



EDUCATION PRIORITIES

FEBRUARY 2014

California School Boards Association

E-Rate and Connectivity

The federal E-rate program was established by Congress in 1996 with the intention of providing schools and libraries, particularly in rural and impoverished communities, with improved access to telecommunications services. The program is funded through fees on telecommunications providers and is administered by the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC), under the direction of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). E-Rate provides discounts to assist schools and libraries in the U.S. to obtain affordable telecommunications and Internet access. E-Rate is currently funded at approximately \$2.4 billion per year.

E-Rate program is necessary to provide assistance to schools in maintaining and expanding internet connectivity

In June 2013, the President announced a new initiative to connect 99 percent of America's students to the internet through high-speed broadband and high-speed wireless within five years. ConnectEd would also invest in improving the skills of teachers and ensure that every teacher receives support and training to use the technology. The Administration called on the FCC to modernize and leverage the existing E-Rate program to meet the goals.

CSBA supports the ConnectEd initiative as it will provide increased funding for schools to expand access for students.

In 2012, the FCC established the Connect America Fund (CAF), a one-time allocation of \$300 million to support broadband build-out in rural areas. Unfortunately, the FCC placed several restrictions on the use of those funds that did not work for rural areas. In May of 2013, the FCC released a second "one-time" allocation of the remaining \$485 million, including any unused funds from the first allocation.

The second CAF installment needs to allow rural communities to actually build out the structures needed in order to fully access high-speed broadband and high-speed internet along with all of benefits it will provide for education and job creation.