# NEWS

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See MCI v. FCC. 515 F 2d 385 (D.C. Circ 1974).

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NEWS MEDIA CONTACT:
David Fiske, 202-418-0513
Email: david.fiske@fcc.gov

## FCC ENABLES HIGH-SPEED, AFFORDABLE BROADBAND FOR SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES

Washington, D.C. -- The Federal Communications Commission today upgraded and modernized the E-rate program to bring fast, affordable Internet access to schools and libraries across the country. These changes will help ensure that America's students can learn and develop the high-tech skills necessary to compete in the 21$^{st}$ Century economy.

The National Broadband Plan laid out a series of recommendations to promote broadband-enabled, cutting-edge learning inside and outside the classroom. One of the key recommendations is modernizing the FCC's E-rate program, established by Congress to bring connectivity to all schools and libraries across America. The program has achieved remarkable success -- 97 percent of American schools and nearly all public libraries now have basic Internet access.

But the Plan found that basic broadband connectivity is too slow to keep up with the innovative high-tech tools that are now essential for a world-class education. According to a recent FCC survey, 78 percent of E-rate recipients say they need faster connections to meet the speed and capacity demands of their students, teachers, and library patrons.

The FCC's E-rate Order makes it easier for schools and libraries to get the highest speeds for the lowest prices by increasing their options for broadband providers and streamlining the application process. The Order is another advance in the Commission's ongoing transformation of the Universal Service Fund, of which the E-rate program is part, to deploy broadband throughout America.

The FCC's upgrades to E-rate include:

- Super-Fast Fiber: The FCC's E-rate Order will help bring affordable, super-fast fiber connections to America's schools and libraries. It allows participants to use E-rate funds to connect to the Internet in the most cost-effective way possible, including via unused fiber optic lines already in place across the country and through existing state, regional and local networks. With these fiber networks, schools and libraries can provide students and communities with cutting-edge connectivity, while at the same time saving millions of dollars by bypassing more expensive options.

- School Spots: The FCC is also opening the door to "School Spots" -- where schools have the option to provide Internet access to the local community after students go home. With affordable fiber, these School Spots are a major step toward the National Broadband Plan's goal of connecting an anchor institution in every community to affordable 1 gigabit per second broadband. School Spots will help ensure that people who otherwise lack access can use broadband.

- Learning On-the-Go: The FCC is launching a pilot program that supports off-campus wireless Internet connectivity for mobile learning devices. Education doesn't stop at the schoolyard gate or the library door. Digital textbooks and other innovative wireless devices allow students to learn in a real-world context, inside the classroom and beyond. Because of their low cost and accessibility, these mobile devices can also help advance digital equality, particularly for children from economically disadvantaged communities.

- 21st Century E-rate Program: The Order brings E-rate into the 21st Century by making the program more effective and efficient. These improvements include:

  - Indexing the cap on E-rate funding to inflation in a fiscally responsible manner, so that the program can more fully meet the needs of students and communities. Since 1997 when the E-rate program started, inflation has raised costs 30 percent but the program has remained capped, significantly decreasing its effective purchasing power. Earlier this month, the Commission reserved hundreds of millions of dollars annually from another program of the Universal Service Fund to cover the incremental E-rate support (less than $25 million next year) it is providing, without growing the overall size of the Universal Service Fund.

  - Supporting connections to the dormitories of schools that serve students facing unique challenges, such as Tribal schools or schools for children with physical, cognitive, or behavioral disabilities.

  - Bolstering protections against waste, fraud, and abuse by codifying competitive bidding requirements and clarifying ethics obligations.

  - Streamlining the E-rate application process for educators and librarians.

Formally called the Schools and Libraries Universal Service program, the E-rate program provides up to $2.25 billion annually to support telephone and Internet connections at schools and libraries across the country. The program supports both the cost of telecommunications and Internet service and the installation of internal networks. Since it was established by the 1996 Telecommunications Act, the program has connected most of the nation's classrooms to the Internet, and supports continued service and necessary upgrades of school and library networks.

Action by the Commission September 23, 2010, by Report and Order (FCC 10-175). Chairman Genachowski, Commissioners Copps, and Clyburn with Commissioner McDowell approving and dissenting in part and Commissioner Baker approving and concurring in part. Separate statements issued by Chairman Genachowski, Commissioners Copps, McDowell, Clyburn, and Baker.

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