Rankings.

This second analysis shows neighborhoods in Tarrant County that are of concern due to a convergence of factors: Zip Code

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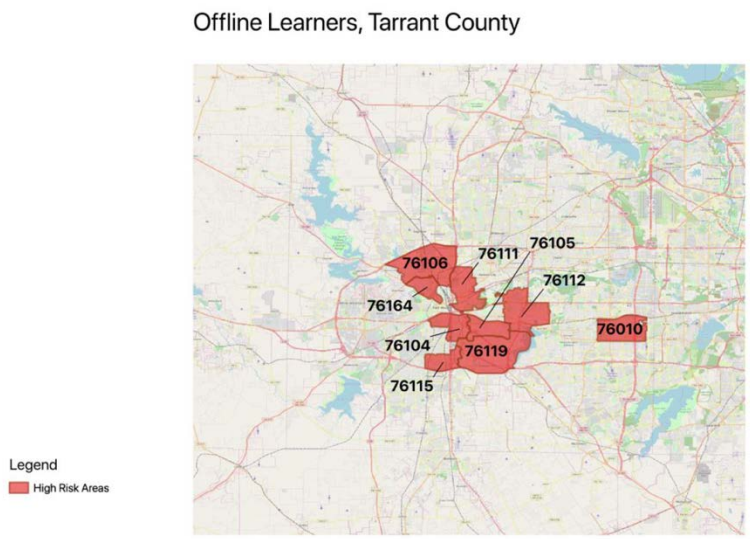
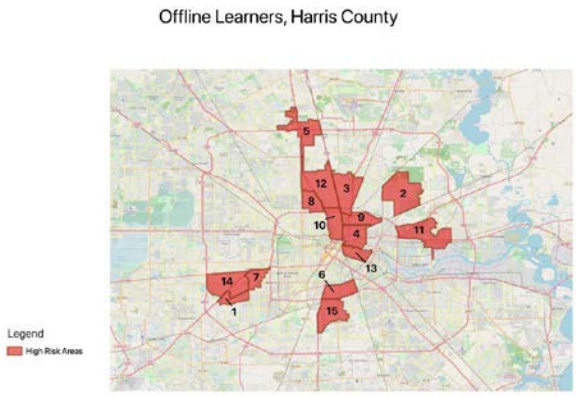


Tabulation Areas (ZCTAs)[2] 76010, 76104, 76105, 76106, 76111, 76112, 76115, 76119, and 76164 had the highest concentration of child poverty, lack of access to online learning, and low-performing schools in Tarrant County.

CHILDREN AT RISK has prepared this analysis for the following counties: Bexar, Dallas, El Paso, Hidalgo, Lubbock, Porter, and Travis. The online learning maps produced by CHILDREN AT RISK were developed at the county level to highlight several cities across Texas (the CHILDREN AT RISK Texas Tour Cities). The methodology used would not translate to the state level as the methodology was developed to look at variations of access within counties.

Seen here, the same analysis of Harris County. To see all of the available maps, click here.



[2] ZIP Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTAs) are generalized territorial representations of United States Postal Service (USPS) ZIP Code service areas. ZIP Codes identify the individual post office or metropolitan area delivery station associated with mailing addresses. USPS ZIP Codes are not actually territorial features but a collection of mail delivery routes. The term ZCTA was created to differentiate between this entity and true USPS ZIP Codes. ZCTAs are used in mapping Census data. ZCTA is a trademark of the U.S. Census Bureau; ZIP Code is a trademark of the U.S. Postal Service.

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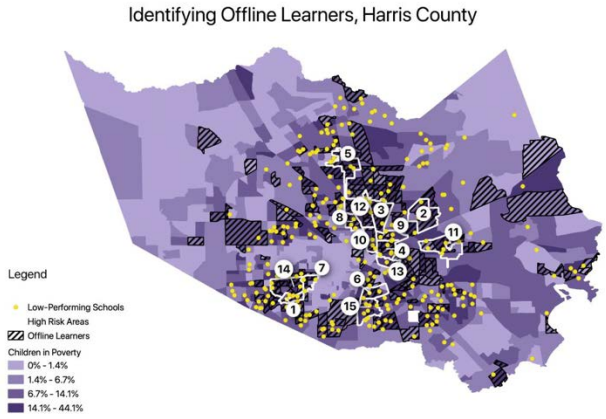

1. Braeburn
2. East Houston
3. Eastex - Jensen Area
4. Greater Fifth Ward
5. Greater Greenspoint
6. Greater OST/South Union
7. Gulfton
8. Independence Heights
9. Kashmere Gardens
10. Near Northside
11. Northshore/Northline
12. Northside
13. Second Ward
14. Sharpstown
15. Sunnyside

Interim Charge 2:
Question 1: Part two: What needs to be done to close this gap?

The COVID-19 pandemic clearly will exacerbate existing educational gaps that exist between children growing up in high poverty populations and those growing up in wealthier neighborhoods. Indeed, a report released by the TEA in June outlines the demographic discrepancy in online academic engagement[3]. Only 85% of economically disadvantaged students were fully engaged with their online curriculum, and over 12% became disengaged, or lost contact with their school completely. In comparison, 95% of non-economically disadvantaged students were fully engaged and just under 4% lost contact with their school.

For Black and Latino/a students, the engagement rates post-pandemic followed the trajectory of economically disadvantaged students closely. Research indicates that low-income students are less likely to have access to internet, or devices, at home. **The data released by TEA further confirms that Texas is segregating economically disadvantaged and minority students by their inability to access what more affluent demographics see as a daily necessity.**

Many in the education community are innovating and going above and beyond to help students stay connected. They cannot be

[3] TEA (2020). Retrieved on August 31, 2020 at https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/covid/covid19-Student-Engagement.pdf.

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expected to weather the transition to online learning alone and without robust state guidance and support. A significant portion of Texas students lack access to technology or internet infrastructure they need to learn online. This in turn suggests greater differences in student performance and the related accountability ratings in the future. Policy makers should account for the effects of the pandemic on accountability ratings when making decisions.

Specific Policy Recommendation #1: Collect and Use Data

Districts and schools located in the identified high-risk areas will need more support than ever before. Ultimately, the state needs to ensure that all districts are tracking and reporting student participation and engagement so that we can begin to understand who is being left out; these data need to be collected and reported at the student level, to include SES, race/ethnicity, disability status, and ELL status. These populations have historically been recognized as our more 'at-risk' student populations, and we cannot fail them now. Texans cannot support the needs of offline students if it cannot find them.

Specific Policy Recommendation #2: Expand Access to Internet and Technology

Offline learners cannot wait. They need access and technology as quickly as possible or they will fall even further behind their connected peers. We know from the most recent Census pulse survey (July 16-21), that 5,739,666 Texas families with children reported that classes were moved to distance learning with 85% of these families reporting they used online resources for learning and 15% reporting they used paper materials that were sent home[4]. Based on data, the Texas Legislature should appropriate additional funds in increase high-speed internet access and provide appropriate tools for students (e.g. laptops or chromebooks) in under-connected schools and communities.

[4] U.S. Census Bureau (2020). Week 12 Household Pulse Survey, July 16 - July 21, 2020 Experimental Data Estimates. Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/demo/hhp/hhp12.html

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