

Common Sense is the nation's leading nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of all kids and families by providing the trustworthy information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in the 21st century.

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LETTER FROM OUR FOUNDER

Dear friends.

We started 2020 on a high note. After years of advocating for critical privacy reforms at the state and federal levels, the California Consumer Privacy Act (also known as the CCPA) went into effect in January. Finally, tech companies were being held to account for their reckless disregard of their customers—especially their youngest users—whose data was mined and sold to the highest bidder. We created tools and resources to help consumers take advantage of their new privacy rights (see page 22), and set an ambitious agenda to continue to win even more rights for kids and families as the year progressed.

James P. Steyer, founder and CEO

When the pandemic sent everyone home in mid-March, families with school-age children, teachers, and lower-income households without internet access were hit especially hard. We needed to pivot—and fast—to deliver as much support as we possibly could to these communities. The summer's social justice movements catalyzed by the murders of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and many other Black Americans at the hands of police officers created another cultural inflection point. And the contentious election in November and December, rife with misinformation about election fraud, was another opportunity to rise in service to our community.

This year's annual report tells the story of our organization during an incredibly challenging year—indeed, how our staff, partners, funders, and advocates came together to meet the moment.

Among our accomplishments:

- We built Wide Open School to provide age-appropriate and free educational activities for students in preschool through grade 12.
- We supported families and teachers as they made the transition to distance learning.
- We hosted virtual conversations with thousands of parents and teachers to provide comfort and community.
- We fought for, and ultimately won, funding to help close the digital divide.

I am incredibly grateful to our talented and resilient staff for their hard work, creativity, and dedication to our mission—and to our partners and supporters, whose generosity affected the lives of millions of kids and families.

Jim Steyer

The conversation about screen time changed overnight.



Common Sense was there to put families' minds at ease.

Screen time, or the amount of time kids spend watching TV or movies, playing games, socializing, or texting online with friends, has always been a concern for parents. How much is too much? Could screen time be damaging to my kid? Over the years at Common Sense, our research and advice have remained consistent: The quality of time spent on screens ultimately matters more than the quantity.

child care: Black and Brown families were often hit harder by the pandemic, experiencing more sickness and tragedy.





These families avoided screens. Then the pandemic hit





Screen time and kids: Parents need to worry less about hours logged

Nothing drove that point home more this year than the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown. Suddenly parents were mandated to stay indoors with their children—no school, no extracurricular activities, no playgrounds, no museums, no playdates. Media and technology became a lifeline for many families. Families in underserved communities had it the worst: Many parents were frontline workers who had to continue working, without school or

In response to the unique challenges facing parents sheltering in place because of the coronavirus, the editors at Common Sense Media and the Common Sense Latino Program curated multiple new resources and curations including:

- What to watch, read, and play while staying home, with quality ageappropriate media and books lists.
- Online resources for learning at home and homework help.
- Guidance for understanding COVID-19 news coverage and helping kids process what was happening.
- How to stay calm, for parents and kids, with movement games and wellness apps.

"Your guidance and resources have been invaluable during this difficult time. Thank you from the bottom of my heart."

–Common Sense parent



At the same time, we expanded our **Tech Balance** texting campaign to support lowerincome parents of young children. Each
week we sent a series of timely tips, in
English and Spanish, on a range of topics
including:

- How to create (and maintain!)

 a healthy balance of media and technology at home.
- Expert recommendations for quality, age-appropriate content your kids will love.
- Tips for talking to and interacting with your kids about what they see online.
- Videos to help non-tech-savvy parents navigate the distance learning process.



We also ramped up our **Conversations with Common Sense** video series, which brought together authors, experts, and thought leaders for meaningful and timely tips and advice on keeping kids engaged, entertained, and learning while at home, as well as best practices for managing stress and self-care for the whole family during increasingly challenging times.

And, finally, in partnership with First Republic Bank, we created **Parent Trapped**, a Webby-nominated* weekly podcast series hosted by Ann Marie Baldonado. Each episode featured expert interviews, humorous anecdotes, and tips for parents who felt like they might be dropping all the balls in the juggle to balance work, family, and school at home.





