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WHEELER RELEASES E-RATE MODERNIZATION Plan: FCC Chairman Would Focus E-Rate Program on High-Speed Wireless Broadband

On June 20, **Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Tom Wheeler** announced a multiyear plan to transition federal E-rate funding away from outdated technologies like pagers and dial-up connections in favor of high-speed wireless broadband for the nation's schools and libraries. Wheeler said his plan would close what he called the nation's Wi-Fi gap while making E-rate dollars go further and simplifying the applications process. The five FCC commissioners, including Wheeler, are expected to vote on Wheeler's plan in mid-July.

Created as part of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the federal E-rate program provides funding to schools and libraries for telephone and internet services. Since 1996, the program has increased the percentage of classrooms with internet connections from 14 percent to nearly 100 percent today. At the same time, however, the program has not evolved with improvements in technology, a fact that Wheeler expounded upon in a June 20 blog post on the FCC's website.

"Over the past 18 years, E-rate has helped ensure that one of society's most basic responsibilities—educating our children—has evolved with new technology," Wheeler writes. "The realities of the internet, however, are different today than they were when E-rate was introduced. The E-rate program must be updated to meet today's needs of schools and libraries."

Whereas it was previously acceptable for students to share a school's computer lab, new technologies like tablets and digital textbooks mean that students need individual connections to the internet, Wheeler notes. He writes that Wi-Fi is the "most cost-effective way" to provide this connectivity, but laments that too many schools lack this capability.

"Today, three out of five schools in America lack sufficient Wi-Fi capability needed to provide students with twenty-first-century educational tools," Wheeler writes. "As currently structured, E-rate in past years has only been able to support Wi-Fi in 5 percent of schools and 1 percent of libraries. Last year, no money was available for Wi-Fi."

Under Wheeler's plan, the FCC would commit at least $1 billion in 2015 to connect more than 10 million students to Wi-Fi, followed by an additional $1 billion in 2016, with "predictable support continuing in future years." It would also include steps to help ensure that rural schools have greater access to E-rate funding.

"While we need to upgrade the connectivity of our schools and libraries, too many parts of rural America lack broadband connectivity altogether," Wheeler writes. "This is in stark contrast to

urban and suburban America, where many consumers have access to broadband at speeds in the hundreds of megabits per second. We cannot leave rural America behind."

The plan would also take several steps to make E-rate dollars go further, including increasing transparency on how E-rate dollars are spent and what prices are charged for E-rate services. It would implement several changes, making the application process simpler and more efficient.

"No modern business expects to function without access to high-speed internet," said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. "So why should we expect it of our schools? The E-rate program has been remarkably effective, but like an old cellphone, it is in need of an upgrade. In today's world, reliable Wi-Fi is not a luxury, it's a necessity. Teachers and students shouldn't have to worry about crashing their systems if too many students hit 'enter' at the same time. America's students need and deserve a world-class education, and in the twenty-first century, that means having reliable access to the internet.

"By focusing E-rate on high-speed broadband and expanding funding for Wi-Fi, Chairman Wheeler's proposal for modernizing E-rate lays the foundation for permanent expansion of E-rate that the nation's schools and libraries so desperately need. I appreciate Chairman Wheeler's sense of urgency on this matter. I urge the FCC to modernize E-rate, and to quickly take the next step of expanding the program to bring today's schools and libraries into the digital age."

More information on Wheeler's proposal is available at
http://transition.fcc.gov/Daily_Releases/Daily_Business/2014/db0620/DOC-327777A1.pdf.

APPROPRIATIONS PROCESS STARTS, THEN STALLS: Senate Appropriations Subcommittee Passes Education Spending Bill, Future Prospects Uncertain

The U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee's decision to postpone a scheduled June 12 markup of the fiscal year (FY) 2015 Labor, Health and Humans Services (HHS), and Education appropriations bill has left education advocates wondering whether the U.S. Congress will finish the bill before the start of the next fiscal year on October 1, or whether federal education programs will have to be temporarily funded by a continuing resolution until a more permanent measure could be passed—perhaps after the congressional elections in November. The delay is even more confusing in light of last December's bipartisan budget agreement that was expected to make the appropriations process run more smoothly this year.

Before the markup was postponed, the committee was set to consider a bill reported out of the Senate Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee that would fund the U.S. Department of Education at $45.06 billion in FY 2015, excluding Pell Grants. The total represents an increase of approximately $530 million compared to FY 2014, but it is roughly $750 million less than the amount President Obama requested in his FY 2015 budget.

