Who Gets Connected?

Trace how internet access shaped opportunities and public decisions.

IS.1.30 "Explain the significance of social, economic, and political issues during the period 1980 to the present and the ways in which these issues affected individuals and organizations."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two barriers to internet access and circle two government actions. Write 1 and 2 beside two places that show how a barrier or action affected a person or organization.

The Changing Cost of Connection

1 In the 1990s, internet connections began changing how Americans found information and communicated. For a student with a home computer, an online encyclopedia could make research faster. For a classmate without a connection, the same assignment might require a trip to a library during open hours. This gap was not only about convenience: families that could afford computers and monthly service had more ways to practice new skills. Schools also faced uneven costs. Wealthier districts could buy equipment and connections more easily, while districts with smaller budgets struggled to offer similar opportunities.

2 Federal policy became part of the response. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 led to the E-Rate program, which began offering eligible schools and libraries discounts on internet access in 1998. The discounts did not give every household a connection, but they helped some public institutions lower their costs. A library could use its connection to serve people who lacked internet at home, and a school could bring online resources into classrooms. The policy shows how a political decision about funding could affect an organization's budget and an individual's chance to get information.

3 In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic pushed many schools to teach remotely. Students who shared one device with siblings or had unreliable internet could miss live lessons or turn in work late. Teachers had to change plans, and districts loaned devices or arranged wireless hotspots where they could. Those steps helped some families but did not remove every barrier, especially when a home connection was weak. In 2021, Congress passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, setting aside billions of dollars to expand broadband service. The debate now included who would receive service first and how public money should reach areas private companies had not served.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could a family's ability to pay for internet service affect a student's schoolwork in the 1990s?

2. How could E-Rate affect both a library's budget and a person without internet at home?

3. Why did remote learning in 2020 create problems for some students and require action from school districts?

4. What different access problems did E-Rate and the 2021 law address, and how could each response affect people?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine your town's nonprofit job center helps residents apply for work, but its internet connection often fails. In five or six sentences, propose a town policy, explain one economic and one social effect, predict effects on a resident and the job center, and connect your plan to one fact from the passage.

Who Gets Connected?

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two barriers to internet access and circle two government actions. Write 1 and 2 beside two places that show how a barrier or action affected a person or organization. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could a family's ability to pay for internet service affect a student's schoolwork in the 1990s?	**A student with home access could research and practice online more easily, while a student without it might have to visit a library during open hours.**
2	How could E-Rate affect both a library's budget and a person without internet at home?	**The discount could lower the library's internet costs, allowing it to offer access to someone without a home connection.**
3	Why did remote learning in 2020 create problems for some students and require action from school districts?	**Shared devices or unreliable connections could keep students from lessons or make work late, so districts loaned devices or arranged hotspots.**
4	What different access problems did E-Rate and the 2021 law address, and how could each response affect people?	**E-Rate lowered connection costs for eligible schools and libraries, where people could use online resources. The 2021 law funded broadband expansion in areas lacking service, which could give more residents access.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The town council should fund a reliable connection at the nonprofit job center. A resident could then complete online applications without losing work when the connection fails. Better access could increase that resident's chances of finding a job, an economic effect. It could also help residents who lack home internet take part in services others can already use, a social effect. The job center could schedule more application appointments instead of spending time fixing connection problems. The passage shows that public funding helped schools and libraries lower internet costs, so the council could consider a similar local investment.

Accept other supported cause-and-effect explanations that distinguish an organization's experience from an individual's. For the proposal, look for a clear town decision, distinct economic and social effects, and an accurate connection to the passage.