

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

January 8, 2014

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Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Wheeler, Commissioner Clyburn, Commissioner O'Rielly, Commissioner Rosenworcel, and Commissioner Pai:

I write to urge swift action to improve and modernize the E-rate program in order to help connect our nation's schools and libraries with high-speed broadband over the next five years. Access to high-speed internet is necessary to prepare students of all ages for the jobs of the 21st century. Modernizing the E-Rate program will help ensure every school has the ability to accelerate next-generation education reforms, support teachers, and enhance student learning. It would also allow libraries to provide personalized education for non-traditional students who may be homeschooled, distance learners, or seeking their GEDs.

These reforms are particularly crucial in rural areas, where students are less likely to have the speeds and infrastructure needed to take advantage of new technologies and high-quality educational content. Too many of our students are currently trying to learn the skills of tomorrow with outdated infrastructure. The average American school or library has about the same bandwidth as the average home, but schools have 200 times as many users. Whether it's checking assignments through a course management system, watching a science video on YouTube, or practicing foreign language pronunciation via a tutoring website, students are consuming increasing amounts of bandwidth. But with such limited resources available, a single user watching video can leave other students or library patrons with only intermittent internet access, significantly inhibiting their access to online education.

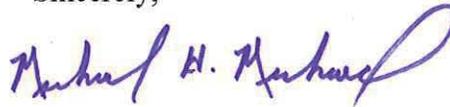
While the E-rate program was successful in bringing basic telephone and broadband to schools and libraries, such connectivity is no longer sufficient. 72% of our nation's schools do not have the internet infrastructure they need to take advantage of current digital learning opportunities, and less than 1% have the infrastructure they will need in the future. In Maine, the public library is the only place people can go for free internet access in 77% of our communities. As distance learning needs grow and the GED exam moves online in 2014, even greater educational demands are expected to be placed on already limited library bandwidth.

In order for students to take full advantage of digital learning, America's schools should aim for 100 Mbps of bandwidth or more for every 1,000 students and staff members today, and 1 Gbps by 2017. In today's global economy, these high speeds are not just an educational imperative, but a competitive necessity. Test results released this month show that American students still lag far behind countries like China, South Korea, Japan, Switzerland, and the Netherlands in math, reading, and science. It is no longer enough just to compete for jobs; we have to compete for higher educational outcomes enabled by higher broadband speeds.

For these reasons, I support modernizations to: (1) Focus E-rate on broadband connectivity and infrastructure to ensure that we maximize the impact of the program on learning by limiting support for yesterday's outdated dial-up era technologies; (2) Create an upgrade fund within the E-rate program to connect every school and library, particularly those in rural areas, to high-speed broadband; (3) Increase transparency and accountability for the program in order to reduce costs, research effective practices, and ensure that all students have access to the connectivity they need; and (4) Simplify and streamline onerous paperwork requirements to improve program efficiency. These reforms will make possible strategic investments to deploy high-speed broadband to schools and classrooms across the country.

If we do nothing we risk letting our kids and our current workforce fall further behind on the international marketplace. By acting now, we will lay the foundation to ensure our future as global leaders. Therefore, I encourage the Commission support swift action to modernize and expand the E-rate program to bring transformative learning opportunities to every school and library in America.

Sincerely,



Michael H. Michaud
Member of Congress



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

April 11, 2014

The Honorable Michael Michaud
U.S. House of Representatives
1724 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Michaud:

Thank you for your letter regarding modernization of the Commission's rules governing the Schools and Libraries universal service support mechanism – also known as the E-rate program. I particularly appreciate your constructive support for ensuring that the E-rate program is well positioned into the future.

Modernization of the E-rate program is among the most important tasks currently facing the Commission. As you point out in your letter, it is critical to America's future to ensure that our schools and libraries have affordable access to modern high-capacity broadband technologies. I am a strong advocate for and believe in the E-rate program, and the need to modernize its operation to emphasize high-speed broadband. I have attached two recent speeches on the topic.

Commission staff is reviewing the record that has been developed in response to the July 2013 *Notice of Proposed Rulemaking*, and meeting with stakeholders to ensure that we have robust input from all interested parties. Just a few weeks ago, the staff released a *Public Notice* seeking focused comment on a handful of specific issues that have been raised by commenters. And my goal is for the Commission to adopt an Order later this spring that would implement fundamental structural and administrative changes, the results of which would go into effect in 2015. We need to ensure that the E-rate program supports the high-capacity broadband needed to give our students access to twenty-first century educational opportunities, while simultaneously improving the efficiency and administration of the program and establishing explicit program goals and measurements. We will include your letter in the record of the proceeding for Commission consideration as we proceed with reform of this important program.

I appreciate your interest in this matter. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Wheeler".

Tom Wheeler

Enclosures