22 online camps approved by Common Sense Media

2020: The Common Sense Media Program facts

Throughout 2020 our editors continued to rate and review everything that kids want to watch, read, or play, providing essential information for parents when their kids' screen time reached an all-time high.

57M (•)

video views. including videos in Spanish, across all platforms.

130M 🏦

people use Common Sense Media ratings and advice.

1.4M 🗷

visitors to the Common Sense Latino site.

35K+ ₺

ratings and reviews for everything kids watch, read, and play.

Common Sense Media **Partner Integrations**

We also continued our work with key partners, providing custom curations and integrations for their platforms.

Apple TV: Character strenghts curation

Comcast: Gaming reviews

Target: Curated book lists



Education

In an instant, school became virtual.



Common Sense was there to support teachers in the shift to distance learning.

The pandemic took the American education system by surprise, forcing 3.5 million educators and 55 million students to radically change how they teach and learn. In order to help teachers prepare for and make the most of teaching and learning during school closures, the Common Sense Education team curated a selection of the best digital tools for planning, collaborating, and teaching virtually, including:

- Extensive tools and advice for virtual education, including student-led learning and virtual field trips.
- Remote teaching resources for core subjects.
- Tools to facilitate video collaboration, discussion and communications with parents.
- Research-backed strategies to ease stress and encourage learning.
- News and media literacy resources to help students and families understand what information is credible and what isn't.
- Media balance tips and digital citizenship resources.



EDUCATION WEEK

Teacher Tips: How to Reduce Screen Time When School Is Online



In addition, the Common Sense outreach team developed a new, virtual professional development series to address the specific challenges educators were experiencing as distance learning dramatically affected learning, student and community wellbeing, and the school climate. Weekly webinar topics included:

- Teaching through the digital divide (specifically on supporting kids without adequate connections).
- Learning loss and the social and emotional toll of the pandemic.
- How schools can be a valuable community resource.
- Teacher self-care.
- Preparing to work with edtech and to teach digital citizenship.

EdTech



5 Tips for an Effective **Hybrid Instruction Experience**

2020: The Common Sense Education Program facts

1.1M **③**

member educators in all 50 states and abroad use our digital citizenship and learning resources. 3.6K ♣

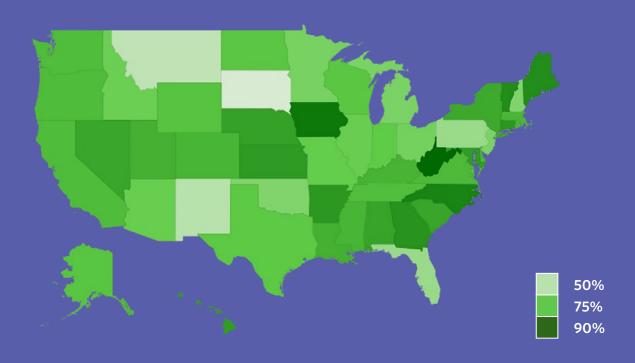
ratings and reviews make teaching with tech easier.

98K ★

schools use Common Sense Education's materials in classrooms. 1M 🗷

downloads of
Digital Citizenship
Curriculum and
teaching resources.

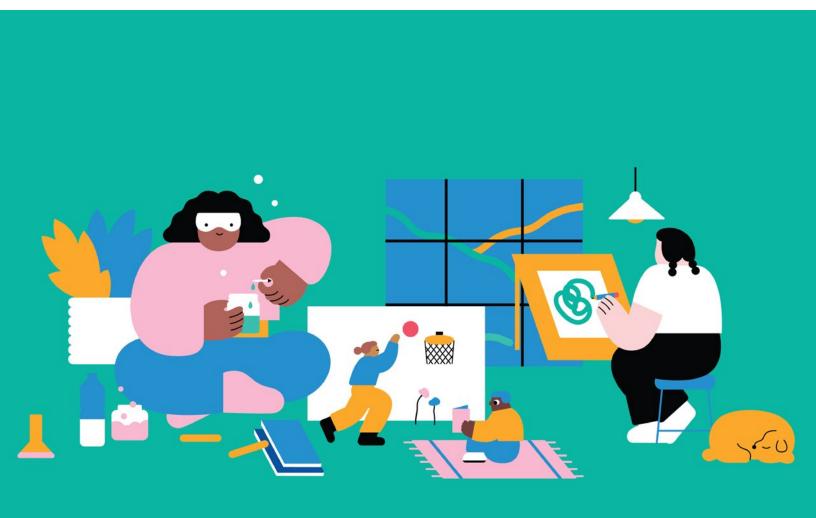
in at least 50% of schools in every state



