

September 30, 2014

Dear Chairman Wheeler and Commissioners Clyburn, Rosenworcel, Pai and O’Rielly,

We, the undersigned organizations, write to express our appreciation to the Federal Communications Commission (Commission) for seeking input on the funding needs of the E-rate program. With a united voice, we write to request a permanent increase in funding to the E-rate program to allow schools and public libraries to keep pace with the rapidly increasing connectivity demands that they face.

The E-rate program, in its first generation, proved an unprecedented success in expanding connectivity to the nation’s schools and libraries. In less than twenty years since Congress established the program, E-rate played a critical role in transforming the level of connectivity from less than one quarter of schools and libraries to nearly all connected today. However, the E-rate program’s job is not done. Achieving the broadband goals established by the Commission in July will require additional investment.

The influx of learning devices in classrooms and libraries has increased demands on networks. Yesterday’s connectivity speeds simply do not meet the needs of today’s students and library patrons. Efficient and dynamic classrooms and libraries need high-speed connectivity, and they need additional E-rate support to deliver it. E-rate must possess sufficient resources to ensure that all students and patrons can gain access in schools and libraries to the high speed broadband they need to excel in school and beyond. The E-rate program also benefits our nation’s educators, allowing them to take full advantage of the online and digital resources and tools needed to transform teaching and learning. America’s librarians are also being asked to do more than ever as they are seeing a growing demand for internet access as adult learning and workforce development are being re-envisioned in the wake of the economic recession.

In a time when almost every single classroom and the majority of libraries in the nation have lower speed internet access than the average American home while serving multiple times more users per day, it is time to ensure that our libraries and schools are connected with the quality of connectivity that is sufficient and scalable for today’s ever-growing connectivity needs. A sustainable, well-funded E-rate program is critical to ensuring educational opportunity and success for every student and library patron as we look to bolster the nation’s economic competitiveness.

A permanent increase in funding to the E-rate program is needed to ensure the following.

- Access to 21st century education and learning: Giving all students access to modern education requires having reliable infrastructure in place. The Commission must deliver on the shared goal of connecting students and adults to high-speed broadband through schools and libraries to support 21st century learning.
- From basic connectivity to capacity: To move from basic connectivity to meeting capacity needs, E-rate funding must be addressed now, not later. Any serious conversation about ensuring the sustainability of a successful E-rate program will include additional funding for the program. Nearly two decades of success later, the continued

success of the E-rate depends on the program's ability to not only expand access to connectivity, but to ensure access to adequate, sustainable capacity, and to do so with funding that is sufficient.

- Equity: As E-rate is sufficiently funded to expand and ensure adequate access to connectivity, we must maintain the program's commitment to equity, including a focus on disadvantaged communities so that everyone, everywhere – rural, urban and suburban – has access to sufficient capacity.

To ensure the E-rate can provide sustainable broadband capacity to our nation's schools and libraries, we call upon the Commission to permanently increase funding to support current and future goals of the E-rate program.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
Alliance for Excellent Education
American Federation of Teachers
American Foundation for the Blind
American Library Association
Amplify
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Association of School Business Officials International
Benton Foundation
Brain Injury Association of America
Carolina Biological Supply Company
Center for Rural Strategies
Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA)
Cisco
Coalition for Community Schools
Common Cause
CoSN – the Consortium for School Networks
Council for Learning Disabilities
Council of the Great City Schools
Dell Inc.
digedu
EducationSuperHighway
EverFi
Famigo
First Focus
Follett Corporation
Gigabit Libraries Network
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
International Society for Technology in Education
Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
Learning First Alliance
Lumen Touch

Funds for Learning
Magnet Schools of America
Manage Mobility
Microsoft
NAACP
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Federally Impacted Schools
National Association of Independent Schools
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Boards of Education
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Catholic Educational Association
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Education Association
National PTA
National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition
National Rural Education Association
National School Boards Association
National Title I Association
Neverware
New America's Open Technology Institute
Organizations Concerned about Rural Education
Partnership for 21st Century Skills
PerformanceED
PresenceLearning
Presidio Networked Solutions
Public Knowledge
Public Library Association
Rethink Education
Rural Broadband Policy Group
Rural School and Community Trust
Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband (SHLB) Coalition
Software & Information Industry Association
State Educational Technology Directors Association
Teach for America
TechNet
Telecommunications Industry Association
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Urban Libraries Council
World Education, Inc.