

E-Rate has been a very important program to the Franklin County School District. The program has permitted our district to provide internet to every classroom allowing students to communicate and collaborate with others globally. Without the E-Rate program, our district would be devastated by not being able to provide 21st Century Skills to our students through online activities such as web-based classes, interactive video conferencing, virtual field trips and opportunities for collaborating on project-based learning activities. Currently, our district could not even afford to provide connectivity annually without E-Rate funding.

One of the ways that the E-Rate program might be improved to better serve our district would be through increased bandwidth services. As we add devices to the network, such as smartphones, pads, etc..., those devices continue to push up bandwidth needs within the schools. Also, increased funding would be appreciated to help with Priority 2 needs. For example, we would like to provide wireless connectivity to our schools, but are only able to do so in those schools that qualify as a 90% school for funding. Our other schools fall in the 80s% range and Priority 2 funding never seems to go down far enough to help them. Lastly, I have heard that non-instructional areas of schools were being looked at for non-funding. To non-fund these areas would put a hardship on the students, schools and those people completing E-Rate forms. For example, to non-fund an area such as a football field house would prevent students playing football to complete online player requirements such as the STAR program that teaches players ethics, bullying and character education in sports. Many of our students don't have internet connectivity at home, so they are dependent on online services at school sites. Additionally, schools are responsible for posting scores to the state athletic association shortly after each game has been played. Lastly, the time required to complete E-Rate forms would increase because of the additional chore of separating areas of the school as funded vs non-funded.

The E-Rate program has been a great program for our district. Although, there are a lot of requirements and deadlines to keep track of, the people working at USAC have always been helpful and courteous. The program has certainly been an asset to our school system and I cannot imagine us trying to function without such a program in place.

Sincerely

Sandra Guinn

District Technology Director

Franklin County Schools, Alabama