"Being 100% virtual, we encountered more situations with cyberbullying, texting, and emails. In most situations, I didn't know how to deal with the issues and my go-to is always to educate my students about the situations as a whole group.

I used the common sense education resources all the time, the videos, the quizzes and resources to help our class deal with and understand certain issues." —Common Sense Education classroom teacher

A world-class collaboration in support of families and educators.



Leveraging our deep relationships with families and educators, partners and funders, we developed a new resource to keep kids learning, healthy, and happy in uncertain times.

As it became clear that the pandemic would alter our day-to-day lives for months, families and schools were scrambling for solutions to keep kids safe, busy, and learning. Common Sense partnered with Amplify, a publisher of next-generation curriculum and assessment programs, to build a coalition that would create something that educators and families could use right away and that would provide resources and support to all.





Common Sense Launches 'Wide Open School' to Assist with Remote Learning

Twenty-five initial partners and 15 funders signed on to help build a website that not only offered high-quality educational content for free, but also fit the needs of both families and educators transitioning to distance learning. Common Sense provided editorial direction, based on our edtech ratings and award-winning Digital Citizenship Curriculum, and put together daily plans for kids in preschool through grade 12. Amplify agreed to take the lead on design and technical development.

"Thank you! I don't know how to express my gratitude for your initiative and desire to help and connect all learners. I love, especially, that you intentionally choose sites that do not require a login, which as you must know, hinders access and participation. Thank you so much for being angels for us educators and learners during this time!" —Common Sense Educator

With a small but mighty working team, Wide Open School solicited and secured a variety of contributors, from NBA stars to art museums to world-class publishers, to offer educational content for free. Following our advocacy efforts to close the digital divide, we featured resources for free and low-cost devices, and internet from partners like Comcast, Cox, AT&T, and EveryoneOn. A range of community partners, such as Boys & Girls Clubs of America, Head Start, Abriendo Puertas, and 4-H, spread the word to families that this free resource was available for them to use.

Daily Plan

Ultimately, Wide Open School expanded to more than 80 partners, from well-known producers like PBS, Smithsonian, and Khan Academy to specialists like Ubongo, 826 National, Peer Health Exchange, and Facing History and Ourselves. The team curated over 2,500 resources in 13 subjects, from core academics like math and social studies to supplemental areas like arts and fitness as well as digital citizenship and emotional well-being. Screen-free and downloadable offline activities were highlighted for those struggling with connectivity. Custom

resources for caregivers and educators ranged from those around learning and thinking differences to equity and social justice, motivation, and academic support.



To ensure the site would support the families who needed it the most, the team focused on accessibility, selecting free activities and resources in one easy-to-use, visually engaging format. A multicultural, multilinguistic team was formed to support families with topics that mattered to them most at an accessible reading level, including curating resources available in Spanish.

Wide Open School launched on April 1, 2020—two weeks from its inception providing a safety net for children to continue learning, no matter what. To date, 2 million teachers and families around the world have visited Wide Open School. In total, 340 school districts, including large urban districts such as New York City and Los Angeles, have adopted the site for their students. Educators, parents, and students have shared overwhelmingly positive feedback that this effort has been a success in more ways than one.

2020 Wide Open School Partners

QUARTZ



Common Sense gathered a who's who of tech and media to help kids learn at home







































































2020 Wide Open School Partners



































































































Research

Data keeps us apprised of the situation on the ground.



