

**REMARKS OF COMMISSIONER JESSICA ROSENWORCEL
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CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE
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Good afternoon. It's exciting to be here and be able to honor ten local heroes. Ten champions of change who are using technology to remake education.

Champions of change! I like the sound of that.

You are definitely champions. One glance at the description of the amazing work you do back home makes that clear. But it doesn't hurt that you are sitting here today, being honored by the President. That's kind of cool, too.

You are also real forces for change. I know, because when I read about what you have been doing, all I can think about is my own education.

When I went to school, there was only the blackboard. This was our common medium, our shared platform for knowledge. Introducing new ideas involved no graphics, gameification, or video. Just the swipe of an eraser and some dusty chalk.

There was also the mimeograph or ditto machine. Tests and math sets were printed out in blotchy purple ink. That ink had a smell that even today I would recognize in an instant.

There was also the great heft of biology textbooks and the stubby guides covering grammar. They weighed down your backpack and cluttered your locker. And beyond books, multimedia just meant grainy filmstrips with history reenactments that had really lousy production values.

So fast forward to the here and now. Clapping together erasers is—blissfully—a lost art. That purple ink has been replaced by the infinite capacity of digital distribution. And texts are being remade and rethought as tablets change the ways we access all forms of media and information.

In short, broadband and connected devices are changing every aspect of our lives. They can change education, too. More than that, they can revolutionize it. Our honorees today know this. They are on the frontlines of this revolution. They are rethinking learning for the digital age, engaging students differently, and blazing new trails in education.

We want others to follow in your footsteps.

Because your success stories are so powerful. And because every student today must be ready for the digital world. Already, 50 percent of jobs today require some digital skills. By the end of the decade, that number will be 77 percent. So we do our students no favors when we strand our classrooms in the industrial era. After all, we live in the digital age.

Other nations recognize this. Countries around the world are wiring their schools with high-speed broadband. They are replacing traditional textbooks with digital readers. They are experimenting with new devices and rethinking education from top to bottom.

There is no reason for us to settle for the status quo and let other nations lead. We can do this. We can make sure that all American students have the opportunity to gain the skills they need to compete, no matter who they are, where they live, or where they go to school.

That sounds lofty. But we have a plan. It's what the President calls ConnectED. And it's designed to connect 99 percent of America's students to high-speed broadband services within five years.

ConnectED is big at the agency where I work—the Federal Communications Commission. That is because the FCC is responsible for the nation's largest education technology program—a program called E-Rate.

E-Rate is the byproduct of a law known as the Telecommunications Act of 1996. Remember 1996? You and I were probably calling the Internet the “information superhighway.” It was a long time ago.

At the time this law was passed, only 14 percent of public schools were connected to the Internet. But E-Rate changed that. By providing support to low-income and rural schools across the country, E-Rate helped nudge that figure northward. In fact, thanks to E-Rate, today more than 95 percent of schools are connected to the Internet.

That sounds impressive. That sounds like the job is done. But it's not. Because the challenge today is not connection—it's capacity. Too many of our schools are connected at speeds that are just too slow. So we need to reboot, reinvigorate, and recharge the E-Rate program. Call it E-Rate 2.0. We need to update this program to support really big bandwidth. Then we need to put it in the hands of creative teachers across this country who can follow the lead of our honorees and make really big and bold things happen.

I think the time to do this is now. Because as President Obama put it in Mooresville, North Carolina a few months ago, we are “at a moment when the rest of the world is trying to out-educate us[.]” But it is within our reach to make sure that our young people have every tool they need to go as far as their talents and dreams and ambitions and hard work will take them.

So we should take the lead of our honorees—and do audacious things. We should seize this moment and the powerful combination of high-speed broadband, plummeting device costs, and new opportunities for cloud-based educational content. We can supercharge education for the digital age.

To our honorees—thank you for being champions of change. Today we salute you. Tomorrow let's take what you are doing and make it possible everywhere.

Thank you.