



THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS

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TOM COCHRAN

March 17, 2014

Chairman Tom Wheeler
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Connecting Our Kids to Higher-Speed Learning Opportunities

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

As leaders of The United States Conference of Mayors, we are writing to urge swift action to modernize the E-rate program in order to connect 99 percent of our schoolchildren with high-speed broadband over the next five years. This critical update is absolutely needed to bring high-speed broadband to every school and library and Wi-Fi to every classroom. It's the single most important step we can take to connect our children to digital learning opportunities that will give them the technological skills they need for the future.

Ensuring that our schools and libraries have high-speed educational opportunities means every child has the chance to reach for their dreams. Experts agree that to enable students to take full advantage of digital learning, America's schools need 100 Mbps or more of Internet access today and 1 Gbps by 2017. Today, however, too many of our children are trying to learn skills for tomorrow, with dial-up speeds from the past. The average American school has about the same bandwidth as the average American home, even though schools have 200 times as many users. It means that 72 percent of our schools do not have the Internet infrastructure they need to take advantage of digital learning opportunities today, and less than one percent have the infrastructure they will need in the future. As a result, 40 million of our kids are being left behind without access to the broadband speeds they need to succeed.

Around the world, countries are recognizing that these high speed Internet connections aren't just an educational supplement, they are a competitive necessity. For example, South Korea, Ireland, Finland, Singapore, New Zealand and Australia, among others, either have or are well on their way toward connecting their schools at fiber speeds. These countries understand that in today's global economy, high speed broadband in schools is just as important as a chalkboard and textbooks.

Chairman Wheeler, Federal Communications Commission
March 17, 2014
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We need to modernize and expand the successful E-rate program by 1) focusing the E-rate program on broadband connectivity and infrastructure to ensure that we maximize the impact of the E-rate on learning; 2) create a one-time upgrade fund within the E-rate program, to connect every school and library to fiber optic cables and every classroom to Wi-Fi; and 3) reform the way the program is managed to reduce costs, improve efficiency, and ensure that all students have access to the connectivity they need. By taking these strategic steps to deploy fiber to our schools and libraries and Wi-Fi to every classroom, we will be investing today, to save money tomorrow. By investing in future-proof technologies like fiber, we can help ensure that these investments make a difference not just for the next semester, but the next generation.

We simply can't prepare our kids to compete for 21st century jobs by leaving them stranded with 20th century technologies. Therefore, we ask you to support swift action to modernize the E-rate program to help bring transformative learning opportunities via fast fiber connections to every K-12 school and library in America.

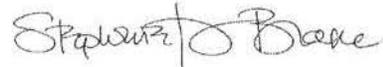
Sincerely,



Scott Smith
Mayor of Mesa
President



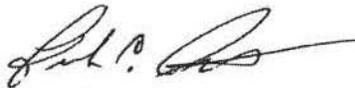
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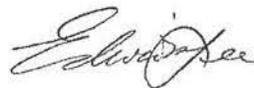
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