

**Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554**

Schools and Libraries Universal Service)	
Support Mechanism)	CC Docket No. 02-6
)	GN Docket No. 09-51
)	

**REPLY COMMENTS OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY (MARYLAND) PUBLIC SCHOOLS ON THE
FY 2013 DRAFT E-RATE ELIGIBLE SERVICES LIST**

Montgomery County Public Schools (“MCPS”) submits these Reply Comments in response to comments that the Commission received on the draft Eligible Services List for Funding year 2013.

MCPS is the largest school district in the state of Maryland and the 17th largest school district in the United States. In our 200 schools, we educate 146,497 students from 164 countries who speak 184 languages. Approximately one-third of our students receive free or reduced price meals. To teach our students, we employ 11,593 teachers.

Our reply comments focus on two areas of E-rate program eligibility: the necessity of uninterrupted Internet access, as well as the use of advanced conferencing, messaging, and communications services. Both are critical to our district’s continued success.

We agree with Funds For Learning that Uninterruptible (failover) Internet Access and WAN connectivity services, which we refer to here collectively as UIA, are services that today’s schools and libraries cannot afford to be without, but that they need E-rate support to help make them affordable. The technology-infused environment in which schools and libraries operate today looks nothing at all like the technology-barren landscape that existed in 1998 when the E-rate program began. In our school district, we have learned from experience that UIA is an indispensable service, because it provides the 21st century “power” we need to keep virtually all of our educational and administrative systems working. A recent example of the necessity of UIA occurred on the last day of school this past June when all teachers were required to submit final grades electronically. The district’s Internet Service Provider was

experiencing a problem that prevented more than half of our schools from being able to submit their grades. If UIA service had been in place, we would have been able to respond to the need for access in a timely manner. This is an extremely important subject that does not, in our opinion, get nearly the attention it deserves. Accordingly, we urge the Commission to consider our comments below and to add UIA to the FY 2013 ESL or, if that is unrealistic, then to the FY 2014 ESL.

IMPORTANCE OF TECHNOLOGY IN EDUCATION WHY UNINTERRUPTIBLE INTERNET ACCESS IS A NECESSITY

Over the past 15 years, school systems have invested in infrastructure, telecommunications, and Internet services to support teaching, learning, and operations to prepare students for college and careers in the 21st century. From tapping into a rich array of online instructional resources, to collaborating with classrooms around the world, access to fast, responsive telecommunication and Internet services via reliable networks has become an expectation for delivery of effective instructional programs. E-rate has made a significant contribution to the successful integration of technology into education, enabling districts to build internal infrastructure and provide needed telecommunications and Internet services.

Teachers, administrators, and central office staff rely on access to these systems and services as part of their everyday work as educators. Communicating with parents, stakeholders, and fellow professionals in geographically dispersed learning communities is made possible through the presence of a strong telecommunications infrastructure and Internet access. Activities and work in the education community extend beyond the traditional school day as we have become a 24/7 society. Students, staff, and stakeholders expect anytime, anywhere access to educational resources.

This success brings with it the demand for reliability. Now that technology is integrated into the classroom, UIA is required to ensure continuity of operations. System outages have a major impact on delivery of education in both time and cost. With 180 days of instruction, the loss of precious instructional time due to system outages cannot be recovered. A loss of communications through e-mail and Web services not only impacts productivity, but creates issues for safety and security. The inability to connect to servers via the WAN/LAN leaves staff without access to key data, documents, and systems that are essential to operations. Such outages can even cause districts to shut down operations for a period of time, which is quite costly in productivity and staff time.

Districts must invest in UIA to ensure essential Internet and WAN connectivity is available for teaching, learning, and operations. Below is a summary of the areas that rely on the availability of essential services.

Curriculum

- Online curriculum – teacher, parent, and student online access to standards, indicators, lesson plans, instructional materials and resources, and just-in-time professional development.
- Online courses –student online access to e-learning courses to meet specific study areas, serve home and hospital needs, and provide access to local and state courses.
- Online professional development – staff online access to courses saving time and money in the delivery of professional development to school based and central office staff.

Instruction

- Online services – staff and student access to online databases and purchased services in school and from home.
- Library management system – staff and student access to online catalogues, inventory, and topic searches in school and from home.
- Interactive classroom – teacher and student use of online interactive technologies to connect with worldwide educational resources and collaboration opportunities for teaching and learning that engage students in their own learning, develop problem solving skills, and support development of critical thinking skills.
- Student attendance – staff access for entry and view of period-by-period attendance data in secondary schools using an online system.
- Grade book program – teacher online access for recording grades/marks daily which are transferred via the WAN/LAN to the central student information system that provides information to teachers on student progress and trends.
- Grade reporting system – staff online access to grading information/databases via WAN/LAN to prepare and generate grade reports (report cards, interims, transcripts, etc.)
- Parent access – parent online access to student progress, homework assignments, school activities, etc. via Web-based systems.

