



NORTH CAROLINA
State Board of Education
Department of Public Instruction

Report to the North Carolina General Assembly

*Statewide Trends in Student Digital
Learning Access § G.S. 115C-102.9(c)*

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INTRODUCTION

The Statewide Trends in Digital Learning Report provides an overview of the current state of digital learning across North Carolina Public School Units (PSUs). The report highlights student access to devices and internet connectivity, both in school and at home, as reported by PSUs. All data referenced in this report is publicly available through the Digital Learning Dashboard at go.ncdpi.gov/DigitalLearningDashboard.

Each year, PSUs submit data through the Student Digital Learning Survey and the North Carolina Digital Learning Media Inventory (NCDLMI) to collect key digital learning metrics related to students, educators, and school infrastructure. These data collections are conducted in accordance with G.S. 115C-102.9(c), which requires the State Board of Education to establish and maintain an electronic dashboard that publicly displays information related to digital learning. It is important to note that all student devices provided by a PSU for in-school or at-home use are set up to protect students from harmful or age-inappropriate content via the state managed web filter and/or the PSU provided filter.

Under statute, each public school unit is required to annually submit to the Department of Public Instruction the categories of information designated by the State Board of Education for inclusion in the Digital Learning Dashboard. At a minimum, the State Board shall require the collection and reporting of the following categories of information:

1. In-school digital device access and student access, including:
 - The number and percentage of students with access to digital devices within schools, disaggregated by PSU, school, and grade level
 - Device source, including whether devices are provided by the PSU or from students' homes
 - Device type, including specifications on the types of devices used
2. Out-of-school digital device access, disaggregated by public school unit, school, and grade level, including:
 - The number and percentage of students with access to digital devices outside of school
 - The source of digital devices, such as those provided by the PSU, the student's home, or both
 - Device type
 - For students without access to devices at home, the primary reason for the lack of access

3. Out-of-school internet connectivity, disaggregated by public school unit, school, and grade level, including:
 - o The number and percentage of students with internet connectivity outside of school, categorized as:
 - Students with connectivity at home
 - Students without connectivity at home but with regular and reliable access to other sources of connectivity
 - o For students without home connectivity, the primary source of internet access outside of school
 - o Type of connectivity, such as broadband, fiber, satellite, or dial-up
 - o For homes without connectivity, the primary reason for the lack of access

This report provides the most current data and programmatic information in alignment with the North Carolina Digital Learning Plan. Data for the Digital Learning Dashboard, as required by G.S. 115C-102.9, is collected by PSUs and reported at multiple aggregation levels, including PSU, school, and grade level. Data collection occurred throughout the school year.

This report reflects responses from 354 Public School Units, including:

- 115 Local Educational Agencies
- 239 Charter, Lab, and Regional Schools

IN-SCHOOL ACCESS TO DEVICES

Access to student devices is critical for maintaining continuity of learning, enabling students to explore, research, and engage in digital instruction throughout the school day. By providing students with consistent access to devices, Public School Units support participation in digital learning opportunities and promote academic growth.

Key findings from the Digital Learning Dashboard and Digital Learning Media Inventory for the 2024–25 school year show that Public School Units reported a total of 1,190,045 student devices available for use statewide.

DEVICE INVENTORY BY TYPE

Of all student devices reported statewide, the distribution by device type is as follows:

- Chrome devices: 90.3%

- Windows devices: 8.7%
- Apple devices: 1%

This distribution reflects a continued statewide emphasis on standardized, portable devices, with Chrome-based devices serving as the primary instructional platform across North Carolina public schools.

TAKE-HOME DEVICE AVAILABILITY

Of the total device inventory:

- 44% of devices are designated as take-home devices
- 56% of devices remain on campus for in-school use only

The majority of take-home devices are Chrome-based, with additional take-home availability among Windows and Apple devices.

Together, these findings demonstrate that North Carolina continues to rely heavily on school-issued, portable devices to support both in-school instruction and extended learning opportunities beyond the school day.

OUT-OF-SCHOOL DEVICE ACCESS

Home access to digital devices includes both school-issued devices that are taken home by students and devices owned by families. Public School Units collect this information through family surveys to better understand student access to technology outside of the school day.

Based on the Student Digital Learning Dashboard summary data, families representing 55,082 students responded to the question regarding student access to digital devices at home.

STUDENT DEVICE ACCESS AT HOME

Among responding families:

- 42% reported their student uses a school-provided device at home
- 33% reported their student uses a family-owned device at home
- 21% reported their student has access to both a school-provided and a family-owned device at home
- 4% reported their student does not have access to a digital device at home

- 1% indicated they preferred not to answer

These results show that the majority of students with home device access rely at least in part on school-issued devices, reinforcing the importance of take-home device programs.

TYPES OF DEVICES ACCESSED AT HOME

Families reporting device access at home identified the following device types. Percentages are based on 14,694 total device-type responses:

- 29% Windows laptops
- 27% N/A or unspecified device type
- 17% Chromebooks
- 9% iPads
- 6% Prefer not to answer
- 5% Android or Kindle tablets
- 3% Windows desktops
- 2% Apple laptops
- 2% Apple desktops
- 0% Windows tablets

This distribution reflects a diverse mix of device types in the home environment, with laptops representing the most common form factor.

