

**Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C.**

In the Matter of)
)
Modernizing the E-rate Program) WCDocketNo.13-184
For Schools and Libraries)
)

COMMENTS OF ORANGE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
in response to

Notice of Proposed Rule Making

*Modernizing the E-rate
Program for Schools and Libraries*

Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) is located in the metropolitan Orlando, Florida area. OCPS serves approximately 192,000 K-12 students at 191 schools and educational centers district-wide. Students in Orange County come from 212 countries and speak 105 different languages. For more information about OCPS, visit the website at <http://www.ocps.net>.

Continuously availability of sustained telecommunication and Internet connectivity is critical to the district vision "**to be the top producer of successful students in the nation**" and succeed in the business of educating students and keeping them safe.

All OCPS buildings utilize enterprise voice infrastructure for vital contact with other schools/offices, parents and the community. Increasingly, new and emerging unified communication features and functionality are integrated into everyday business interactions. Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) and Internet are pivotal components to this enhancement. Though IP telephony maximizes phone lines, they is still a telecommunications requirement for schools and offices throughout the district.

OCPS, like many other school districts around the nation, strives to create 21st century learning environments enabling students to effectively collaborate with their peers in the school system and around the world. This year, OCPS transformed seven schools to a Digital Curriculum utilizing a 1:1 device ratios, digital instructional focus and online assessment provisions. OCPS is expanding the digital focus through a two-school pilot utilizing bring your own device, or BYOD. Students and staff rely upon connectivity to LAN/WAN and Internet to access state-mandated online testing, digital curriculum, Learning Management Systems, STEM-research, etc.

E-Rate does not meet the demands these new initiatives place on school districts. The funding cap of \$2.25 billion was set in 1998, before broadband Internet, tablets or digital curriculum existed. According Keith Krueger, CEO of Consortium for School Networking, doubling the E-Rate cap would cost about 40 cents more per month on the average consumer's telephone bill—or about \$5 per year (Krueger, 2013).

Below are OCPS perspectives toward major E-Rate reform

1. Increase annual E-Rate funding to \$4.5 billion with ongoing adjustment for inflation. The original cap was set when gas was \$1 per gallon! The ability to deliver Internet bandwidth to our students is ultimately a combination of both Priority 1 and Priority 2 funding; therefore, the funding cap needs to be increased to provide Internet (P1) and the infrastructure (P2) it takes to run on. Better still, increase funding, remove the priority system and give districts more spending flexibility. The State E-Rate Coordinators Alliance (SECA, 2013) plan should not be implemented—as their approach suggests cutting Telecom services, Web Hosting and Maintenance across the board and scheduling P2 funding on a rotating basis (Klein, 2013). There is no regard to individual district goals or consideration for the massive disparity in P1 and P2 commitments across districts. OCPS agrees with SETDA (State Education Technology Directors Association) that Universal Service statutory requirements have not been met due to a chronic funding shortfall in the E-Rate program.
2. OCPS will have replaced or renovated 65 schools by the start of the 2013-2014 school year with 35 of those new schools constructed since 2003 to alleviate overcrowding. The district currently applies for E-Rate funding to refresh networks at approximately 25 schools annually, which allows our district to fund enhancements to 25 other schools' networks otherwise ineligible for P2 E-Rate funding—89 percent or lower poverty level. Internal connections will lose all funding if E-Rate remains at the current 2.3 billion dollar cap. The district would not be able to keep pace with President Obama's ConnectEd initiative or state-mandated digital curriculum and online testing requirements (Naik, 2013).
3. OCPS supports a per-student funding solution to ensure equitable distribution of available funds. OCPS is the 11th largest district in the nation and 4th largest in Florida. Commitments for the 12-13 school year equate to \$54 per student, a conservative request given the 76 percent (E-Rate) Free and Reduced Lunch eligible population. Requests for 13-14 school year equate to \$96 per student in response to legislation regarding digital curriculum, online testing, etc. These requests are conservative compared to much smaller districts requesting funded at levels of \$6,000-7,000 per student. In the strictest definition of ConnectEd, E-Rate would only fund Internet connections (Obama, 2013). If Telecommunications and Internal Connections funding were cut, OCPS would only receive \$3.9 million for the 2013-14 school year, even though over 77 percent of our students reside at or below poverty level.
4. OCPS proposes the per-student limit be multiplied by school's discount level, accounting for Free and Reduced eligibility. OCPS supports the continued use of Free and Reduced meal counts for funding calculations to determine neediness. The current system of aggregated discount percent complicates the application, review and audit processes.
5. OCPS proposes to eliminate the priority system as it prevents schools and districts from deciding how to allocate their E-rate funds. Infrastructure costs for a school system as large as OCPS are

increasingly demanding. OCPS requires funding for Priority 2 services to meet President Obama's goal of providing 99% of the schools access to high-speed broadband and wireless.

6. OCPS supports simplification of application process and forms. The initial application process is cumbersome and unnecessarily labor intensive. OCPS proposes E-rate vendors be required to list items on quotes/invoices as eligible or ineligible for E-rate discounts/reimbursements to expedite funding commitment decisions.
7. Also, current Program Integrity Analysis (PIA) practices delay funding for larger districts. It would appear they are set aside due to the larger dollar amount until rollover funds are available. The process filters through several layers of preliminary reviews lasting 4-6 months prior to the actual PIA reviewer assignment.
8. OCPS supports the existing eligible services framework and list. Differing technology needs of individual schools and ongoing advancements in technology require the FCC to maintain a neutral eligible services list that does not impose specific service or design limitations on applicants. Clearer eligible services descriptions are needed and service providers should be required to maintain E-Rate knowledge of these services and annual program changes.

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