

Field Poll: 25% in California don't have broadband access

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Living in the heart of the nation's technology boom, it's easy for many Bay Area residents to think everyone is well connected to the online world. But a new survey shows that than 1 in 4 Californians doesn't have access to broadband at home - a disparity that analysts say will only widen the gap between the wealthy and poor.

California's goal is to have 80 percent of its homes wired to a broadband connection by 2017, with no single demographic group or region below 70 percent. But it is falling short, as its poorest and non-English-speaking residents don't enjoy the same access to the Internet as its wealthier ones, according to a Field Poll released Tuesday.

While 75 percent of all Californians reported having access to broadband in their home, the percentage plummets among residents who didn't graduate from high school (32 percent); Spanish-speaking Latinos (46 percent), all Latinos (63 percent), people over 65 years old (47 percent), people with disabilities (59 percent) and those with household incomes of less than \$20,000.

Only 60 percent of noncitizens reported broadband access at home, according to the survey.

Not only is it nearly impossible to find a job without basic digital skills, children living in a home without broadband access are rapidly falling behind their peers, analysts said.

"This documents an area where you are creating a two-tiered society - those who have broadband access in their homes and those who don't," said Field Poll director [Mark DiCamillo](#).

The disparity is creating an opportunity gap, said [Sunne Wright McPeak](#), president and CEO of the [California Emerging Technology Fund](#), a nonprofit foundation set up by the [California Public Utilities Commission](#) to increase broadband access. The fund commissioned the survey.

"It is the disadvantaged populations which get the most benefit out of being connected - it transforms their lives in so many ways. It makes it so much easier to get ahead if they are connected," McPeak said.

The poll found that 84 percent of the parents surveyed used their home broadband connection to help their children with homework and 75 percent use it to find information about homework and grades.

It's not enough just to connect to the broadband network through a smartphone - particularly for students, McPeak said. The survey found that 8 percent of Californians are now connected to broadband at home solely through a smartphone.

Public-school students are required to take some tests on a broadband-connected device. McPeak said those without regular experience using one at home will be at a disadvantage.

Plus, she said, "It's hard to write a paper on a phone."

The survey also found that people without a home broadband connection were less likely to conduct financial transactions online, visit a government website, or get medical information or communicate with their doctor.

The survey's findings are based on a Field Poll completed June 5-22. The survey was conducted among a random sample of 2,013 adults. Land and cell lines were used. The survey was administered in six languages and dialects - English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Vietnamese and Korean, and had a margin of error of plus or minus 2.2 percentage points.

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