

# RISING STAR INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

P.O. BOX 37

RISING STAR, TEXAS 76471

(254) 643-1981 • FAX: (254) 643-1922



**Dr. Max Thompson**  
Superintendent

Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Washington, DC 20554

April 25, 2012

In the Matter of )

Lifeline and Link Up Reform and  
Modernization )

WC Docket No. 11-42

Lifeline and Link Up )

WC Docket No. 03-109

Federal-State Joint Board on Universal  
Service )

CC Docket No. 96-45

WC Docket No. 12-23

Advancing Broadband Availability Through  
Digital Literacy Training )

Dear Sir/Madame:

I am writing today in response to the FCC's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking which, among other things, proposes a Digital Literacy Pilot to fund schools and libraries operating digital literacy training courses. Before delving into my response to the proposed pilot, I want to first thank the FCC for your continued support for the E-Rate program. The E-Rate program provides critical discounts to assist schools (like mine) to obtain affordable telecommunications and internet access.

Rising Star is a poor, rural, small school district of approximately 185 students located in central Texas. Our district free & reduced lunch rate is 77% this year and climbing. We strive to not let our circumstances limit our students. If it wasn't for E-Rate and what it does for us to be able to provide dual credit opportunities for our high school students via discounted distance learning connections, providing discounted rates on internal connections so we can afford to have 21<sup>st</sup> Century classroom opportunities via discounted internet access that we could not afford otherwise. Also, the video distance learning opportunities that our elementary students experience that takes them beyond the local area to places they may never experience in their life otherwise.

**Barbara Long**  
K-6 Principal

**Jerry Black**  
7-12 Principal

I just read an e-mail from the US Department of Education in which John White conveys,

“On Monday, April 30, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan will welcome educators and students to the National Rural Education Technology Summit 2.0 – an online virtual conference with up to 1,500 log-ins. Participants could be an individual at their computer or a teacher logging in with their entire class to join an interactive session on STEM with the Smithsonian or Robotics with the Naval Surface Warfare Center. The goal is to show ways that technology is being used to overcome rural isolation and increase educational opportunities.”

Rising Star would not be able to even consider participation were it not for the E-Rate program, we simply couldn't afford the access. E-Rate makes it possible for RSISD to break down the barriers.

The pilot would provide grants to K-12 schools and libraries, lasting four years, to hire trainers, conduct training courses and provide resources/materials to those who lack digital literacy skills. While the FCC does not propose to fund the pilot using E-Rate funds, it does propose implementing and administering the program through the same division that oversees the E-Rate program. Specifically, the FCC proposes implementing/administering the program through the Schools & Libraries Division of the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC).

I am concerned that operating the pilot through E-Rate will undermine the important and ongoing work of E-Rate, causing delays in the program's application and appeal processes, creating auditing problems and results in problematic precedents for E-Rate's eligible services. **Specifically, I oppose the proposal to operate/administer the proposed pilot through the E-Rate program.**

I personally am afraid that diversion of resources within the E-Rate administration might severely impact what I am able to provide for my students. I furthermore am afraid that program intent might change and funding for E-Rate be decreased which would make it difficult for us to continue to not let poor, rural, and small define our district.

Thank you for considering my response as you move forward with your decision on the Digital Literacy Pilot. I applaud the FCC for its continued efforts to protect the already oversubscribed E-Rate program by not funding the pilot with E-Rate funding. I urge you to take similar protective measures when it comes to the implementation and administration of the pilot; please ensure that critical, limited E-Rate resources—both fiscal and administrative—are protected.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Max Thompson". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Max Thompson