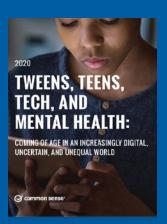
In 2020 the Common Sense Research Program informed efforts that helped close the digital divide, combat misinformation during the election, and safeguard kids' mental health.



TEENS AND THE NEWS: THE INFLUENCERS, CELEBRITIES, AND PLATFORMS THEY SAY MATTER MOST, 2020

The rise of social media personalities and influencers as part of the news media landscape has given young people new ways to access information, understand biases, and think critically about how the news affects their lives (or doesn't). **Teens** and the News: The Influencers, Celebrities, and Platforms They Say Matter Most, **2020** asked how teens get their news, how much they trust different news sources, and more. This report was a follow-up to our 2017 study on this topic, News and America's Kids, which asked kids age 10 to 18 similar questions about how they engaged with and understood the news. As the pandemic exacerbated political and

social injustices, misinformation, and online divisions, it was even more important to understand where the next generation was getting its news. And although the 2020 study was conducted before the coronavirus pandemic reached the United States, Teens and the News offers valuable insights into how teens have gravitated toward social media platforms and other nontraditional news sources over the past three years.



TWEENS, TEENS, TECH, AND MENTAL HEALTH: COMING OF AGE IN AN INCREASINGLY DIGITAL, UNCERTAIN, AND UNEQUAL WORLD, 2020

Over the past few years, we've seen an alarming rise in depression, anxiety, and suicide risk among tweens and teens, and many parents, academics, and health

professionals are working to better understand the relationships between heavy technology and social media use and mental health. Enter the coronavirus pandemic of 2020, when literally overnight, schools, peer networks, workplaces, and communities were pushed entirely online, and societal structures were unmoored. Parents, educators, and adolescents themselves faced unprecedented instability and uncertainty, a recipe for toxic stress, trauma, and anxiety.

Vex

TEENS & MENTAL HEALTH

The pandemic is raising concerns about how teens use technology. But there's still a lot we don't know.

To understand how we can best support adolescents and develop guardrails for the future, Common Sense released Tweens, **Teens, Tech, and Mental Health**, a report that synthesized what is known about adolescents' mental health and its associations with digital technology use. Importantly, the report provided guidance to identify those who might be most vulnerable, signal when parents should be concerned, and outline what stakeholders can do to help.

THE COMMON SENSE CENSUS: MEDIA **USE BY KIDS AGE ZERO TO EIGHT, 2020**

Young kids spend more of their TV and video viewing time watching online videos than ever before. But the content they're seeing on sites like YouTube and TikTok

lacks educational value and, in many cases, exposes young children to advertising, violence, and other content that's inappropriate for their ages.





CENSUS 0-8

Edtech Reports Recap: Video Is Eating the World, Broadband Fails to Keep Up

Our fourth iteration of the **Common Sense Census** focusing on this age group is a pre-pandemic snapshot of young kids' media use, and presents a unique opportunity to understand the impact of the pandemic when combined with future research. The results of this report are vitally important to finding solutions that provide all children with access to media that supports learning, health, and opportunity.

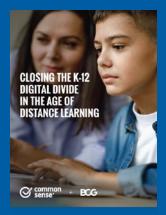


YOUNG KIDS AND YOUTUBE: HOW ADS. TOYS, AND GAMES DOMINATE VIEWING

One of the biggest unknowns in kids' media research is what, exactly, kids are doing

with their media time. Released in conjunction with 2020's Common Sense Census: Media Use by Kids Age Zero to **Eight**, and in partnership with Dr. Jenny Radesky and the University of Michigan, Young Kids and YouTube: How Ads, Toys, and Games Dominate Viewing is an attempt to address the "what," with timely data on the platform where young kids are now spending most of their viewing time: YouTube. Among the key findings: Ninetyfive percent of early childhood videos included some form of advertising, and one in five videos viewed by children age 8 and under contained ads that were not age-appropriate.

