Digital Access and Literacy Update
Information Technology Committee
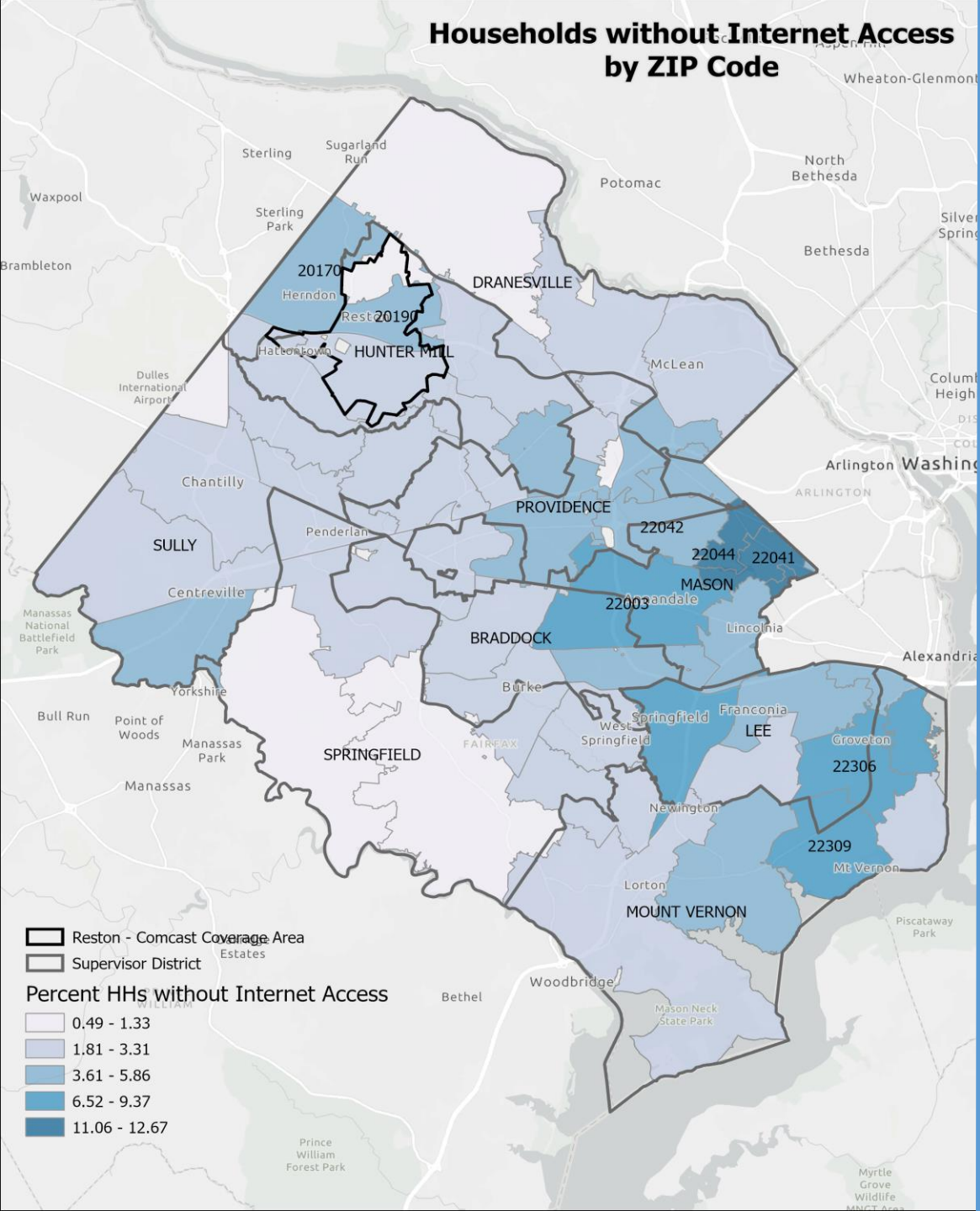
January 12, 2021

Digital Access and Literacy Workgroup
Broadband Access - Availability + Affordability

- The Digital Access and Literacy (DAL) Workgroup found that broadband infrastructure is not a significant issue for Fairfax County overall

  - **Wireline:** Almost all locations in the County have access to service from two providers (Verizon, and Cox or Comcast).

  - **Wireless:** Cellular service is robust throughout most of the County and will continue to improve.

- Broadband access *is* a challenge for households in certain areas of the County and in certain living situations

- The bigger issues are **Affordability** and **Awareness**

- Will require a targeted approach to address issues

Households without Internet Access by ZIP Code

Legend:
- Reston - Comcast Coverage Area
- Supervisor District

Percent HHs without Internet Access
- 0.49 - 1.33
- 1.81 - 3.31
- 3.61 - 5.86
- 6.52 - 9.37
- 11.06 - 12.67

While 4% percent of households in Fairfax County overall do not have internet access, the percentage of households without internet access in select zip codes within Supervisor Districts is significantly higher.

