

California Broadband Council
1325 J Street
Suite 1600
Sacramento, CA 95814-2941

RE: California Broadband for All Action Plan and California Executive Order N-73-20

Dear California Broadband Council:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the California Broadband Council's development of a California Broadband for All Action Plan regarding the state's Executive Order N-73-20. UnidosUS, previously known as NCLR (National Council of La Raza), is the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Through its unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an Affiliate Network of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico, UnidosUS simultaneously challenges the social, economic, and political barriers at the national and state levels.

UnidosUS strongly supports the California Broadband for All Action Plan and urges the Council to proceed forth with its intention of submitting the action plan to Governor Newsom. All students—including those who are English learners, those living in rural communities, and those coming from low-income backgrounds—have been deeply impacted by COVID-19, which has exacerbated the digital divide; created larger opportunity gaps for underserved students; and increased projected learning loss.

The continuation of remote learning demonstrates that targeted funds must be dedicated to increasing access to devices, technological training, and reliable, high-speed broadband. Although the CARES Act appropriated \$2 billion to the FCC's E-Rate "Emergency Connectivity Fund" program and over \$30 billion to the Education Stabilization Fund to cover a range of expenses including providing technology for online learning to all students, closing the digital divide is estimated to cost an additional \$6 billion to \$11 billion in the first 12 months.¹ While the California Department of Education (CDE) has made progress on the digital divide by creating the Learning Loss Mitigation Fund (LLMF), collaborating with internet service providers (ISPs), formulating relationships with companies (e.g., Apple and T-Mobile), and developing a task force, many students are still without devices and adequate broadband capable of handling the demands of synchronous learning.

¹ S. Chandra, A. Chang, L. Day, A. Fazlullah, J. Liu, L. McBride, T. Mudalige, D. Weiss, *Closing the K–12 Digital Divide in the Age of Distance Learning* (San Francisco, CA: Common Sense Media & Boston, Massachusetts: Boston Consulting Group, 2020), https://www.common sense media.org/sites/default/files/uploads/pdfs/common_sense_media_report_final_6_29_12-42pm_web_updated.pdf (accessed November 16, 2020).

UnidosUS believes that while the Action Plan effectively makes the case for accessing better, detailed data on students affected by the digital divide; the need for closing the digital divide within the state; strengthening technological training; and providing comparable price transparency, we provide the following revisions for a more inclusive Action Plan.

Latino students comprise the largest percentage of California's public schools and yet, are among the most affected by the digital divide. Nationally, nearly 20% of Latino households are without computers and more than 30% are without high-speed home internet.² This summer, a survey conducted by UnidosUS and SOMOS found that 83% of Latinos in California did not receive any support or assistance from their employer or local school district for devices.³ 22% of Latino families in California also reported that they did not receive proper training or instructions on how to access or navigate websites or software programs to connect to school or work.⁴ The impact of the digital divide on California's Latino students and families predates the pandemic, and the community has had to contend with a multitude of natural disasters that forced students to participate in remote learning and face more days out of school.

California's English learners, the majority of whom are Spanish-speakers (81.56%), have also been adversely affected by the homework gap and digital divide.⁵ Given the impacts of the digital divide on California's Latino population, Latinos (and statistics detailing their experiences) should be explicitly mentioned in the Action Plan to ensure that this hard-hit population has access to necessary, targeted resources to meaningfully participate in remote learning.

The pandemic has made clear that preexisting educational inequities have worsened during this crisis. Better, detailed data is necessary in order to identify which students are disproportionately affected and target resources to students with the highest need. While the Action Plan proposes that California turn over data it has already collected, it is critical that the data is disaggregated by race/ethnicity and income to illustrate where the gaps in access exist. Plans that overlook Latinos, who comprise the largest population group in California, leaves the community with inadequate resources and lacking culturally

² Alliance for Excellent Education (All4Ed), National Indian Education Association (NIEA), National Urban League (NUL), UnidosUS, *Students of Color Caught in the Homework Gap* (Washington, DC: All4Ed, NIEA, NUL, UnidosUS, 2020), https://futureready.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/HomeworkGap_FINAL8.06.2020.pdf ([accessed November 16, 2020](#)).

³ SOMOS, UnidosUS, *Somos / UnidosUS National Survey of Latinos – August 2020* (Washington, DC: SOMOS & UnidosUS, 2020), <https://latinodecisions.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/National-and-State-Results-Somos-Unidos-Aug-Svy.pdf> ([accessed November 16, 2020](#)).

⁴ Ibid.

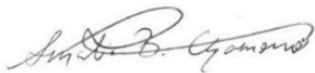
⁵ UnidosUS, *California Latino Students & English Learners Fast Facts 2020-21* ([Washington, DC: UnidosUS, 2020](#)).

responsive initiatives. The Council's decision to issue this Action Plan without specifically incorporating Latinos may have deleterious effects on California's ability to close the digital divide that has adversely affected Latino student success in remote learning.

UnidosUS strongly advocates for comprehensive and robust resources to mitigate the impacts of the digital divide, and we can only accomplish this by lifting up the impact on Latinos to state leaders, informed by data disaggregated by race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status. 80% of California's Latino population is classified as socioeconomically disadvantaged, and one's income is a large indicator of technological knowledge and access to broadband and devices.⁶ Statewide, it is estimated that nearly 35% of Latino students are without broadband.⁷ Given California's reputation as a state whose policies spur other states to act, it is necessary to incorporate Latinos not only into the Action Plan, but also the Council's mission.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to submit comments regarding the direction of the California Broadband for All Action Plan. Should you have any questions, please contact Kendall Evans, Education Policy Analyst at [REDACTED]

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Amalia Chamorro".

Amalia Chamorro
Associate Director, Education Policy

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.