

DPI Statement on the FCC E-rate Modernization Order Adopted on July 11

At the Friday, July 11 meeting, the Federal Communications Commission adopted an E-rate Modernization Order designed to start the process of bringing a comprehensive and modern E-rate program more closely aligned to the current needs of schools and libraries.

DPI supports this decision as it is the first such major overhaul of the program since its inception in 1996 and changes to the E-rate program increases focus on the largest and most urgent need—closing the school and library internal networking and Wi-Fi gap.

“We are very encouraged that Friday’s vote will allow schools and libraries that, in the past have been denied funding, to now gain access to funds for internal networking and WI-FI upgrades enabling them to meet the needs of students and patrons.” said Kurt Kiefer, Assistant Superintendent for Libraries and technology. ‘It is a great start at aligning the program to meet current needs for our schools and libraries in a digital age.’”

The order adopted by the FCC was very much in line with what was offered by FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler earlier in June with a few changes. Highlights of the order, which is not yet released in final written form, include the following items that directly affect Wisconsin schools and libraries:

- Increasing support targeted for Wi-Fi in rural school districts and all public libraries.
- Directing at least \$1 billion in support for Wi-Fi for Funding Years 2015 and 2016 in Category 2 using a reserve fund the SLD/USAC has accumulated over the past several years. Historically, with the exception of the Milwaukee Public Schools, approximately 90 percent of Wisconsin’s public school districts and 99 percent of our public libraries have received no funding for internal connections since 1999.
- Beginning a multi-year transition of all program funding to broadband, by phasing down support for non-broadband services - essentially re-aligning the program to meet the needs of schools and libraries in the 21st century.
- Moving to electronic filing of all documents and increasing transparency on how E-rate dollars are spent and on prices charged for E-rate services.
- Simplifying discount calculations. For schools they will now calculate their discount as a simple, district-wide average, instead of the current weighted average.

“We also look forward to providing input and suggestions in response to the important questions asked concerning program funding on a permanent basis and other issues, including ensuring adequate and affordable broadband to the school and library building.” added Kiefer.