



## **Support Student Broadband Access Including the FCC's E-rate and Lifeline Programs**

### **Primary Message**

*Support E-Rate and the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) Recent Lifeline Order*

### **Background**

On March 31, the FCC updated the 30-year-old Lifeline program to permit low-income families to use the subsidy for broadband services. The FCC established Lifeline in 1985 to help poor households gain access to “plain old telephone service.” Recognizing the increasingly vital importance of broadband access to daily life, including addressing the “Homework Gap,” the FCC hopes this update will help more families acquire home broadband services at meaningful connection speeds. The new Lifeline will provide support for stand-alone mobile or fixed broadband Internet access service; require Wi-Fi functionality, and ensure minimum connection speeds. Although greater funding will ultimately be needed to make sure all low-income families have access to broadband, the FCC’s action is a strong step in the right direction. The FCC’s decision complements the agency’s work the 2014 update to the E-rate program which provided critically needed new support to expand WiFi in schools and grow the program to better meet the broadband requirements of students and teachers.

### **Core Talking Points**

- We urge Congress to use every tool at its disposal to connect the nation’s low-income families to the telecommunications services required to engage fully in their communities, with employers, and especially with the nation’s schools. This includes continued strong support for the E-rate, and now the Lifeline program, which will serve as a vital tool for helping low-income families acquire broadband.
- State and school district education technology leaders strongly support the FCC’s recent decision to update the Lifeline program. Far too many low-income students lack access to home broadband access, which limits the ability of students to complete assigned homework and fully benefit from digital resources.
- The “Homework” gap is only going to become more pronounced if steps, like the Lifeline reform, are not taken. For example, district technology leaders responding to CoSN’s 2015 IT Leadership Survey said they expect their district’s instructional materials to be at least 50% digital within the next 3 years. Expanded home Internet access is essential to support this transition to digital content.
- The E-rate is of critical importance to ensuring all students are connected to high capacity broadband. We urge Congress to remain steadfastly supportive of the E-rate program. [Provide example from your State or school district.]

### **Supplementary Talking Points**

- Students often require Internet access to complete homework assignments, as well as to take advantage of blended learning, virtual learning, course choice, and other digital learning opportunities.
- Some districts offer off-campus Internet connectivity programs, such as subsidized home access for low-income students, making community and business WiFi hot spots available for students, and deploying district owned personal hot spots. These discrete district connectivity initiatives are laudable, but very limited. Significantly greater federal, state, and local leadership is needed to overcome this challenge.