Millions of children will be going back to school remotely this fall, with millions more participating in hybrid or in-person instruction. For all students, however, there remains a high likelihood of at least intermittent virtual learning for the duration of the pandemic – a wholesale educational shift that has created unprecedented burdens on schools and families.

As with many other challenges brought by COVID-19, fuel and petrochemical manufacturers are stepping in to help support schools and students during this difficult time.

The transition to online learning presents many financial and technological challenges, particularly among less affluent school districts. But several fuel companies stepped up to help their local schools weather this transition. ExxonMobil gave the Carlsbad Municipal School District $100,000 to help provide internet connections to low-income students in rural areas, while $100,000 of a $300,000 contribution by Phillips 66 helped the Bartlesville Public Schools purchase cellular hotspots for underserved students. And Chevron donated $500,000 to help provide remote learning grants for educators in underserved school districts as they transitioned to virtual learning.

Chevron also worked with the nonprofit STEM NOLA and UBTECH to ensure that students continued to have access to STEM education this summer. Chevron funded 175 scholarships for Camp: ASPIRE (At-Home Summer Programs in Robotics and Engineering), which offered children ages 8-16 robotics kits, virtual learning from STEM educators, and at-home activities to keep them interested in STEM while school was out.

“Because of Chevron’s donation, kids that might not have this opportunity otherwise, will be immersed in activities that will challenge their imaginations and equip them with practical skills for the future,” said Calvin Mackie, director and founder of STEM NOLA.

The technology required for virtual learning has put particular pressure on low-income families, which fuel and petrochemical companies have sought to help alleviate. CITGO partnered with the Harris County Sheriff’s Office to donate 150 Kindles to help low-income students in the Houston and Alief Independent School Districts meet their e-learning needs, while Exxon donated laptops in the Carlsbad, NM community. Similarly, Motiva donated 500 refurbished laptops to Comp-U-Dopt, a nonprofit that provides technology to underserved students in the Houston and Galveston areas. Marathon Petroleum’s Martinez refinery recognized that many families are also struggling to provide basic supplies – like paper, pens and notebooks – and employees partnered with the Boys and Girls Club of Contra Costa to deliver over 500 kits of school supplies to children in Contra Costa County.

Another difficult byproduct of widespread virtual learning is the need to replace meals provided for low-income children at school. In order to help meet this need, Marathon Petroleum’s Canton refinery employees raised more than $36,000 – which was matched 100% by the Marathon Foundation – for a total gift of $73,000 for the Stark County Hunger Task Force’s Backpack Program. The program provides backpacks full of nutritious items that students can prepare on their own, to help supplement missed meals usually provided at school.

“These communities are a part of the fabric of our employees’ lives and are what allows our employees to be healthy, happy and successful,” says Heather Pennington, accounting supervisor at the Canton refinery. “Knowing that kids are going to miss meals due to school closures was a big motivator for a lot of folks who contributed to this campaign. We recognized that with all the folks losing their jobs in this current environment, and kids being out of school without access to food, the situation would become even harder on our community.”

Companies are also providing support for those schools that are reopening in person. Phillips 66 and Chevron Phillips Chemical Company have both recently donated $10,000 to Bartlesville Public Schools to purchase face coverings and personal protective equipment for students and staff as they return to school.

Above and beyond all that the industries have done to support their communities, fuel and petrochemical manufacturers enable learning by virtue of the products they help create. Laptops, tablets, kindles, headphones and even internet connections would not be possible without petrochemicals. And without the fuels to efficiently and affordably transport these products, students would not have access to these critical tools and technologies.

Learn more about how the fuel and petrochemical industries are continuing to support their communities and their country during the pandemic.

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