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| **Jeanné Collins**  Superintendent of Schools  jcollins@rnesu.org  **Brenda L. Fleming**  Director of Business & Finance  bfleming@rnesu.org  **Marsha F. Bruce**  Director of Special Services  mbruce@rnesu.org  **Andy Kepes**  Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment  akepes@rnesu.org | Chairman Ajit Pai Federal Communications Commission 445 12th Street SW,  Washington, DC 20554  October 16, 2017  Comments regarding E-Rate program proposed changes  Dear Chairman Pai,  I am writing today in response to the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) Public Notice which is considering changes to the E-Rate program. First, let me thank the FCC for your continued support for the E-Rate program and for the critical programmatic and policy changes the commission adopted in 2014. The E-Rate program provides critical discounts to assist schools (like mine) to obtain affordable telecommunications and internet access.  I work in a rural district in Vermont, serving 1400 students K-12 with about 55% poverty. We rely heavily on E-rate as we strive to provide access to the internet and reliable phone services for all of our students, many of whom don’t have access at home. Access to the internet is as basic as having a pencil and paper for schoolwork these days. Students must be facile on the hardware and know how to search with a critical eye for reliable information. Must of what we teach is already outdated by the time textbooks come out and the internet deepens the learning which can take place in a rural school. We also depend on this access for professional development for our teachers and access to high level classes at the small high school we run.  The E-Rate program is a program succeeding in its mission. As the FCC moves forward with this public notice, it is necessary to remain focused on the fact that E-Rate is a program that works.  Any changes to the E-Rate program should be focused on expanding a successful program that has yet to reach its full potential and ensuring the FCC remains a good steward of the changes adopted 2014, allowing those changes to progress and play out as intended.  E-Rate played a critical role in the rapid and significant expansion of connectivity in schools, and the 2014 modernization was a much needed update to ensure more schools and libraries are connected to broadband. The E-Rate’s investment in Category 2 Wi-Fi and internal connections funding is extremely valuable and could not be replaced by school, district or state funds. We in RNESU have already used some of its E-Rate Category 2 funds and plan to use it all for wifi and internal connections, including phone services to expand on our school safety options, as well as increased access in the schools.  In closing, I reiterate my district’s continued, strong support for and reliance upon the E-Rate program for being able to access and afford the high-speed connectivity that is so central to our students’ learning. Thank you for considering these comments.  Thank you for considering my comments.  Sincerely,  *Jeanne Collins*  Jeanne Collins  Superintendent of Schools, RNESU |
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