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Lack of adequate funding is a barrier to increasing broadband speed, access in schools and libraries

EdLiNC reacts to today's FCC vote to approve changes to E-Rate

WASHINGTON—The Federal Communications Commission voted today to approve several changes to E-Rate that would dramatically increase speed and access to broadband internet for schools and libraries across the country. The FCC order will give libraries and schools the ability to use E-Rate funds to connect to broadband in every community and to connect in the a cost-effective way because it gives them the choice of contracting to light dark fiber already in the ground or with existing state, regional, and local networks.

The Education and Library Networks Coalition (EdLiNC), an umbrella group comprised of major public and private education associations and the library association, focuses on preserving and strengthening the E-Rate program. The following statement may be attributed to the EdLiNC Coalition:

“EdLiNC wholeheartedly supports many of the changes that today’s order adopts, including rule changes to streamline the E-Rate’s application process and to make leased dark fiber eligible for discount, but we remain extremely concerned that the Commission has yet to adequately address the biggest problem facing the program: lack of funding.

“The Commission has acknowledged E-Rate’s increasingly dire funding picture. Annual demand for financial support is outpacing available funds by \$1.75 billion while available funding for internal connections is dwindling, with the likely prospect that no internal connections funding will be available soon. Moreover, E-Rate’s \$2.25 billion annual funding cap has not changed in more than a decade even though it is based on an outdated 12-year-old study. The Commission’s order also establishes a costly new pilot program that would allow E-Rate to support wireless internet access for off-premises devices but requests no additional funding for that program.

“The Commission’s decision to adjust the cap annually based on inflation is a useful first step but falls far short of the escalating demand for broadband services and applications in our nation’s schools and libraries. The inflationary adjustment may provide little or no additional funding to E-Rate this coming year as the economy may produce a zero inflation rate.

“America’s school children and library patrons count on the connectivity provided through E-Rate, so the lack of adequate funding for E-Rate becomes a significant barrier to attaining access to online educational, employment, research and government services and tools.

“We call upon the Commission to address the funding crisis facing the E-Rate in subsequent rulemaking.”

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For more information on the Education & Library Networks Coalition (EdLiNC), please go to www.edlinc.org/