Closing the Digital Divide

Before ADARA

Before I started working as a Software Engineer, I coordinated a charter after school program in a low-income community in the San Fernando Valley. The school had no more than 300 students and, for the most part, didn't offer any technology classes or activities in their curriculum. In an attempt to engage the students, I implemented an online driver's education course (for students interested in getting their license) and a coding program. Implementing STEM activities in my program was somewhat difficult because of the lack of technology resources this school had access to. Their internet connectivity was low-speed and the school's computer lab was outdated with older model Dell computers, some of which didn't work. I also safely assume that they had an inadequate network infrastructure.

Since joining

During my time at ADARA Networks, I've been exposed to the endless possibilities of our technology, and that makes me excited for the future. Most ISP providers have given up on finding a solution to poor internet connectivity in rural and low-income communities due to high costs of scaling their existing infrastructure. But, we haven't. We want students, teachers, and their families to have the best internet connectivity in order to be on a level playing field with other connected schools and homes. I am thankful that I get to work on products such as our SD WAN Platform and Mobile SD WAN Platform that can help solve this. I've read online

articles and publications that speak on the internet connectivity gap in order to gain insight as to how bad the gap really is. The statistics show that entire populations in California lack access to high speed internet. The public sector can and should benefit from ADARA products.

It is a journey, not a finish line

In June 2013, President Obama announced the ConnectED initiative, which aimed to enrich K-12 education by providing teachers, students, and districts with the latest technology to bring curriculums into the modern day. According to EducationSuperHighway, the number of students with access to 100kpbs connections in school grew from 4 million in 2013 to 44.7 million in 2019. That is amazing progress in bringing high-speed internet connections to classrooms. More and more students now have access to high speed internet than ever before and the possibilities of enriched learning are virtually limitless. It is crucial for students to have access and training to use the latest technologies in order to keep up with evolving demands from the work force. But while the ConnectED initiative has delivered on its goal, many classrooms are still without high speed internet connectivity.

A fair chance

An estimated 1,356 schools still remain "off the grid". It's no coincidence that these schools happen to be located in rural areas and/or low income communities. According to a report by the California Public Utilities Commission, 95 percent of households in the state have access to broadband, but only 43 percent of the rural population have the same access. That is to say, almost half of the population in rural areas either have no internet connection or they have a low-performing internet connection. Through a marketplace perspective, it makes sense that ISPs do not invest in spreading better connectivity to already hard to reach rural areas since they only make up 17 percent of California's population. It's a "bad return on investment". However, from a socioeconomic standpoint, it makes every bit of sense to provide the same high speed connectivity to all of California's population, regardless of location. Solving digital inequality ensures everyone has exposure to the best connections available. As we've seen, our social transition into technology is not without excluding populations. ADARA products have the potential to lessen the digital inequality gap so students and their families can have an equal playing field.