Differences in Home, School, and Library Use of the Internet by At-Risk Students, 2001

FAST FACTS

RECENT STATISTICS FROM THE LIBRARY RESEARCH SERVICE

According to an October 2003 report from the National Center for Education Statistics, two out of five children and teens rely on the Internet to complete school assignments. (See Chart 1.) One-third of the respondents to the 2001 survey reported using the Internet to communicate with others via e-mail and to play games. One out of five K-12 students indicated obtaining news reports and finding information on products via the Internet. One out of 10 reported using the Internet to participate in online chat and listservs, to watch TV or movies, or to listen to radio.

Highlights

- The most popular use of the Internet by children and teens is to complete school assignments.
- The older students get, the more they rely on Internet access.
- At-risk students—including certain racial and ethnic minorities, the disabled, the poor, those with less well-educated parents, and those from inner cities—are less likely to have access to the Internet at home.
- Internet access via schools and public libraries helps to compensate for this inequality.

Chart 1. Most Popular Uses of the Internet by Persons Age 5-17, 2001

Internet activity:
- Completing school assignments: 42%
- E-mail or instant messaging: 38%
- Playing games: 36%
- News/weather/sports: 22%
- Find information on products: 20%
- Chat rooms or listservs: 12%
- Watch/listen to TV, movies, or radio: 11%

Percent (0% - 50%)

That the overall proportion of K-12 students using the Internet for school assignments was not higher is explained by the student's age. (See Chart 2.) Though only one in 10 children age 5 to 7 used the Internet to do school work, almost two-thirds of teens age 15 to 17 reported relying on Internet sources to complete school assignments.

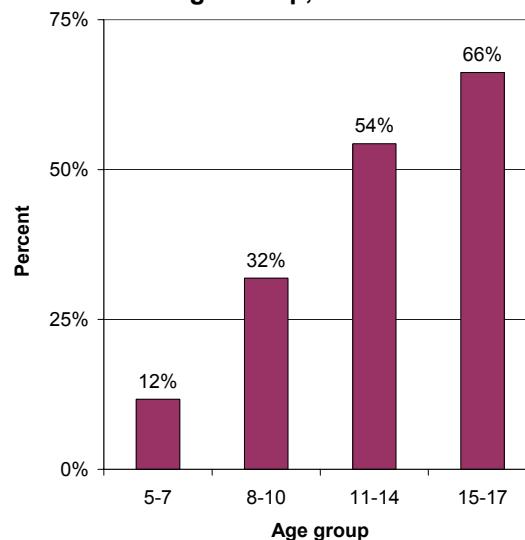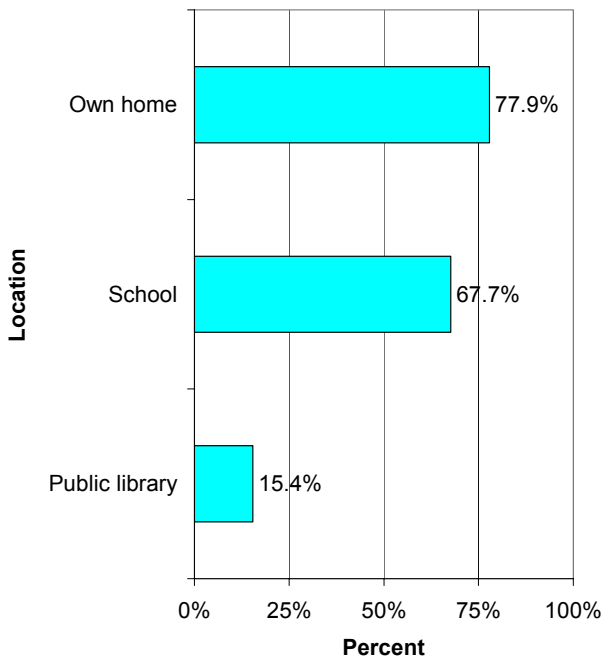**Chart 2. Percent of Persons Age 5-17 Using the Internet to Complete School Assignments by Age Group, 2001**

Percent by Age group:
- 5-7: 12%
- 8-10: 32%
- 11-14: 54%
- 15-17: 66%

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Chart 3. Percentage of Internet Users Age 5-17 by Location, 2001

The survey identified the three most popular locations from which K-12 students used the Internet: their own homes, their schools, and their public libraries. (See Chart 3.)

- Four out of five students reported using the Internet at home.
- Two-thirds of students reported accessing the Internet via a home computer.
- One out of seven students reported using the Internet at a public library.

The prevalence of access to a home computer likely explains the fact that more students reported using the Internet at home than at school. However, the fact that almost a quarter of all students do not have access to a home computer certainly explains why one out of seven students reported using a public library computer.


Use of the Internet at schools and public libraries increases dramatically with age. (See Chart 4.)

- Use of the Internet at school rose steadily from more than half for age 5 to 7 to almost three-fourths for age 15 to 17.
- Use of the Internet at a public library also increased consistently from one out of 10 for age 5-7 to almost one out of five for age 15-17.
- Both of these increases from K to 12 represent a 50 percent improvement.

