

January 29, 2024

The Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel
Chairwoman
Federal Communications Commission
45 L St. NE
Washington, DC 20554

RE: Addressing the Homework Gap through the E-Rate Program (WC Docket No. 21-31)

Dear Chairwoman Rosenworcel:

The undersigned organizations express our support for the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) initiative to modernize the E-rate program. This proposal would enable schools and libraries to offer Wi-Fi hotspots and wireless internet services to students and educators for off-premises use through the E-Rate program.ⁱ

Home internet access is as critical to education today as traditional textbooks were two decades ago. However, inequitable access to high-speed home internet threatens to widen opportunity and achievement gaps that have persisted for far too long and were magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prior to the pandemic, nearly 17 million children – including one in three Black, Latinx, and Indigenous households – lacked high-speed home internet access.ⁱⁱ To address this Homework Gap, Congress provided over \$7 billion through the Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) established under the American Rescue Plan Act. ECF successfully funded more than 8 million internet connections,ⁱⁱⁱ including Wi-Fi hotspot devices and associated services provided to over 1.1 million students, school staff, and library patrons.^{iv} Regrettably, the program faced a demand-supply gap of over \$2 billion^v and will sunset on June 30, 2024.^{vi}

We agree with the FCC's assertion "that although schools and libraries have returned to in-person operations, Internet access remains necessary to fully engage in educational opportunities that arise outside of the physical confines of school and library buildings and after the close of the traditional school day."^{vii} The FCC's effort to modernize the E-rate program aligns with its original purpose as directed by Congress,^{viii} recognizing that in the 21st century, the "classroom" extends beyond school buildings, and learning occurs beyond the sound of the school bell.

Students' need for home internet access persists after the pandemic and the lifespan of ECF. We endorse the FCC's proposal to fund Wi-Fi hotspots and wireless internet services through the E-rate program and look forward to working with you to ensure this policy empowers historically marginalized students to reach their full potential.

Sincerely,

A for Arizona
All4Ed
Bluum, Inc.
Data Quality Campaign
DelawareCAN
EdTrust Louisiana
Education Civil Rights Now
Education Reform Now
Education Reform Now, New York
Kids First Chicago
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Urban League
Our Turn
SchoolHouse Connection
Tennesseans for Student Success
The Education Trust
UnidosUS
2541 LLC

ⁱ *Notice of Proposed Rulemaking*, WC Docket No. 21-31 (2023) (Notice).

ⁱⁱ All4Ed, "Students of Color Caught in the Homework Gap" (All4Ed, National Indian Education Association, National Urban League, and Unidos US, 2020), <https://all4ed.org/publication/homeworkgap/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Federal Communications Commission. "Emergency Connectivity Fund." May 25, 2021, <https://www.fcc.gov/emergency-connectivity-fund>.

^{iv} Notice, para. 17.

^v Rebeca Shackelford. "Review of Congress: Prevent 7,496,927 Internet Connections from Going Dark." Washington, D.C.: All4Ed, <https://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/ECF-for-the-Hill.pdf>.

^{vi} Notice, para. 14.

^{vii} Notice, para. 16.

^{viii} Notice, para.416.