"This is the bill that invests in America and allows us to respond to the changing needs of our country, all within a difficult budget," said **Senate Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA)**. "I am particularly encouraged that the bill directs funding to investments in high-quality early childhood care and education, which have

been proven to have positive, lasting effects on children and families. The bill also invests in programs that support working families and contains funding that allows for an increase in the maximum Pell Grant award, which is critical for expanding access to higher education. All in all, this bill takes a thoughtful approach to funding these critical programs because this bill funds America's priorities; it is the bill in which we invest in our future."

Under an agreement reached last December between Democrats and Republicans to break the appropriations process from gridlock, the discretionary spending total for FY 2015 was set at essentially the same level as FY 2014. As the subcommittee explains in a summary of the bill, any funding increases in the bill must be offset by cuts to other programs. Perhaps for that reason, many programs in the bill were funded at last year's levels and several increases that President Obama requested in his budget were not met.

The Alliance for Excellent Education and other high school reform advocates were particularly disappointed by the subcommittee's decision not to fund the president's request for a $150 million competitive grant program to "promote the whole school transformation of the high school experience in order to provide students with challenging and relevant academic and career-related learning experiences" that prepare them for college and a career. Moreover, the subcommittee eliminated funding for the High School Graduation Initiative, the only federal program focused on high school reform. The subcommittee also chose not to fund Obama's request for a new $300 million Race to the Top competition focused on improving the academic performances of students in high-poverty schools and a new $200 million competitive program to support educators' use of technology and data. (More information on each of these programs is available at http://all4ed.org/?p=19417).

The subcommittee did provide a $100 million increase for Preschool Development Grants, another one of Obama's priorities, funding the program at $350 million for FY 2015 but falling short of the $500 million the president requested in his budget. The Investing in Innovation Fund would receive $142 million—the same as last year—but less than the $165 million the president requested.

The two biggest formula grant programs each would receive small increases under the subcommittee's bill. The bill would provide $14.43 billion for Title I grants to school districts, a slight increase of $50 million over the president's budget request, which would have frozen funding for the program. Special education state grants would receive a $40 million increase, taking funding to $11.51 billion.

The Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy program, which focuses on students from birth through grade 12, would see its funding increased by $10 million to $168 million. Career and technical education state grants ($1.1 billion), federal TRIO programs ($847 million), and Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) ($305 million), would each receive very small increases ranging from $3 million to $5 million. School Improvement Grants ($506 million), which target the nation's lowest-performing schools, and Statewide Data Systems ($35 million) were funded at FY 2014 levels.

It is unclear why the markup by the full Senate Appropriations Committee was postponed, but senators from both parties believe it was to prevent votes on controversial amendments, including some related to the Affordable Care Act.

After learning of the postponement, **Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN)**, **a member of the Senate Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Committee and top Republican on the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee**, took to the Senate floor and said that "being in the Senate and not being allowed to vote on amendments is like being asked to join the Grand Ole Opry and not being allowed to sing." During his floor speech, Alexander said he had planned to offer an amendment in the full committee markup that would "[direct] the federal government to keep its sticky fingers off state standards and not to interfere with the hard work states are doing to raise expectations."

The next step forward for the bill is unclear, but Harkin has said that he hopes the full committee will consider it after the July 4 recess. The U.S. House of Representatives has yet to take any action on its version of the bill and is not expected to do so until July at the earliest.

CREATING ANYTIME, ANYWHERE LEARNING FOR ALL STUDENTS: Comprehensive Digital Infrastructure Must Include Changes in Teaching Practice, Professional Learning, Assessment, and Other Key Elements, Says New Alliance Report

While connecting the nation's schools and libraries to the internet by modernizing and expanding the federal E-rate program currently dominates education technology efforts, a new report from the Alliance for Excellent Education urges that adequate broadband access be accompanied by a comprehensive "digital infrastructure" that unlocks the potential technology to enhance student learning. The report, *Creating Anytime, Anywhere Learning for all Students: Key Elements of a Comprehensive Digital Infrastructure*, adopts a broader definition of digital infrastructure that includes professional learning, changes in pedagogy, parent and community engagement, and assessment and data systems.

"Traditionally, when educators think about digital infrastructure they see only computers, wires, and high-speed internet connections," said **Bob Wise**, **president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**, who will present the report at the [annual National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) conference Thursday, June 26 in San Diego](). "While these basic components are vital, they do not guarantee academic success. The comprehensive digital infrastructure envisioned in the report can support the shifts in instructional practice and professional learning that really make a difference in student learning."

As a foundation to a comprehensive digital infrastructure, appropriate broadband access remains unavailable to a vast majority of students. The report notes that more than 70 percent of public K–12 schools and public libraries lack sufficient broadband access while about 30 percent of households do not have a high-speed broadband connection. Nonwhite households, those with low education and economic attainment, and homes in rural areas are most likely to lack high-speed connections.