Chart 4. Percent of Persons Age 5-17 Using the Internet by Location & Age Group, 2001

Predictably, home Internet use began high and went even higher. Almost three-fourths of kindergartners had access to a home computer. More than four out of five high school students had such ready access to the information riches of the Internet.
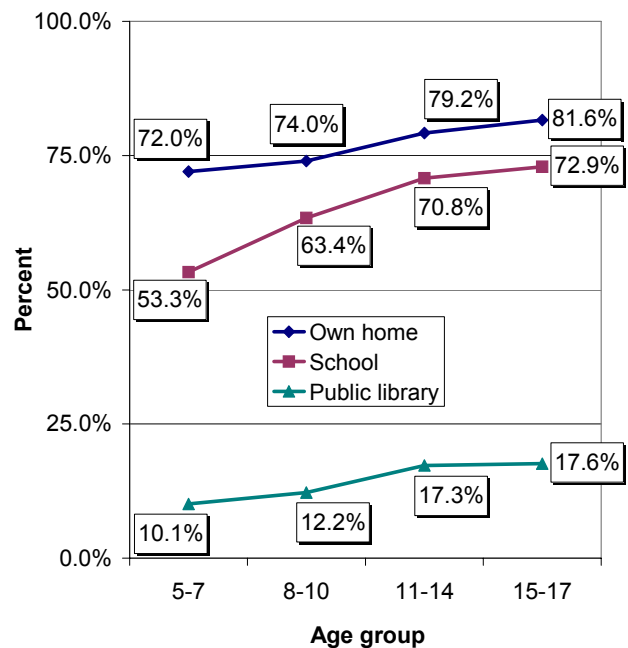
Race and ethnicity help to explain where a student uses the Internet. (See Chart 5.) Approximately two thirds of students across all racial and ethnic groups report using the Internet at school. No such equality of access exists to home computers. Four out of five White students and nine out of 10 Asian students have access to home computers, but two out of five Black and Hispanic students lack such access. The varying degree of reliance on library computers mirrors home access. Black students are almost three times as likely as White students to rely on library computers for Internet access. Hispanic students are almost twice as likely as White students to rely on library Internet access.

Disabled students are less likely than their non-disabled counterparts to have access to home computers, and, as a result, more likely to rely on school and library computers. (See Chart 6.)

Chart 5. Percentage of Persons Age 5-17 Using the Internet by Location & Race/Ethnicity, 2001

The educational attainment of students' parents can also affect their Internet access. (See Chart 7.) Better educated parents are more likely than their less well-educated counterparts to provide home Internet access to their children. School access "levels" this inequality, while library access compensates somewhat for it, especially for children whose parents did not finish high school themselves.
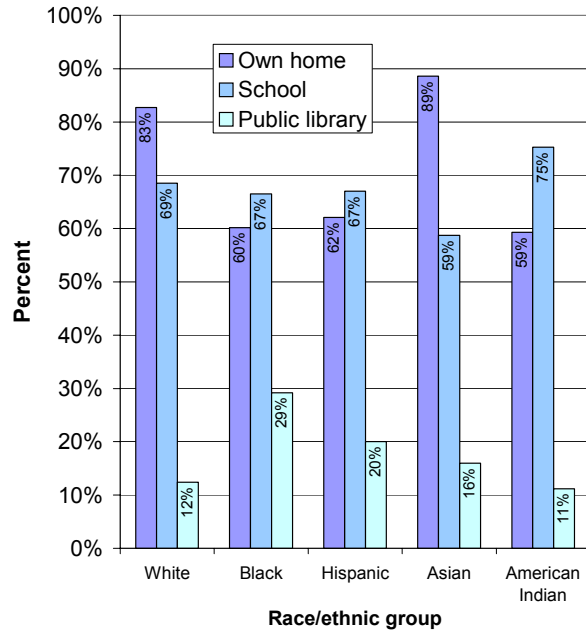
Chart 6. Percentage of Persons Age 5-17 Using the Internet by Location & Disability Status, 2001
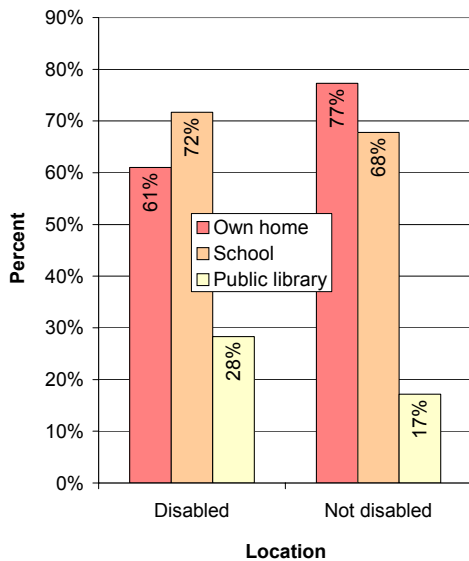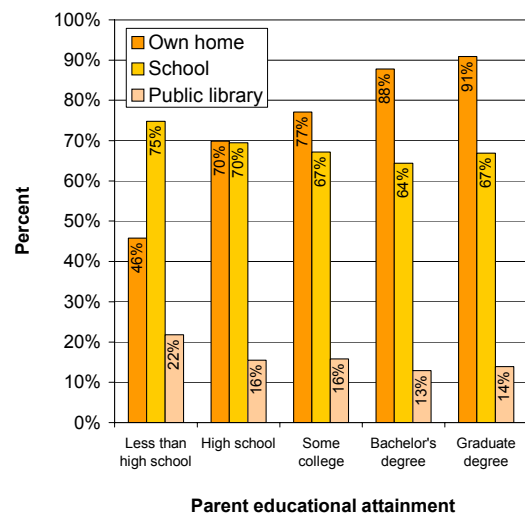

