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**New Report Finds Schools and Libraries Rely on E-Rate Support
– Especially Under Current Budget Constraints**

WASHINGTON, DC – With schools and public libraries facing the toughest budget cuts in years, E-Rate (education rate) support for basic telecommunications services, Internet access and networking is essential according to a new report from the Education and Library Networks Coalition (EdLiNC).

In EdLiNC's third report, *E-Rate: A Vision of Opportunity and Innovation*, leaders from communities, libraries, and schools around the country share results of how support from the E-Rate program has brought new resources, opportunities and experiences to thousands of students, teachers, parents and community members. The report documents how the E-Rate program has helped transform America's schools and libraries into twenty-first century institutions, but it also demonstrates how the E-Rate is providing much needed support to schools and communities in today's tough economy.

In rural Alaska, the Kuspuk and Lower Kuskokwin School Districts know that the E-Rate is integral to implementing the No Child Left Behind Act because it enables them to meet the teacher quality mandates through online professional development. Ted Berry, Technology Director for the school district said, "Technology is bringing remote Eskimo villages into the 21st Century." He noted that E-Rate discounts have facilitated standards-based teaching by allowing school administrators and teachers to maintain district-wide student achievement records.

However, interviewees reported that E-Rate support is not just about meeting new mandates or expanding existing services; it is also about providing support to sustain necessary services. For example, the technology budget for Louisiana's libraries was reduced due to the state's funding shortfall and E-Rate support will allow the state to leverage resources necessary to maintain key databases.

In *E-Rate: A Vision of Opportunity and Innovation*, EdLiNC offers five (5) key findings that are based on in-depth interviews with over 90 E-Rate recipients in 25 states.

- **The E-Rate is an important tool for economic empowerment in underserved communities.** Survey respondents reported that E-Rate supported Internet access is essential in helping people search for jobs, obtain vocational and professional training, and develop key technology skills that are prerequisites for success in today's job market. For example, in Fort Benton, Montana, the public schools' business teacher uses online business development kits to teach students how to run a small business.
- **The E-Rate is beginning to bring new learning opportunities to special education students.** For the first time since EdLiNC has been polling E-Rate recipients, teachers and parents reported significant use of technology to communicate with individuals who were deaf or hard of hearing. Respondents also reported Internet access has helped students with cognitive disabilities gain work and life skills. At the King's Daughters' School in Tennessee, a private school which serves children with cognitive disabilities, the Internet and computers are infused into everyday school life, ensuring that students can become active and productive participants in society.
- **The E-Rate is transforming education in rural America.** Support from the E-Rate is bringing advanced placement courses and new professional opportunities for teachers in rural communities. Library patrons are now able to gain access to a broad range of educational and cultural resources, once out of reach. For military families, including those in Wessington, South Dakota, the library Internet connection is the best and often the only way to communicate with family members stationed in Kuwait.
- **The E-Rate supported technology infrastructure in schools is vital to reaching the student achievement goals stated in No Child Left Behind (NCLB).** Many schools and school districts rely on technology to track student progress, identify problem areas and direct resources to improve student learning. Additionally, the E-Rate provides invaluable support to meeting the teacher quality requirements of NCLB. According to Administrators at the Houston Independent School District in Texas, E-Rate support has allowed them to leverage resources to create an online database, which "allows us to better understand the strengths of individual students and trace the areas where they need additional reinforcement."
- **Schools and libraries are devoting significant resources and exercising great care in completing E-Rate applications.** Survey respondents believe there has been significant improvement in the application process in the last few years. They believe that participation in the E-Rate program is worth the time and care they devote to the process. Tony Machado, Director of the E-Rate program in Miami-Dade County Public Schools, said, "If you asked me about the E-Rate application process in years one or two, I might have said it was crazy, but now I would say the program has created a much easier, friendlier application process."

EdLiNC's *E-Rate: A Vision of Opportunity and Innovation* also provides an updated state-by-state listing of E-Rate discounts allocated over the past five years. Schools and libraries in California and New York have received the most funding support from the E-Rate with \$1.4 billion each. Texas was the third largest recipient with \$929 million in E-Rate support, followed by Illinois with \$544 million and Pennsylvania with \$346 million. In the last program year, 41% of the E-Rate recipients were rural, receiving a total of \$385 million in E-Rate discounts.

The report and highlighted findings are based on survey responses from over 800 E-Rate recipients. Extensive telephone interviews were conducted with over 90 randomly-selected respondents and those interviews form the bases for the 39 community success profiles featured in the report. In *E-Rate: A Vision of Opportunity and Innovation*, seven (7) representative schools and libraries provide an in-depth description the impact of the E-Rate in their institutions and communities; the last section of the report presents brief abstracts of 31 E-Rate participants in 21 states. Support for the report was provided by Verizon.

About the E-Rate

Created by the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the E-Rate is a \$2.25 billion program designated to provide support to public and private school, and public libraries around the country. Since 1997, the program has been administered by the Universal Service Administrative Company Schools and Libraries Division (www.universalservice.org). Over \$10 billion has been allocated to schools and libraries across the country for discounted services for telecommunications services, access to the Internet and computer networking services. Now in its sixth program year, the E-Rate continues to provide critical infrastructure and connectivity to schools and libraries in rural, urban and suburban communities.

About EdLiNC (www.edlinc.org)

The Education and Library Networks Coalition (EdLiNC) was formed in 1995 to represent the viewpoint of public and private schools and libraries in the FCC proceeding dealing with the implementation of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. The Coalition seeks to expand the use of educational technologies in schools and libraries by making sure that these entities receive affordable rates guaranteed to them in the Universal Service Provisions of the Telecommunications Act.

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