

July 7, 2014

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

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

We write to express our support for many of the elements of Chairman Wheeler's proposal to modernize the E-rate program. This plan advances a number of common sense reforms as a first step toward ensuring students have access to high-speed broadband and robust internal connections. Our diverse coalition represents beneficiaries of the program, including all state departments of education, 4,400 individuals and organizations involved in blended and online learning, 6,400 charter schools, and other organizations who are on the front lines of education reform and digital learning.

To prepare our students to succeed in today's economy, we must provide high-speed broadband both to and within our schools and libraries. A modernized E-rate should help schools and libraries to invest in scalable, high-capacity broadband services as well as the internal equipment needed to ensure that broadband supports teachers, students, and 21st century learning models.

In 2012, less than 5 percent of schools and just 1 percent of libraries nationwide received any support for internal connections. Under the proposal, over 43 million students in more than 100,000 schools will benefit from this investment for the first time in at least the last five years. This targeted funding represents a 75 percent increase in funding for internal connections in rural schools and a 60 percent increase for urban and suburban schools. The proposal to use a common sense budget for Wi-Fi spending will not only give applicants greater predictability but will also help ensure the program is more equitable overall.

Providing support for consortia is critical as a means to help make these services more readily available and affordable for schools, especially for rural and low-income applicants. Consortia can allow applicants to pool resources and expertise while driving down costs through increased buying power; improve the speed, reliability and security of local networks; and assist applicants, particularly in our rural areas, to better leverage modern broadband infrastructure effectively and efficiently.

Chairman Wheeler's proposal is a necessary first step toward providing students with the educational infrastructure they need to excel. The proposal will allow for more efficient and focused use of E-rate's limited funding.

With this momentous opportunity at hand, the FCC can and should act now. Our schools and libraries, and most importantly the students they serve, cannot afford any delays.

/s/ Peter Zamora

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