

DIGITAL OPPORTUNITY NOW FOR AMERICA'S CHILDREN

Digital technology has revolutionized American commerce, government, entertainment, and communications. Children and young adults, in particular, now learn, play, and communicate with others in ways unimagined even a decade ago. Yet, while computers, the Internet, and other digital tools have transformed children's lives, the United States has not yet pursued a national strategy to ensure that young people are ready to compete in the global workforce and thrive in a digital culture. Nor has the nation committed to putting technology to work to improve the lives of children.

Today's children need 21st Century skills that will allow them to take advantage of economic opportunities in a digital economy as well as to enable them to provide the innovation and know-how America needs to stay at the forefront of a global economy. Parents, guardians, and teachers need the knowledge to guide young people to safe and beneficial online experiences through readily available information and training. Moreover, as research increasingly documents the ways that broadband, innovative content, and applications improve children's lives, public programs that serve children and families, such as education, health care, and workforce training, should take advantage of technology to become more effective and efficient.

As the demonstrated benefits of information and digital technology continue to grow, there are still millions of children and families who are severely disadvantaged because they do not have a computer or broadband in the home or the skills to use them effectively. The time has come to finish the job of providing access to all families and to put the power of technology to work for all of our nation's children.

The Children's Partnership (TCP) is calling for leadership in government and in the private and nonprofit sectors to ensure all children have the skills and the digital connections they need to become healthy, productive adults.

TCP'S DIGITAL OPPORTUNITY AGENDA FOR AMERICA'S CHILDREN

1. Equip all Children with 21st Century Skills.

- Incorporate 21st Century Skills Training into All Schooling. Establish 21st Century skills for children and youth as a national priority and promote national model state standards, frameworks, and assessments that states can adopt.
- Make Education Technology More Available. Increase funding for the Enhancing Education Through Technology (EETT) program to enable both schools and 21st Century Community Learning Centers to acquire technology-enabled content and applications that support learning for all children, including those with disabilities.

- Use Out-Of-School Time to Train Young People in the Use of Technology. Use after-school programs to help students acquire 21st Century skills tied to homework, school achievement, and creativity. Ensure that current workforce training funding is available to community-based organizations to provide youth with information technology skills that prepare them for higher education and the workforce.
- Invest in Teacher Training and Development. Expand resources for teacher training and professional development, including specialized training on how to incorporate and use technology in the classroom, how to ensure online safety and legal online behavior, and how to use technology to connect to parents and students at home.

2. Put Technology to Work for Children.

- Deploy Technology to Improve Children's Health. Develop and support technologies that help children and families manage chronic illnesses, such as asthma or diabetes; learn how to make healthy lifestyle choices; and receive needed care in medically underserved areas through telemedicine administered in schools, child care centers, and other places where children spend their time.
- Make Public Programs that Serve Children and Families More Effective. Maximize taxpayer dollars by using information technology to streamline eligibility determination for programs such as Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and to facilitate the use of electronic health records (EHRs). Provide family-friendly e-government resources in relevant languages and literacy levels to help families find services, determine eligibility, and use services.
- Stimulate Research & Development. Establish a federal program of grants and financial incentives for demonstration programs in the public and nonprofit sectors that use technology to improve education, workforce training, civic participation, and health care services for all children. Publicly funded research and development, coupled with tax incentives for the private sector, can encourage the development of large-scale innovative solutions to problems facing children. Community-based programs and schools can deliver these applications and ensure they are most effective.

3. Bring Technology Home.

- Enable All Families with Children to Have Digital Tools at Home. Ensure that families who qualify for an appropriate means-tested program, such as the National School Lunch Program, can obtain assistance to acquire a broadband-connected computer or device in the home as well as affordable broadband services.
- Equip Parents with Digital Opportunity and Internet Safety Knowledge and Skills. Encourage the development of training programs and opportunities for parents and others who care for children in community centers, libraries, schools, and places of employment so parents can use 21st Century tools to improve their children's health, education, and online safety.

4. **Build the 21st Century Infrastructure.**

Extending the benefits of technology to children and families cannot be accomplished without a strong 21st Century infrastructure and a means of accountability. The Children's Partnership supports the following essential policies and practices.

- Universal Service. Establish universal broadband as a national goal and craft a date-certain schedule for reforming universal service programs to focus on digital broadband networks rather than analog ones. Program reforms should extend cost-effective broadband infrastructure to underserved rural areas and offer support to low-income families to adopt broadband while achieving greater transparency and accountability. The E-rate program should be strengthened to support broadband technologies as well as equipment, including wireless networking and computers, and its discounts should be extended to 21st Century Community Learning Centers as well as to schools and libraries. Funding and distribution mechanisms need concurrent reforms to avoid increasing surcharges on customers' bills.
- Clear Broadband Definitions, Tracking, and Public Information. Direct the FCC to develop new metrics for measuring broadband that can be easily updated to reflect evolving speeds, track broadband deployment and adoption by collecting data at both the five and nine-digit ZIP code levels, and make this data widely available through public reports and mapping efforts.
- Accountability. Create a national office to foster, promote, and track developments in creating 21st Century digital opportunities for children. Federal leadership should help bring together the work of the public and private sectors, set goals, monitor progress, and put into place corrective actions where needed to extend the benefits of technology to all children and their families.



For more information, please contact:

Ken Kelly
Director, Washington, DC Office
kkelly@childrenspartnership.org

Elaine Carpenter
Senior Technology Policy Associate
ecarpenter@childrenspartnership.org