

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF OSCEOLA COUNTY, FLORIDA

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Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Debra P. Pace

How has your access to E-Rate changed since 2014? Have you received more funding? Have you been better able to serve/support internal connections?

Most recently, access to E-Rate funding has changed because funding support for VoIP and Centrex telephone services has been phased out completely. The district must fund the cost for these telecommunication services going forward, in excess of \$132,000.00 annually. Long distance costs have increased because there are more families in the district maintaining cell phone numbers with out of state or country area codes. The district has reduced the number of phone lines as much as possible while preserving safety/security in its facilities/schools. As far as internal connections funding support, the district-wide discount percentage has broadened funding to all schools, but the budget cap per student has limited the district to deficient upgrades with some projects. It should be noted that all E-Rate internal connections funding was denied by USAC for the years of 2013-2014 and 2014-2015. This decision caused delays in “catching up” with upgrading network infrastructure equipment for schools.

Think about your current connectivity needs vs your ideal connectivity needs. To the extent that your ideal connectivity needs are not yet in place in part because of access to local funds: if those funds were also available, what type of build out would you need to do in the next three to five years?

Current wide area network (WAN) connectivity needs are satisfactory for the current implementation of network and server infrastructure. Unfortunately, it does not allow for consolidation of resources to our core sites. Since 2016, the district has refreshed school server hardware costing hundreds of thousands of dollars. We would like to implement the following changes in an effort to consolidate resources to save on energy and hardware maintenance expenses at the schools:

- **Install our own fiber-optic cabling between two (2) neighboring schools.** This design allows one school to support its adjacent school by sharing a single enhanced server configuration and WAN connection serving both schools. This approach is already being utilized effectively between two pairs of adjoining school campuses.
- **Significantly increase the WAN connection bandwidth at schools.** Potentially increasing bandwidth to schools to 10Gbps would allow for the relocation of server resources to our three (3) core sites, eliminating the need for separate server configurations at each of the more than forty-nine schools.

In your community, do you think of rural health and rural education as competing or complementary needs?

Our community, within Osceola County, does not currently compete with any rural health or education needs. Based on publicly available RHC data, there are various state-wide consortia of health care providers receiving funding support and these needs are complementary.

If E-Rate were to be funded under an umbrella, with a capped amount shared by rural healthcare (whose costs continue to rise), what concerns would that raise for you?

Upon researching the RHC program, a number of concerns and questions are raised. When considering the Schools and Libraries and the Rural Health Care programs:

- Is the intended purpose of the “capped umbrella” to reduce funding support for the Schools and Libraries applicants and increase funding support for Rural Health Care applicants?*
- How will the funding support be apportioned between programs?*
- How will eligible services change for the respective programs?*
- What will be the discount structure or percentage of discount offered to applicants for which types of service?*
- Telecommunications services (VoIP) are not eligible for funding support in Schools and Libraries Division program but are eligible in Rural Health Care program*
- Will criteria used to determine urban/rural status remain the same?*

Please share any specific details about your E-Rate applications: what build out have you done? What system or connectivity upgrades have you put in to place?

E-Rate funding applications supported the district and its schools in achieving:

- Internet access connection upgrades from a 75mb connection to the current 6Gbps*
- Wide-area metro-ethernet network connectivity upgrades from an average 10mbps circuit per school to an average of 400mbps for elementary schools, and 800mbps for secondary schools*
- Implemented VoIP telecommunications*
- Network infrastructure equipment improvements (racks, switches, cabling, uninterruptible power supplies, digital video encoders) have been accomplished in 46 of 49 schools*
- Deployment of modern access points to deliver wireless signals across school campuses*

Open Item: Anything you can share that highlights the value and benefit of E-Rate in your district.

Without E-Rate funding, Osceola County School District would have been incapable of moving into twenty-first century education. The district has participated in the Schools and Libraries program since its inception in 1998. The district is fast-growing and has a transient student population that is very diverse, with a majority of schools qualifying as CEP schools. The number of students impacted cannot be easily determined, however, the district has progressed exponentially to support the educational mission of providing digital access to student resources, curriculum, as well as business and professional services.