Chart 7. Percentage of Persons Age 5-17 Using the Internet by Location & Parent Educational Attainment, 2001

Household language, poverty, and metropolitan status also affect a student's access to the Internet.

Students from households that speak Spanish only and those from poor households are less likely to have access to the Internet than their counterparts from wealthier, predominantly English-speaking households. (See Charts 8 and 9.)

Students who live in suburbia are more likely than their urban and rural counterparts to have home computers. (See Chart 10.) Rural students are the likeliest metro status group to rely on school access, while urban students are likelier than suburban or rural students to use library access.

Chart 8. Percentage of Persons Age 5-17 Using the Internet at Home, School, and Public Library by Household Language, 2001
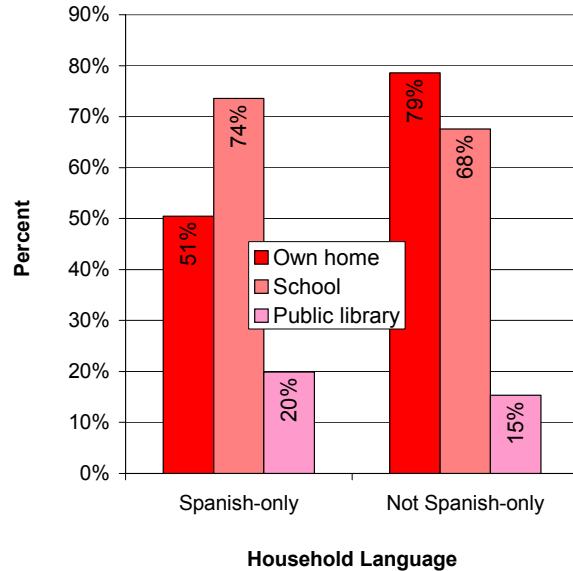
Chart 9. Percentage of Persons Age 5-17 Using the Internet at Home, School, and Public Library by Poverty Status, 2001

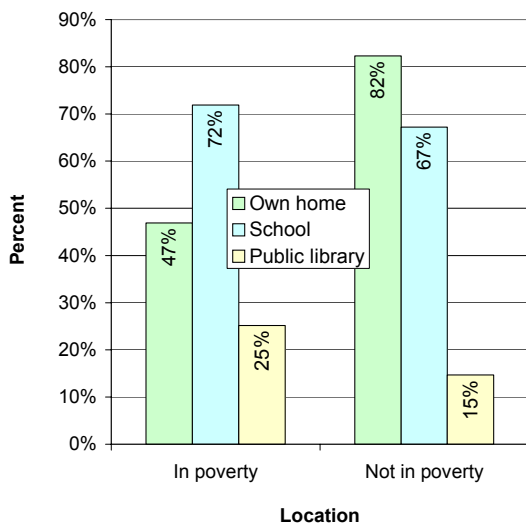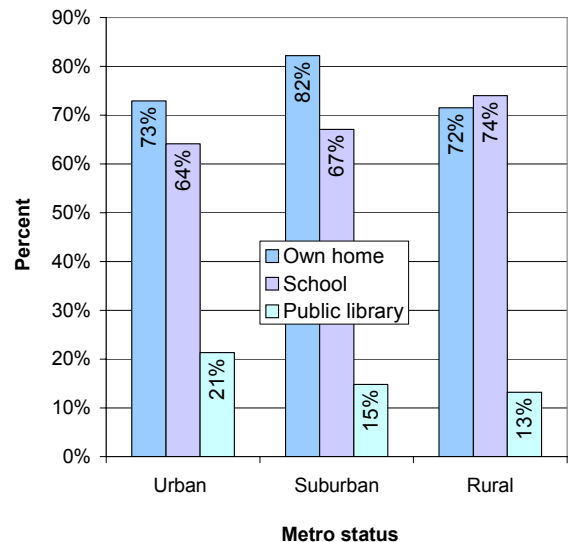**Chart 10. Percentage of Persons Age 5-17 Using the Internet at Home, School, and Public Library by Metropolitan Status, 2001**