STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER JESSICA ROSENWORCEL,
CONCURRING

Re: Modernizing the E-Rate Program for Schools and Libraries, WC Docket No. 13-184,
Report and Order

The E-Rate program is a powerful force for digital equity. For more than two decades, it has
provided support to schools and libraries across the country, helping them connect to broadband and the
internet.

But great programs like E-Rate do not thrive without continuous attention and care. So two years
ago, at my urging the Federal Communications Commission set out to update E-Rate for the digital age.
This new iteration of the program—call it E.Rate 2.0—has produced extraordinary results. Tens of
millions of more students now have the broadband and internet access they need in their classrooms.
Libraries have seen dramatic increases in support. And rural schools and libraries have been the most
prominent beneficiaries. These results are by and large due to changes that put a new premium on
fostering Wi-Fi access through what is known as category two funding.

With this decision, the agency takes steps to strengthen the program by cementing in place
essential E.Rate 2.0 reforms. Specifically, we extend our category two funding approach to give schools
and libraries certainty about future funding available for Wi-Fi. In addition, we improve flexibility and
administration by allowing schools and libraries to budget at the school district or library system level
instead of on a site-by-site basis. These are smart adjustments that will improve the program.

Though we get the broad outlines of these changes right, I think the agency misses the mark on
some key details. To this end, I am concerned that the record before us supports a greater per pupil
allowance than what is adopted in this decision. While I appreciate the effort to maintain the status quo,
the evidence suggests that some schools hold back because it is impractical to seek Wi-Fi support at
current levels. In addition, I am concerned that the decision to adjust this program for inflation only once
every five years is akin to a stealth cut. It should be done annually. I also believe that while some
libraries may find additional funding opportunities for Wi-Fi are available due to adjustments to their per
square footage funding, urban libraries will see their funding levels cut. This is not right and could limit
access to the internet in libraries in some of our most populated communities nationwide. Because I think
in these respects today’s decision misses the mark, I choose to concur.

When it comes to E-Rate, the details matter. While we have made great strides as I note above,
there is still work to do. At present only 38 percent of school districts report that they have met the
E.Rate 2.0 connectivity goal of 1 Gbps per 1000 students. In other words, the small choices we make as
we amend this program can have big impact.

Finally, it is important to note that we need to keep a close watch on emerging cyber
vulnerabilities affecting schools and libraries. The sad truth is that civic institutions nationwide have
become targets for attack. Over the last four years, there have been over 700 reported K-12 cyber
incidents. These include an attack earlier this year in Louisiana on multiple school districts, forcing the
governor to issue a declaration of emergency. In Houston County, Alabama, a cyberattack was
purportedly the reason for a delay in the start of the school year. As these problems grow more common,
it is appropriate to consider what practices can help prevent school and library networks avoid the
inconvenience and harm that follows in the wake of these attacks. So I am pleased that my colleagues
agree that the agency should be open to learning more about these challenges. I hope this will help
inform policies that across the board will ensure that school and library networks remain strong and
secure in the future.