



North Central ESD
430 Olds Station Road
Wenatchee, WA 98807
509.665.2628
Fax: 509.662.9027
www.ncesd.org

Chairman Ajit Pai
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW,
Washington, DC 20554

October 18, 2017

Dear Chairman Pai,

I am writing today in response to the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) Public Notice which, among other things, considers changes to the E-Rate program. Before delving into my response to the proposed changes, I want to 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 and districts in our rural communities to obtain affordable telecommunications and internet access.

North Central Educational Service District is a state agency that provides regional services to 29 rural school districts across central Washington. Over 44,000 students with a regional poverty rate of over 65% free and reduced lunch. Our demographics include over 20 languages with our Hispanic students comprising nearly 50% of our population. Our vast isolated rural plain in the Columbia Basin is the heart of the agriculture industry in Washington State. Apples, wheat, potatoes, corn, and grapes are found stretched across our region. While technology and aerospace industries are starting to grow in our area, a large number of the working poor, living in generational poverty, reside in our region. We must rely heavily on the federal E-Rate dollars to provide our students with the necessary infrastructure to open up the possibilities for them to break the cycle of poverty and to compete in their global future.

The E-Rate program is a program succeeding in its mission. As the FCC moves forward with this public notice, it is prudent 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.

Across our region, our 29 school districts have used E-Rate Category 2 funding to complete major infrastructure projects. Electronic resources are a powerful and compelling way for our students to engage in core subjects and applied skills in a

relevant and rigorous way. The secure access to broadband to and within the buildings has enabled interactive technology to be used by students. With the prospects of the FCC deeply cutting or eliminating E-Rate programs, North Central Washington students and schools will lose critical funding that has provided:

- Local area network (LAN) installation and replacement projects
- Installation and upgrades of our wireless network infrastructure (WLAN)
- Uninterruptible power supply (UPS)/battery backup systems
- Network routers, switches, Power Over Ethernet (PoE) switches
- Voice over internet protocol (VOIP) handsets
- Building level systems
- Access control and security
- Managed broadband services
-

Without these resources that are or have been supported by E-Rate, our region of 29 school districts would not have the operational capacity for deploying and using technology in their schools.

In closing, I reiterate our region of 29 rural school districts 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.

Sincerely,



Michelle Price, Ed. D.
Superintendent



North Central Educational Service District 171
430 Olds Station Rd., Wenatchee, WA 98801
(W) 509.665.2628 * (C) 509.760.1138
www.ncesd.org

