Enabling Remote Learning and Digital Fluency

New York, NY

SCENARIO

To keep its 1,866 schools and 1,126,501 students virtually connected to the classroom during the pandemic, the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) needed data to guide the distribution of its technology resources and for managing hotspots and over half a million iPads® throughout the city. NYC DOE also needed a way to remotely troubleshoot individual connectivity problems, which IT staff could no longer do for students in person at computer labs.

SOLUTION

After distributing its pre-existing stock of Wi-Fi-only laptops to students with home internet connections, NYC DOE set up 20,000 Verizon 4G LTE/5G hotspots and distributed an additional 500,000 iPads®. Of the iPads®, 300,000 were LTE-enabled, meaning they came with data plans which allowed them to operate without home Wi-Fi.

Distributing these tools equitably required investigation. Which students would benefit most from an LTE-enabled device? Where would the hotspots best serve students with devices but no connectivity? NYC DOE used Ookla's Cell Analytics™ to see where mobile network coverage could enable students to connect.

NYC DOE integrated Speedtest Mobile SDK™ network testing directly into mobile applications on all student devices, enabling the measurement of internet performance without any action by students. This delivered network diagnostics that allowed IT teams to solve individual student connectivity problems and network performance data from mobile and internet operators within the school district.

RESULT

To help address the homework gap, enable remote learning, and increase digital equity, the NYC DOE distributed an additional 175,000 devices and made digital citizenship and digital skills a top priority for the 2021-2022 school year.