Dear E-rate Community:

This is an exciting and important time of year for the E-rate Program as we move toward completion of all FY2015 applications, continue to implement the E-rate Productivity Center (EPC) and mark the beginning of the 2016 funding year with our in-person training efforts. These coming months are particularly important given the changes brought by the modernization orders and the implementation of EPC.

We fully understand that change brings both opportunity and challenge to all of us in different ways. I want to assure you that we will do everything we can to mitigate the challenges and deliver on the FCC's goal of a faster, simpler, and more efficient E-rate Program.

Transparency is a critical component of these enhancements and of managing through the change. Thus, I would like to discuss with you a couple of areas that are currently of particular interest --- the pace of FY2015 funding decisions and the status and performance of EPC.
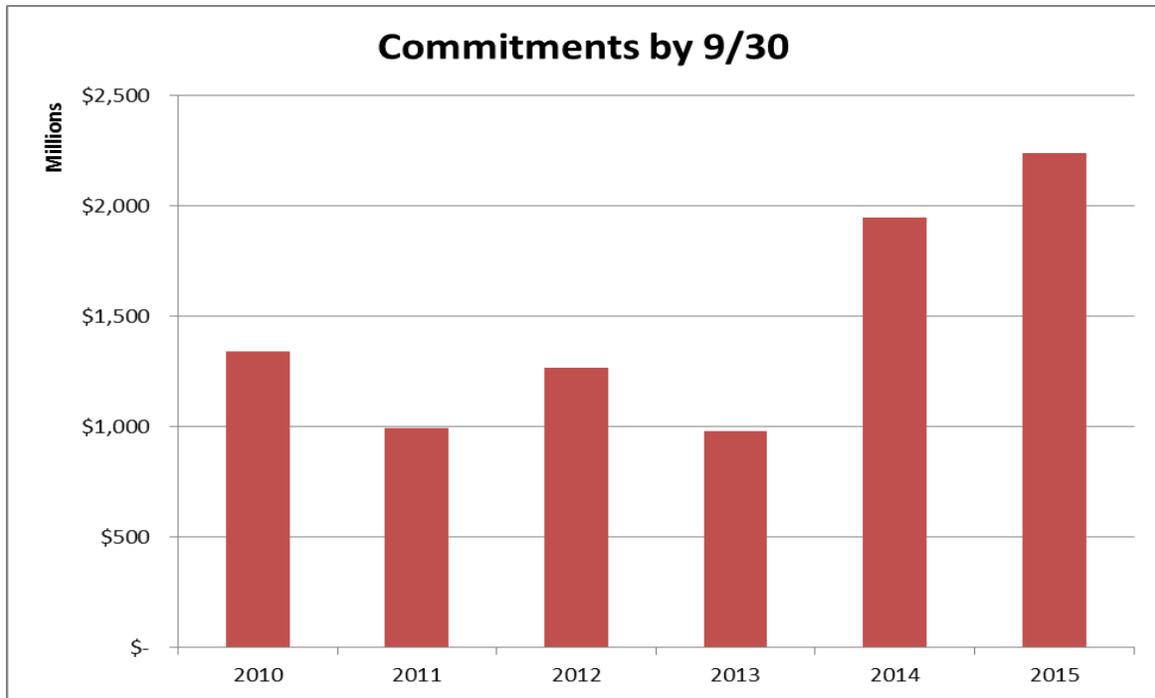
FY2015 FUNDING DECISIONS

The FCC Order provided a target of September 1 to complete all "workable" applications. We adjusted the date to September 24 to reflect the effect of the three week FCC Form 471 deadline extension. We received approximately 48,000 applications of which about 42,000 were classified as "workable," by September 24, based on the definition provided in the Order.

With your help, we reviewed and committed 41,852 applications, 225 applications short of the target. These remaining applications will be completed this week.

In total (48,000 minus the 42,000) we have approximately 6,000 "unworkable" applications remaining. While the definition of "unworkable" is clear in the Order, the term does not fully capture the reality of these applications. For the most part, these applications are, in fact, workable, but they do require additional review and information requests of varying scope. However, nearly all of these are in process and we project that most will be completed in the next 90 days.

This issue is particularly important because these applications represent over $1 billion in value and thus represent a greater proportion of the program dollars than application volume. As we work to finalize these remaining applications, we also have begun a review of our internal review processes and procedures so that we can meaningfully accelerate the pace of decisions for all Funding Year 2016 applications.

Below you will find a chart that compares the pace of funding over the past six years, as of September 30th of each funding year.

Commitments by 9/30

Dollars Committed by 9/30 for recent Fund Years

EPC PORTAL

As we have discussed previously, the EPC Portal offers a real opportunity to improve every aspect of the E-rate Program experience from application to disbursement. In short, EPC will eliminate or substantially reduce the need to input information annually, and it will enhance communication and support tools. While many of you are active within EPC, too many of you have faced challenges in gaining access to, and otherwise using, the tool. While it is no excuse, the unfortunate reality is that the accelerated timing of the deployment did not allow for adequate user testing. Please know that we are working to improve the tool in real time as we implement the many constructive suggestions we have received to-date. We are committed to continually improving the user experience so that EPC lives up to its full potential. This includes user testing for the new EPC-based FCC Form 471 filing process.

We look forward to providing additional support in the upcoming in-person trainings and in other communications as we move forward, and we appreciate your patience with any challenges you have faced in the EPC launch thus far.

Again, we thank you for your patience during this time of change. Please continue to provide us with your feedback on ways we can improve our processes, and know that we will continue to work tirelessly to effectuate positive change in the days ahead.

Sincerely,

Mel Blackwell
Vice President of the Schools and Libraries Program