Digital Equity Community Needs Assessment Report for the Minnesota Department of Education

Minnesota Association of Workforce Boards Operations Committee
Leading With Equity Initiative

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Literacy Minnesota

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- One year with Literacy Minnesota as a VISTA and staff member.

- First participated in the literacy movement as a volunteer ESL teacher in North Minneapolis in 2018; still teach ESL as a volunteer; also taught English in North Sumatra, Indonesia with the Fulbright Program in 2019-20.

- T.A. in Stats for Econ; B.A. *cum laude* with Distinctions in Economics and Political Science from St. Olaf College; studied at the London School of Economics and Political Science as well as SOAS University of London.

- Pursuing an M.Sc. International Business Administration at SOAS University of London.

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What does Literacy Minnesota do?

- Mission: to share the power of learning through education, community building and advocacy.

- St. Paul based 501(c)3 educational nonprofit founded in 1972, offering:
  - Free classes for adults (ABE, Civics, ESL, GED, etc.) in the metro;
  - Statewide services for adult basic education (ABE) programs, e.g. recruiting, training and supporting ABE participants, professionals and volunteers; and
  - An AmeriCorps program and various national programs focused on advancing the literacy movement through advocacy, digital equity, etc.

- We envision a world where life changing learning is within everyone's reach.

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DIGITAL EQUITY REQUIRES THREE ELEMENTS:

Literacy Minnesota's expertise!

1. Equitable access to devices.

2. Equitable access to internet service.

3. Equitable access to education and skills to make use of these tools.

50%

of households earning less than $30,000 per year have a computer, compared to 94% of households making over $100,000.[1]

18 million

households do not have internet access, including 14 million low-income households in urban areas and four million in rural areas.[2]

80%

of middle-skill jobs require digital skills, but one in three workers has limited or no digital skills.[3]

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NORTHSTAR
DIGITAL LITERACY

Northstar Digital Literacy

A National Program of Literacy Minnesota

- The online platform offers (i) digital literacy skills assessment online for free; (ii) certificates, curricula and self-guided online learning for subscribers.

- More than 5 million Northstar Digital Literacy Skills Assessments have been taken since its launch in 2011, and users from 195 countries accessed the site https://www.digitalliteracyassessment.org/ last year.

- Northstar has partners in 48 states, and Literacy Minnesota offers advice, guidance and training to support statewide digital equity initiatives in Louisiana, Washington, Hawaii, etc.

- Partnered with Ling Becker, Ramsey Co. in 2020 for a CARES Act project.

CASE STUDY: RAMSEY COUNTY TECHPAK PROGRAM

In 2020, Ramsey County partnered with Literacy Minnesota, Tech Dump/Tech Discounts, PCs for People, Saint Paul Public Libraries and other community organizations to provide computers, internet and digital literacy training to more than 500 residents impacted by COVID-19. Digital Literacy Navigators from Literacy Minnesota supported each participant by facilitating computer pick-up, digital literacy assessment and learning on Northstar Digital Literacy and information technology (IT) support. They also referred participants to ABE classes, job searches and workforce training.

$1 → $2.40

For every $1 dollar spent by the TechPak initiative there is a projected $2.40 in social value generated through improved earnings, well-being and cost savings. **See details.**

1. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/07/digital-divide-persists-even-as-lower-income-americans-make-gains-in-tech-adoption/
2. https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs
3. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018161.pdf

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NORTHSTAR DIGITAL LITERACY

Digital Equity Community Needs Assessment Report for the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE)

- *Digital equity* – Access to a computer, the internet and digital literacy skills.

- Premise: Digital equity is a right. Participation in democracy, economy, etc.

- Key takeaways of the Report:

  - Describes how digital navigators connect participants to resources, offer digital literacy instruction and help participants achieve their goals.

  - Estimates a statewide Digital Navigator Program would require an 200 digital navigators hosted at trusted organizations, serve 80,000 people.

  - Includes an evaluation of Minnesota's 87 counties with respect to high-priority needs identified by MDE, e.g education, employment, English.

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Digital Equity Community Needs Assessment Report for the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE)

The Report draws on data from the U.S. Census, outreach, an original survey and Literacy Minnesota's nearly 50 years of work in Adult Basic Education. The Report answers the following questions:

I. What counties have high digital access, economic, education and English language learning needs?

II. How have organizations adapted and addressed digital access needs in their communities, who do they serve and which counties are served?

III. How would a statewide Digital Navigator Program complement available resources and sustainably solve persistent problems?

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I. What counties have high digital access, economic, education and English language learning needs?

- Counties with most high-priority needs identified by MDE:
  - **Nobles**, nonmetro county - urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, not adjacent to a metro area (6/6);
  - **Watonwan**, nonmetro - urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area (5/6);
  - **10 counties** with 4/6 need: Ramsey, Mille Lacs, Mower, Kandiyohi, Pine, Mahnomen, Wadena, Beltrami, Aitkin, Lake of the Woods

- Digital equity is an issue in both rural and urban counties – rural counties face distinct challenges, more organizations work to advance digital equity per capita in rural counties and more people do not have access to digital equity in urban counties.

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II. How have organizations adapted and addressed digital access needs in their communities, who do they serve and which counties are served?

- While most organizations surveyed (284) added services between March and January 2020, most organizations saw a decrease in participants.
    - Organizations surveyed included ABE organizations, community based organizations, internet service providers, libraries, schools, etc.

- The highest reported barriers to participation were:
    - Internet Access.
    - Participants' Digital Literacy Skills.
    - Access to a Device.
    - Participants' Language Skills.
    - Instructors' Digital Literacy Skills.

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III. How would a statewide Digital Navigator Program complement available resources and sustainably solve persistent problems?

- The goal of the Report is to show how and where a statewide digital navigator program could support available resources to bring digital navigation to all who need it; see written and video reports.

- A statewide Digital Navigator Program would aims to support local, trusted organizations' programs and services to include digital navigation for the purpose of advancing digital equity.

- Digital navigators are trusted community partners who help people acquire the equipment, knowledge, services, and skills necessary to access digital equity – this looks different in different communities across Minnesota.

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Recommendations in MDE Report

- A Digital Equity Initiative should help digitally disenfranchised Minnesotans access a reliable device, the internet and digital literacy skills.

- The most efficient use of resources would allow a single entity to organize a coordinated Digital Equity Initiative. A coordinated response would not only save money but also allow for local administration of digital navigators.

- A statewide Digital Equity Initiative should start by serving people most in need, like MFIP recipients, but should be informed by the ultimate goal of digital equity so that they may fulfill their full potential as members of society – civically, economically, educationally, socially, etc.

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Discussion

What questions do you have for me?
       About the Report? Blind spots?
       About Literacy Minnesota?

What challenges do your programs face with respect to digital equity and digital literacy skills?

What opportunities do you see to include digital literacy skills building in existing programs and services?

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