Assessment

- High stakes testing – teacher, student, staff access to online state assessment tests that depend on reliable access to telecommunication and Internet services to comply with inflexible school and assessment timelines and adherence to test security processes and procedures.
- Local district formative and summative assessments – teacher, student, and staff online access to reading and math assessments conducted in classrooms. Test results are transmitted to databases from which reports are generated and made available online; prompt and efficient turnaround of test results are essential to providing timely information for differentiated instruction.

Safety and Security

- Email and Web communication – staff, parent, local authorities, and community online access to essential information ranging from weather related events to code blue and code red impacting schools and offices.
- Visitor management system – staff and visitor use of online system to monitor access to schools by all visitors during the school day. The system provides for scanning driver’s licenses that can be cross referenced with the state and local sex offender registries.
- Electronic detection – staff access to monitoring and reporting technology provides for accurate monitoring of alarms in schools and offices and for efficient responses to after-hours incidents and emergencies.
- Digital closed-circuit camera systems – staff access to surveillance technology to monitor activity at designated access points at school sites.
- Emergency preparedness – staff, student, parent, and community access to websites that provide information on emergency processes and procedures.
- Cybersafety resources – staff, student, parent and community online access to guidance, educational materials and resources, hotline information, community partners, and law enforcement information related to safe and appropriate use of the Internet.

Operations (Human Resources, Financial Mgmt, Transportation, Food & Nutrition, etc.)

- Learning management systems – staff online access to professional development and professional learning community resources.
- Financial systems – staff use of online systems to process and track orders, monitor vendor payments, and integrate with accounting systems.
- Human resources –staff and community access to online job postings, job applications, benefits, pay statement, salary direct deposit, etc. made available through websites that connect internal and service provider systems.
- Transportation – staff and community access to online information related to bus routes, changes in schedules, transportation for sporting events, field trips, and travel between schools.
- Energy management systems – staff use of online systems to monitor and control HVAC operations and implement energy savings such as remotely turning off computers after hours.
- Facilities availability system – staff use of online system to track snow and ice removal operations.
- Food and nutrition systems – staff use of online systems for point-of-sale meals, FARMS eligibility, and responsive accounting and resource management.

Productivity

- Access to licensed office productivity tools (word processing, spreadsheets, presentations, etc.)
- Networked storage and backup of user artifacts (databases, documents, educational materials, etc.)

**SERVICES WHICH FACILITATE THE ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE
SHOULD BE ELIGIBLE FOR E-RATE DISCOUNTS.**

In the Commission's *Sixth Report and Order* (FCC 10-175 ¶100-101), the Commission concluded that web hosting services are "essential for facilitating teaching and learning as well as communication among the entire school community." As a result, web hosting features which "facilitate real-time interactive communication" are considered eligible, because "the transfer of messages across a school's hosted website is functionally equivalent to other services that facilitate the ability to communicate such as e-mail, text messaging, voice mail, and paging."

MCPS agrees with the Commission that services which are functionally equivalent to other eligible services should be considered eligible for program support. However, we feel that the Draft Eligible Services List identifies two specific services which clearly "facilitate the ability to communicate" in a manner identical to eligible web hosting features, yet are treated as ineligible.

Broadcast "Blast" Messaging and Emergency Notification Services

In the Sixth Report and Order, the Commission asserts that teachers use web pages to "post messages to students and parents," in addition to enabling communication for numerous other educational purposes. We agree with the Commission's determination that "parental and family engagement in a child's school" has a positive impact on student achievement, and support the use of E-rate program funds to help facilitate parental involvement.

MCPS feels that posting important messages via a school's public website is indeed functionally equivalent to communicating that same information via other means of communication, such as SMS/text messaging, telephone, or voicemail. As such, we feel that notification services which facilitate this communication should be considered eligible for program funds, including bulk text message services and auto-dial telephone messaging services. We see no reason why communicating with our student and parent communities en masse should be eligible if performed via our website, but ineligible if distributed by other means, such as text message or voicemail.

Conferencing Services

In its discussion of web hosting eligibility, the Commission states that funding "for web hosting will not include support for the applications necessary to run online classes or collaborative meetings." However, MCPS feels that voice, video, and web conferencing services are a perfect example of connectivity services which facilitate interactive activity. Web

conferencing services enable users to send messages and share information online, while voice and video conferencing services enable multiple parties to engage in realtime communication.

We find that the language on page four of the draft Eligible Services List regarding conferencing somewhat confusing:

In addition, the telecommunications component of voice or video conferencing services that provide a means for multiple users to participate in group discussions may be eligible if the services are limited only to eligible educational or library purposes.

Basic conduit access to the Internet may be used for access to Internet-based distance learning and video conferencing services.

How the “telecommunications component” of a voice or video conferencing service is identified seems to be open to interpretation, and the assertion that conduit Internet access may be “used to access” conferencing services does not speak directly to the eligibility of the conferencing service itself. As such, we urge the Commission to simplify the Eligible Services List while maintaining functional equivalence across various types of service by clarifying that the charges for voice, video, and web conferencing services are eligible for program funds.

Respectfully submitted,

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August 21, 2012