

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4606

COMMITTEES:  
FINANCE

BANKING, HOUSING, AND  
URBAN AFFAIRS

BUDGET

INTELLIGENCE

RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

August 24, 2020

Mr. Satya Nadella  
Chief Executive Officer  
Microsoft Corporation  
1 Microsoft Way  
Redmond, WA 98052

Dear Mr. Nadella:

As unprecedented numbers of students rely on remote access for education due to the COVID-19 pandemic, their education is only as effective as the computing resources they have at home. Effective remote learning requires capable devices and broadband internet access. I write to ask for your assistance to help ensure Virginia students can fully take advantage of essential education opportunities this fall.

The public health emergency has starkly highlighted the gaps in the nation's access to broadband. This lingering gap is particularly tragic in the context of students, of all ages, seeking to access online education. Earlier in the year, I called on the nation's internet service providers (ISPs) to proactively work with education leaders and local school districts to close the homework gap. In response to my letter, AT&T, Charter, CenturyLink, Comcast, T-Mobile, Verizon, Sprint and Cox, among others, each announced a variety of new policies, such as service upgrades, fee waivers, free access to Wi-Fi hotspots, more affordable plans, free support services, and more. Congress also passed funding for educators through the bipartisan CARES Act in March, which has been used in many cases to purchase hot spots, devices, and equipment to better support online education. I am also pushing for additional money to help continue to increase access to affordable internet.

However, in recent conversations with community leaders, education stakeholders, and Virginians, a prominent issue has been access to internet-capable computing devices. For so many Virginians struggling to juggle education and work obligations, the public health emergency has highlighted the heavy reliance on now-inaccessible computer labs, as entire households often struggle to share a single internet accessible desktop, laptop or tablet (if the household has access to one at all).

The Pew Research Center found in March that the "homework gap" of students lacking reliable access to a computer at home is a significant challenge for many students, and even more pronounced for Black, Hispanic and lower income households. In June, McKinsey and Co. reported that this education achievement gap limited the growth of the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) by at least \$426 billion between 2009 and 2019. The necessary closing of schools during the public health crisis and transition to remote education has exacerbated these gaps. Home computers and devices now serve as essential education lifelines for successful learning.

For younger students, such as kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade levels, tablets are most useful. Intermediate students benefit more from the features of small laptops. For high school, community college, and university students, more capable laptops match their advanced needs.

While the CARES Act provided essential funding for schools to purchase equipment for home learning, significant challenges remain to provide students with appropriate devices. Many primary and secondary school districts report that computers and tablets suitable for student use are not available for them to purchase in bulk. In other areas where the district doesn't provide items, families are not able to afford purchasing their own devices. Vulnerable students who already face numerous hardships are then further disadvantaged when they cannot access a remote education due to device unavailability.

In light of these circumstances, I urge you take immediate action to help close this new education gap created by the health crisis as the school year commences. There are a range of actions your company can take, including educational product discounts, the provision of complimentary or donated computers (including for home lending programs many educational institutions operate), and the provision of refurbished or returned products in good working condition for school districts and higher education institutions to distribute to educators and students. While I understand the strains placed on the global supply chain, your prioritization of these matters would greatly assist struggling families at this challenging time.

I look forward to promptly hearing from you about what steps you will take to help limit the economic and social disruption as students endure COVID-19 related education challenges. Containing the health impact of COVID-19 will depend on observance of social distancing measures outlined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other public health authorities. But containing the *economic and social* impact of COVID-19 requires a whole-of-society effort.

At this time of great strain on our economic and education systems, I encourage you to do everything you can to cushion the impacts on American families and students. My staff would be happy to connect you with local education officials and administrators in the Commonwealth of Virginia to facilitate this effort.

I appreciate your time and consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,



MARK R. WARNER  
United States Senator

### **Suggested Computer Donation Technical Requirements**

- Capable of running Windows 10 or macOS 10.14 or later; or ChromeOS with at least 2 years of support remaining
- Processor: Capable of running the current operating system version
- Storage: Hard Drive or Solid State Drive with 32 GB or higher
- Memory: 4 GB RAM or higher
- Computer microphone and speakers
- Web Camera
- WiFi enabled

### **Tablet Donation Technical Requirements**

- 10 inches or greater
- Capable of running current versions of iPadOS, Windows 10, or currently supported Android tablet operating systems
- WiFi enabled