



## OLYMPIA COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT #16

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#### **District**

Andy Walsh - Student Services

Scott Powers - Technology

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#### **Olympia High School**

Dr. Ed Jodlowski - Principal

Mike Jones - Dean of Students

Mike Castleman - OHMS

Activities Director

Jackie Litwiller - OMHS Asst.

Activities Director

Phone: 309-379-5911

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#### **Olympia Middle School**

Ben Lee - Principal

Phone: 309-379-5941

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#### **Olympia North Elementary**

Matt Hurley - Principal

Phone: 309-963-4514

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#### **Olympia South Elementary**

Stacey Rogers - Principal

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#### **Olympia West Elementary**

Lisa Castleman - Principal

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Office of Federal Communications

445 12th Street SW

Washington, DC 20554

Dear Federal Communications Rules Committee -

A recent proposal from the Federal Communications Commission would place limits on the amount of money the E-Rate program could make available to support school and library efforts to improve access. Instituting funding caps on E-Rate would increase the gap between the haves and have nots, especially in rural impoverished areas already without reliable connection and health services.

As a rural school Superintendent, E-Rate dollars are crucial in establishing equity and opportunity by providing reliable internet services to our rural schools and communities. I am scheduled to receive \$498,000 in E-Rate funds to bring fiber to the schools within my school district. My school district is nearly 400 square miles and resides within 5 counties in the heartland of Illinois. Without E-Rate funds, I would not be able to provide reliable connectivity to my schools. As a Consolidated PK-12 District, I have 4 school buildings within the 400 square miles which serve 10 rural farming communities. With my scheduled E-Rate funds for next year, not only will I be able to bring high speed reliable internet to my 4 school buildings, but each of the small rural villages would have the opportunity to tap into the school fiber for their own villages services (Fire, EMS, Police, Library, etc...), impacting an entire region of the State.

The proposal places E-Rate and Rural Health Care under the same caps, and pits them against each other. This is a vicious 'Hunger Games' scenario that will ultimately undermine the ability of both programs to support their critical mission. The proposal to consolidate E-Rate and Rural Health Care is in direct conflict with the underlying original statute. The 1996 Telecommunications Act established two separate and distinct programs for schools/libraries and rural health care providers. Section 254(h) contains two distinct subparts, one for schools and libraries, and another for rural health care providers to provide telehealth, intended to support telecom services in different ways for different purposes. Combining these two programs under a single spending cap de facto merges the programs financially, which will become abundantly clear when the funds hit the merged cap.

The FCC has not achieved E-Rates goal of 1 Gbps per 1,000 students set forth in the E-Rate Modernization Order, and capping funding at a time when we need it most in rural America will stop progress toward connectivity; cutting off rural schools and communities from services; and work against the very reason E-Rate was created.

Please do not cap E-Rate. Please do not force rural Health Care and Rural Education to compete for the funds which give them the right to access and equity.

Sincerely -

  
Andrew S. Wise, Ph.D.

Superintendent of Olympia CUSD 16