Bloomberg YOUNG KID AND YOUTUBE Kids on YouTube See Many Ads, Few Educational Videos: Study



CLOSING THE K-12 DIGITAL DIVIDE IN THE AGE OF DISTANCE LEARNING

Common Sense partnered with the Walton Family Foundation and Boston Consulting Group on a series of research reports to understand the true extent of the digital

divide and its consequences. Analysis showed that 15 million to 16 million kids -3 million to 4 million more than previous estimates—and as many as 400,000 teachers lack adequate internet or computing devices at home.

- The first report contained state-by-state data and carefully established the technical requirements for adequate distance learning and the specific needs of different segments of the K-12 student and teacher populations with distance learning technology gaps.
- A second, follow-up report by Boston Consulting Group, Common Sense, and EducationSuperHighway analyzed relevant case studies and highlighted best practices for closing the K-12 digital divide during the coronavirus pandemic.
- The third report, developed in partnership with Boston Consulting **Group and Southern Education** Foundation and published in 2021, tracked progress made during the pandemic toward closing the digital divide, while also exploring its root causes. Importantly, this report provides a set of recommendations for policymakers on how to close the digital divide once and for all.



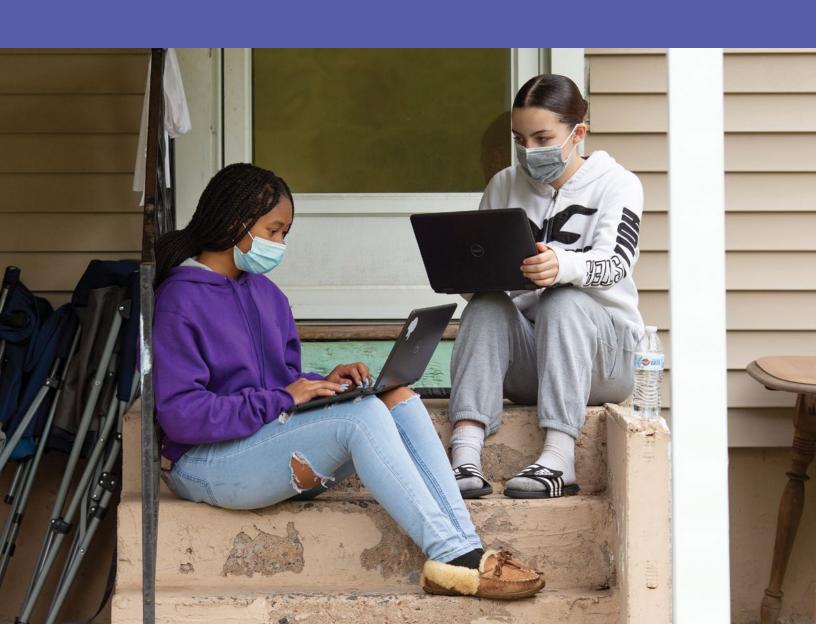


AGE OF DISTANCE LEARNING (DIGITAL DIVIDE)

Many kids lack tech tools for remote learning, new report says



2020 laid bare the challenges kids and families face in America today.



Common Sense focused on addressing inequities and protecting the vulnerable.



As the pandemic forced schools to go virtual, closed businesses, and created 100% remote workforces, millions of kids and families in the United States lacked broadband access and were suddenly locked out of education, work, health care, and community. Common Sense's advocacy team swung into action to:

Close the digital divide

Access to robust home broadband service, appropriate and reliable learning devices, and digital citizenship tools that keep families and teachers connected are essential to the future of education. The digital divide exacerbates economic inequality and lack of opportunity, and it curtails access to health care and pandemic-related information, applying for critical benefits, and job training, just at a time when people desperately need to be connected.





The "homework gap" was a real problem long before COVID-19, with children from lower-income families suffering the effects of unequal internet and device access at home for education, health, and social connectivity. Throughout the year, and through a series of actions, Common Sense continued to sound the alarm, reminding those in power of the devastating consequences that a lack of broadband meant for kids and families in the pandemic, and pressing for funding in Congress to close the gap once and for all.