Percentage of households without internet access by Supervisor District (ACS 205-2019 5-year estimates)

Fairfax County Overall – 4.2%
Mason – 8.9%
Lee – 6.8%
Providence – 3.8%
Mount Vernon – 3.8%
Braddock – 3.5%
Hunter Mill – 3.4%
Dranesville – 3.1%
Sully – 2.6%
Springfield – 1.4%

Percentage of households without internet in select zip codes within Supervisor Districts (ACS 2013-2017 5-year estimates)

Dranesville (Herndon, 20170) – 6.2%
Mount Vernon (Route 1, 22306) -- 17.5%
Mount Vernon (Route 1, 22309) – 14.9%
Mason/Braddock (Annandale, 22003) – 10.6%
Mason (Seven Corners, 22041) – 18.8%
Mason (Seven Corners, 22042) – 9.9%
Mason (Seven Corners, 22044) – 20.8%
Hunter Mill (Reston, 20190) – 10.7%

Digital Equity Defined

*"**Digital equity** ensures opportunities for Fairfax County residents to participate and engage in a connected community. The ability to access, understand and use digital tools is essential for many tasks in modern life, including applying for jobs, paying bills, enjoying recreational activities, completing homework, staying informed and connecting with government/community services."*

In Fairfax County, the ideal state of digital equity means:

1. Affordable digital hardware and connections
2. Awareness of digital resources and services
3. Access to specific digital tools
4. Advancement of digital literacy skills

Issues/Implications Related to COVID-19

Broader issues across the county with bandwidth usage and associated costs but **existing DAL inequities were accentuated by COVID-19**

- Access barriers
  - Affordability
  - Hardware and Connections
  - Digital Literacy
  - Technical Support

- Awareness of resources and information
  - Eligibility
  - Trust

- DAL needs vary by population
  - Unique needs of students, families, and adults (including seniors)
  - Educational, Workforce Development, "Assistance from a Distance," Telehealth, Maintaining Social Networks

DAL Updates: Fairfax County

- NCS and FCPL are primary vehicles for public access
  - NCS reopened all 10 after school tech centers and community centers
  - FCPL close to implementing a program for checking out Chromebooks
  - Providing virtual programming for youth and adults

- NCS is supporting the re-engagement of participants and their families and conducting wellness checks to maintain positive developmental relationships and support social emotional learning

- Conducting countywide analysis of center Wi-Fi capabilities

- HCD site analysis to address connectivity barriers

- Expansion of spill over wireless hours at libraries

- Contributed to PPE production utilizing 3D printers and other technology

DAL Updates: FCPS SY 2020-21 Efforts

ACCESS:

- Refreshed and distributed more than 80,000 existing devices for students
- Leveraged cable channels to provide more than 500 language arts and math lessons for use by students with access challenges
- Acquired and distributed a total of 90,000 new laptops for grade 3 - 8 students
- Acquired additional MiFi hotspot devices to distribute more than 7,300 to students
- Created partnership with Cox Communications to subsidize low-cost internet and have registered 530 families so far

DAL Updates: FCPS SY 2020-21 Efforts

LITERACY:

Citizenship curriculum for all FCPS students prior to COVID, which included a parent component. This curriculum covers broad topics like online safety, privacy, and healthy online interactions.

- Set up a Parent Technology Help Desk with after-hours assistance for parents and students.
- Created tip sheets and videos to instruct parents in 22 different topics related to common platforms for students like Blackboard and Google.
- Conducted summer workshops for parents to walk them through log-in and navigation of primary platforms.
- Provided support for parents who are speakers of other languages by:
  - Including a language support service in the Parent Technology Help Desk
  - Providing tip sheets and self-help videos in other languages
  - Including language translators in school technology orientation sessions

DAL Updates: FCPS SY 2020-21 Efforts

ONGOING CHALLENGES:

- Acquiring age-appropriate devices for PreK - 2 grade levels to replace remaining legacy laptops
- Supporting families for whom neither the MiFi hotspot nor Cox service provide good options. Circumstances that continue to be blockers:
  - Families live in an apartment complex or private home that does not allow Cox service.
  - Families live in an interior apartment or room that does not have adequate Verizon cellular service for the MiFi unit.
- Sustaining the level of support resources needed to provide ongoing access and digital literacy support for families

Next Steps

- Continue working collaboratively with FCPS
- Engaging **Connected DMV's** *Connectivity for All* initiative to explore regional partnership and leverage opportunities