

Prepared Remarks of Acting Chairwoman Mignon L. Clyburn
“Connected in the Digital Age: Improving American Education through Technology”
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Thank you, Julius, for that introduction. Clearly, spending a summer away from the Commission agrees with you. You look a bit younger. I look a bit... Anyway, I'm proud of what we were able to accomplish together, and the initiatives I plan to talk about today build on the foundation you laid during your Chairmanship.

To the organizers, Annenberg Retreat at Sunnylands, Common Sense Media, the LEAD Commission, and NewSchools Venture Fund, thank you for enabling us to highlight such a pivotal moment for our schools, for industry stakeholders, for the future of education, for all of us. As you heard during the morning sessions, and as many of you know from your personal experiences, technology has the power to revolutionize education in America.

But this conference is being held because we recognize that we are not where we need to be on digital learning, both relative to other nations, and to the rate of technology adoption, in other sectors of society. One of the biggest obstacles to seizing these opportunities is inadequate bandwidth at our schools and libraries. Simply put, our schools need faster high-capacity connections, and they need them *now*.

This summer, when we launched a modernization of E-Rate, the FCC took an important step toward ensuring that our schools and libraries have the tools they need to support modern digital learning.

E-rate is one of the FCC's biggest success stories.

Back in 1996, when less than 1 percent of the world's population was online, leaders at the White House, FCC, and Congress, recognized that the Internet was a game-changer, and schools and libraries could serve as an on-ramp for the nascent information superhighway. As part of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, a bipartisan coalition of Senators led by Jay Rockefeller and Olympia Snowe as well as then Representative Markey established E-Rate to ensure that kids in all areas of the country, including rural areas, could get access to the Internet and advanced communications services.

As a result of E-rate, nearly every U.S. library and school is connected to the Internet.

For just one example of its impact, allow me to speak about Loris Elementary in my home state of South Carolina. Loris is a town of about 2,400 people, almost half of whom live in poverty. But the local elementary school is using technology to help their children rise above these circumstances. Every student in grades three through five has been assigned a laptop, loaded with learning software.

Teachers are using digital tools to assess each student's progress in real time and offer differentiated instruction to meet each student's individual needs. Now, test scores are up, and in state rankings of similar schools, Loris Elementary rose from 41st into the top 20.

Places like Loris Elementary remind us that broadband has the potential to be the great equalizer for our children. It doesn't matter whether you live in a rural, low-income area or in a wealthy urban community, connecting a child to the Internet links them to cutting-edge instruction and new learning opportunities.

Our goal should be to make this the rule and not the exception.

We also need to ensure similar advances for libraries. These reference centers are key pieces of the overall education picture, because they support kindergarten-through-12th grade students after school hours, with online research resources, interactive online homework help, and digital learning labs. They also support home-schooled students, distance learners, GED preparation and test-taking, job re-training, and other lifelong learning.

While E-rate has been a success, it needs to be modernized to ensure all schools and libraries have the capacity they need.

As educators increasingly integrate digital content into their lesson plans, faster speeds, and additional capacity to and within schools are needed to accommodate all of today's and tomorrow's interactive, digital learning. Although some schools have sufficient capacity to implement digital learning tools and strategies, too many do not. In fact, in a 2010 FCC survey of schools and districts, nearly half of respondents reported lower speed Internet connectivity than the average American home. Similarly, 41 percent of libraries reported that their connectivity was inadequate, and fewer than 10 percent of America's libraries offer Internet speeds of 100Mbps or faster.

This is simply not good enough. We must do better for the nation's children and citizens. We must ensure that our young people, teachers, and the millions of citizens that use libraries each year have access to the tools they need to compete and succeed in the digital age. The U.S. will fall behind in the 21st century economy if our classrooms don't evolve beyond a 19th century model.

This summer, President Obama went to Mooresville High School in North Carolina, and issued a call for action, to close our education system's bandwidth deficit. In fact, Mooresville's Superintendent Mark Edwards was on the preceding panel, so many of you know why the President visited this school to highlight the benefits of greater network capacity. While in North Carolina, the President announced his ConnectED initiative and called on the FCC to bring high-speed Internet to 99% of U.S. students within five years.

The FCC needs to modernize E-rate to answer the President's call.

We need to roll up our sleeves and do what it takes to ensure that our nation's schools and libraries have the broadband connections needed, to meet their current and future requirements. The E-rate rulemaking we launched in July is a critical first step.

Our key goals are clear: 1) connecting every student in America, by ensuring affordable access for schools and libraries, to high-capacity broadband; 2) maximizing the cost effectiveness of purchases; and 3) ensuring the administrative efficiency of E-rate.

What's not clear is how to achieve these goals. That's what we're trying to answer with our proceeding, and that's where we need your help.

Good data drives good policy. And I'll be blunt. We need good data if we're going to get this right. We need data when it comes to the bandwidth schools need for today's and tomorrow's digital learning tools. We need data to understand how to cut costs, increase efficiency, streamline the program, and deliver that

broadband capacity to and within schools in the most cost-effective manner. Resources are not unlimited, and we have a responsibility to be careful stewards of public resources. So we need to ensure that we're getting the most bang for our E-Rate buck. We need to ensure that we're connecting as many children as possible, that we leverage consortium and other bulk buying opportunities, that we phase out funding for unnecessary services, and that we streamline and improve the administration of this program.

We need you to help us come up these answers. And by you, I'm not just talking about those who have participated in previous E-Rate proceedings. I'm talking about innovators from Silicon Valley, researchers, businesses, community leaders, and other stakeholders, who may not receive E-Rate funding, but who have valuable information that will help the Commission ensure that all of America's children will be prepared with the skills to enter and contribute to the digital economy.

Comments are due next week with reply comments following next month. So I strongly encourage all of you to weigh in.

Maximizing participation in the FCC's proceeding will help us maximize the benefits of our E-Rate investments.

Thank you all for being a part of today's conference, as well as this effort. By working together, we will realize the promise of technology to improve U.S. education and expand opportunity, for future generations.