Organizations help kids bridge digital schooling divide by providing internet, learning tools

"Really love how @CommonSense is leading in this time. The broadband divide is a real issue and exacerbates inequity in this time of COVID19." —Andrea Zellner, Twitter response

Ensure our kids were learning in secure environments

The Common Sense Privacy Program evaluates privacy policies so that teachers can make smart and safe choices about the learning tools they use with their students, and so that schools and districts can participate in improving the technology used in K-12 classrooms. When school moved entirely online, it was more important than ever for teachers and districts to recommend and use edtech tools that safeguarded student privacy and data.





LEARNING IN SECURE ENVIRONMENT

Internet Safety for Kids: How to Protect Your Child From Online Danger

The Common Sense Privacy Ratings became indispensable, providing ratings for more than 1,000 edtech tools and solutions. The team also provided privacy consultations to developers who saw demand for their products surge as a result of the pandemic, and who were not necessarily prepared for their products to be used in educational settings. This was the case with the videoconferencing platform Zoom, whom we advised on how to improve their product privacy practices around use by students and children. Zoom launched a new Zoom for Education product shortly after; it received one of our highest privacy ratings.

We also have made great progress in using artificial intelligence/machine learning

(AI/ML) to help us read and score privacy policies more efficiently, and it's an exciting new technological frontier for the organization. Our thought leadership articles on privacy for students have been used by Congressional committees and experts nationally and internationally, and we estimate that over 40 million students in the U.S. now have significantly enhanced privacy protections thanks to our privacy work over the past two or three years.



Allow consumers to exercise their right to privacy

In an era where we're tracked with every click, swipe, and voice request, 2020 ushered in critical new privacy rights for consumers. The California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA), which was cosponsored by Common Sense and passed in 2018, went into effect in January 2020 and gave consumers unprecedented rights over how their data is collected, used, and sold. The law extends extra protections for teens up to age 16, prohibiting companies from selling their data unless they are explicitly given permission.

In order to help consumers control and protect the massive amounts of data that companies collect from them, Common Sense created free resources to help

families understand and exercise their rights, including a "Do Not Sell" form and tips for how to understand what information companies have about them and how families can best protect it.





RIGHT TO PRIVACY

Privacy ballot measure could give you more control over personal data -- again

Combat misinformation with news and media literacy

Common Sense research revealed that Americans are deeply skeptical that their votes will be counted, and young adults in particular were the least likely to be confident about knowing how to participate in the 2020 election.

Therefore, as part of our news and media literacy efforts to combat misinformation, Common Sense released the Young Voter's Guide to Social Media and the News to help give all voters, and especially young voters, the resources and tools necessary to separate fact from fiction and make sense of election news and social media coverage.

The guide also provided the Common Sense "2020 Social Media Voter Scorecard," which showed how the top social platforms were addressing the integrity of election-related posts. The scorecard looked at how they were

Company actions:	f Facebook	o Instagram	eddit	 Snapchat	d' TikTok	Twitter	YouTube
Fact-check political content	<u></u>	<u> </u>	①	0	<u>@</u>	<u> </u>	9
Label, demote, or remove false or misleading posts	9	9	(D)	0	(4)	(9)	9
Remove hate speech and voter suppression	<u> </u>	9	9	0	(4)	9	9
Voter-ready?* Common Sense says:	<u> </u>	<u>@</u>	@	0	(6)	(9)	(9)

fact-checking and flagging or demoting misleading information, and whether or not they were removing content around hate speech or voter suppression. The guide gave voters tips on navigating the flood of videos, memes, and hashtags to get the most out of social media during election season.

Hold tech companies accountable

We are at a pivotal moment in history, as technology collides with our democracy, our fundamental approach to education, and our mental, physical, and emotional health.



MarketWatch

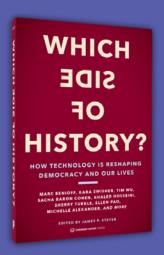
#StopHateForProfit

Jim Stever: Only a breakup of Facebook and controls on social media can reduce disinformation and lies on the internet

In late spring of 2020, Common Sense launched the #StopHateforProfit campaign alongside the Anti-Defamation League, the NAACP, Color of Change, and Free Press. The goal of the campaign, which is ongoing, is to pressure social media companies specifically Facebook—to curb hate speech



on their platforms. The campaign culminated in a coordinated advertising boycott of Facebook, which counted over 1,200 businesses (including Coca-Cola, Ford, Honda, HP, REI, Starbucks, Target, Unilever, and Verizon), nonprofits, and other advertisers.