REASONS FOR LACK OF DEVICE ACCESS AT HOME

Families reporting limited or no device access provided the following reasons. Percentages are based on 21,179 total responses:

- 93% Not applicable
- 3% Prefer not to answer
- 2% Device is too expensive to purchase
- 1% Device is broken, damaged, or outdated

- 1% Family chooses not to purchase a device
- 0% Device is not provided by the school
- 0% Other reasons
- 0% Lack of internet to use a device at home

While a small percentage of families report barriers to device access, cost and device condition remain the most commonly cited challenges.

OUT-OF-SCHOOL INTERNET CONNECTIVITY

Public School Units administer family surveys to understand whether students have reliable internet access at home and to identify barriers when connectivity is unavailable.

The following findings reflect state-level summary data from the Student Digital Learning Dashboard for the 2024–25 school year:

STUDENT INTERNET ACCESS AT HOME

Families were asked whether students in their household have consistent internet access at home that is adequate to complete schoolwork. A total of 36,365 families responded.

- 93% reported yes, their student has consistent and adequate internet access at home
- 2% reported sometimes
- 2% reported no
- 3% reported prefer not to answer

These results indicate that most responding families report adequate home internet access, though a small percentage of students continue to experience inconsistent or unavailable connectivity.

TYPES OF INTERNET SERVICE AT HOME

Families were also asked to identify the type of internet service available at home. A total of 22,077 responses were recorded.

- 31% Broadband or DSL
- 25% Prefer not to answer
- 19% Fiber

- 18% Other
- 3% Satellite
- 2% Personal hotspot from a cell phone
- 1% N/A
- 1% Hotspot device
- 0% Dial-up

Broadband and fiber connections together represent half of reported home internet services, while a smaller share of families rely on mobile or alternative connectivity options.

REASONS FOR LACK OF INTERNET ACCESS AT HOME

Families reporting limited or no internet access were asked to identify the primary reason. A total of 19,146 responses were recorded.

- 88% Not applicable
- 6% Prefer not to answer
- 2% Internet available but too expensive
- 2% Internet available but not dependable
- 0% Internet available but not adequate
- 0% Not available where the home is located
- 0% Family chooses not to have internet
- 0% No cell signal, lack of school alternatives, or broken or outdated equipment

Among families reporting barriers, affordability and reliability remain the most common challenges.

OTHER SOURCES OF INTERNET ACCESS

Families who reported limited or inconsistent home connectivity identified alternative locations used to access the internet. A total of 13,809 responses were recorded.

- 37% Prefer not to answer
- 21% Internet at the public library

- 19% Hotspot provided by the home
- 10% Internet at another home
- 6% No regular and reliable internet access
- 3% Internet in a school parking lot
- 1% Internet at another community location
- 1% Internet within the community
- 1% Hotspot provided by the school
- 0% Internet at a park and ride or on a school bus

These findings underscore the continued reliance on public libraries, home hotspots, and community locations to support students without consistent home internet access.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on analysis of the 2024–25 Digital Learning Dashboard, Digital Learning Media Inventory (DLM), and Student Digital Learning Survey data, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction offers the following recommendations for consideration.

Recommendation 1: Sustain support for student technology devices provided by the PSU

Student devices remain the primary means by which students access digital learning and resources during and after the school day. To maintain access, PSUs require predictable and recurring funding that supports the full lifecycle of devices, including purchase, warranties, maintenance, repair, and scheduled replacement.

With federal ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund) and ECF (Emergency Connectivity Funds) funds now concluded, many PSUs are unable to sustain student device programs that expanded during the pandemic. Large portions of the current device fleet have aged beyond expected lifespans, resulting in higher failure rates, declining performance, and reduced reliability for both classroom and at home use. Some PSUs have begun limiting or discontinuing take home access because they lack replacement inventory. These reductions disproportionately affect students who rely on school-issued devices to complete assignments, access digital instructional materials, participate in assessments, family use, and communicate with teachers.

To support long term sustainability, DPI recommends the following actions:

- Establish dedicated and recurring state funding to stabilize PSU device refresh cycles and reduce reliance on temporary federal programs.

- Provide updated statewide guidance on lifecycle planning that aligns with House Bill 378 and a review and refresh of the DPI's CTO Guidebook. This guidance should include recommended refresh timelines, total cost of ownership considerations, and multi year budgeting strategies.
- Use DLMI and other data systems to monitor device age, device availability, and take home capacity to ensure technology resources match instructional and assessment needs.

Sustaining reliable and up to date devices for both school and home use is foundational to effective instruction, digital access, and continuity of learning across the state.

Recommendation 2: Continue to explore how to improve parental participation in reporting on home connectivity and device access.

PSUs report that parents remain reluctant to share information about home connectivity and the devices students have access to, creating ongoing challenges in data collection.

Continued training and communication are expected to support stronger participation in future reporting cycles.

CONCLUSION

The findings presented in the *Statewide Trends in Digital Learning Report* reaffirm that access to reliable devices and high-quality internet connectivity remains fundamental to student success in North Carolina. As digital tools are embedded in instruction, assessment, and communication, students' ability to fully participate in learning, both in school and at home, depends on access to the technology that supports these experiences.

Without reliable take-home access, students who depend on school devices for completing assignments, accessing digital resources, and communicating with teachers risk falling behind their peers. Similarly, while most families report adequate home internet connectivity, gaps remain, particularly around affordability and reliability, that can directly impact learning outcomes.

Ensuring that every student has dependable access to devices and internet connectivity strengthens instructional continuity, student outcomes, and expands opportunities for all learners. Sustaining investment in device access, connectivity, and high-quality instructional resources will remain vital to improving student outcomes and preparing students for success for today and tomorrow.