In the fall, we launched the Which Side of History? campaign, anchored by a new book by our CEO and founder, Jim Steyer. The campaign convened notable

journalists, engineers, entrepreneurs, activists, storytellers, business leaders, and scholars for dozens of virtual events that explored the ethics (or lack thereof) behind Big Tech, and presented a road map of solutions for regulation and reform.

Out of the Which Side of History? campaign, in November 2020 we released a new Tech Agenda, a detailed road map to ensure that tech is a force for equity and opportunity for all families. The agenda focuses on four areas—platform accountability, privacy, market competition, and tech equity—and will guide our advocacy efforts into 2021 and beyond.

Bloomberg



Big Tech Has to Answer for Misinformation

"Really just want to say that although I have never paid for a membership or signed up for anything with common sense, I am for the first time thinking about doing just that. You took a bold, important and unpopular stand on Prop 15. Bravo!!! We need organizations like you to help us get Prop 15 passed. The Irvine company and so many other wealthy corporations are spending huge amounts of money to try to scare people into thinking that Prop 15 is the start of an effort to raise property taxes on seniors. These are lies but they are taking out prime advertising spots on TV, radio, magazines, etc. to try to push their agenda. THANK YOU for fighting the good fight!!" —Katy, Common Sense Parent



Looking Ahead

2021 got off to a promising start for kids and families in the United States. A new administration immediately set to work on an aggressive vaccination plan.

Relief bills were passed that prioritized the well-being of kids and aimed to lift millions of families out of poverty. And at press time for this report, cities and states around the country looked to get "back to normal," lifting social-distancing requirements as increasing numbers of people were vaccinated.

At Common Sense, our priority is to ensure that all kids and families are able to access the benefits made available to them by the new American Rescue Plan. And as families and schools are putting back the pieces after the stresses and hardships of the last year, we will be providing new resources for schools to support kids' social-emotional learning and well-being. And, to empower students as advocates for themselves and others, we will be expanding our resources on civic learning and news literacy.

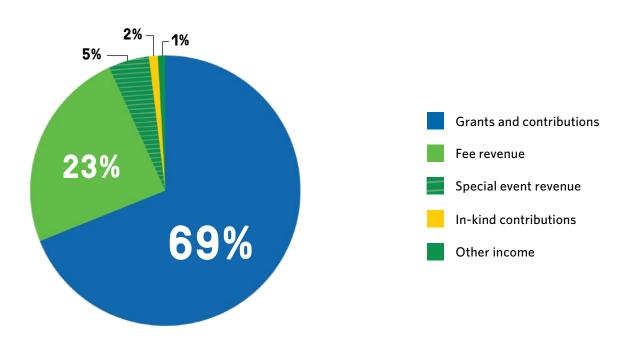
Finally, there is important, unfinished work around our ongoing commitment to serving diverse audiences. In 2020, organizations such as ours were able to make an honest assessment of whether and how we are serving all communities, specifically Black, Latino, and lower-income populations. While Common Sense had begun this work more than three years earlier, the events of 2020 demonstrated an imperative to do even more. In 2021 we are committed to three priorities: 1), continuing to diversify our staff, 2). creating new family and community content and resources that serve all families, with a focus on Black, Latino, and lower-income families, and 3). publishing new research and ratings that champion diversity, equity, and inclusion.

We are pleased to put 2020 in the rearview mirror, but are grateful to have emerged stronger and more committed than ever to our mission to serve families.



2020 FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Sources of funds



Building for the future

To continue making kids our nation's top priority, Common Sense has several efforts underway that will continue in 2021:

- Maintain and build diversified revenue streams, particularly through new initiatives and programs.
- Build a more sustainable infrastructure to keep administrative costs down.
- Fund an operating reserve to ensure stability in down times.

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