Another key component of comprehensive digital infrastructure that supports anytime, anywhere learning is an investment in ongoing, consistent, and relevant professional learning needed for formal and informal educators to make a necessary transformation in teaching practices and

assessment and data systems that lead to individualized, interest-powered, production-centered, and collaborative learning opportunities for every student.

Other components outlined in the report include

- robust academic content and appropriate digital tools;
- a well-articulated plan for fostering digital citizenship to ensure the appropriate and responsible use of technology;
- engagement of parents and community partners in cultivating anytime, anywhere learning opportunities that extend beyond the school day; and
- assessment and data systems that facilitate individualized, interest-powered, production-centered, and collaborative learning opportunities.

The report offers several federal, local-, and school-level policy recommendations that could strengthen anytime, anywhere learning for more students. Key issues include

- ensuring low-cost, high-quality broadband in schools, homes, and community institutions;
- improving equity of access to high-quality digital devices, applications, and content that students can use as learning resources;
- promoting policies that advance digital literacy skills for teachers, parents, students, and community members;
- supporting professional learning for school leaders, formal and informal educators, and community organizations on the best ways to utilize digital learning tools to personalize learning, allowing all students to reach their full potential; and
- encouraging districts to engage in community partnerships that promote college and career readiness for all students.

The report also highlights several school districts and organizations that are implementing promising practices and promoting effective strategies for leveraging the potential of technology. In Elizabeth Forward School District in Pennsylvania, where 86 percent of students are low-income, dropout rates decreased after the district implemented an iPad 1:1 program paired with mentorship and opportunities for collaboration to support students' learning pathways. Additionally, Digital Youth Network, Cable in the Classroom, Common Sense Media, and iKeepSafe have developed well-articulated plans that foster students' digital citizenship and promote responsible use of this technology both in school and out of school.

"The creation of anytime, anywhere learning environments requires federal, local-, and school-level policies that help increase student access to a comprehensive digital infrastructure for learning," said Wise. "The lack of any one of the infrastructure elements compromises the entire vision of anytime, anywhere learning. However, when all of the elements are in place, the potential for digital learning to transform education can be realized on a much grander scale for all children and beyond isolated models of success."

The full report is available at
http://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/DigitalInfrastructure.pdf.

LEARNER AT THE CENTER OF A NETWORKED WORLD: Aspen Institute Task Force on Learning and the Internet Offers New Vision of Learning and Recommendations for How to Create It

On June 17, the Aspen Institute Task Force on Learning and the Internet released *Learner at the Center of a Networked World*, a new report with recommendations for ensuring that students are at the center of, and have access to, safe learning inside and outside of the classroom. To meet this goal, however, the nation must resolve "serious" issues of trust, safety, privacy, literacy, and equity of access.

"Education in America should be organized around the principle that what students know is more important than where they go. We need to ensure students have access to new education models that combine the best of classroom and online learning," said **Jeb Bush**, **former governor of Florida and chairman of the Foundation for Excellence in Education**, who served as the taskforce's honorary cochair with **actress and cofounder of Voto Latino Rosario Dawson**. "It is incumbent on us to provide them with the skills necessary to thrive while empowering them to learn at their own pace and in their own way. Learning should be the constant and time the variable. This report can serve as a catalyst to deliver on the promise of a high-quality and customized education for all students."

The six recommendations for creating the new vision of learning laid out in the report include

- redesigning learning environments to empower learners to learn at any time, in any place, and at any pace, both in school and beyond;
- enhancing the ability of educators to support and guide learners in a networked learning environment;
- building an infrastructure that will connect all students in all of the places they learn;
- making sure all learning networks are interoperable or have the ability to share information and data;
- adopting policies to ensure children are taught basic skills—or digital literacies—for living and learning in the digital age; and
- creating trusted learning environments for children to keep them safe.

Accompanying the recommendations are twenty-six action steps that identify which entity or entities among government, parents, educators, school districts and leaders, students, foundations, nonprofits, and businesses that are most suited to the specific action.

The taskforce is composed of twenty individuals representing the fields of technology, public policy, education, business, privacy, and safety. More information about the report and the taskforce is available at http://csreports.aspeninstitute.org/Task-Force-on-Learning-and-the-Internet/2014/report.

STUDENT-CENTERED SCHOOLS: **New SCOPE Report Examines How Four Urban High Schools Are Closing the Opportunity Gap**

Student-Centered Schools: Closing the Opportunity Gap, a new report from the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE) examines how four urban high schools serving predominantly low-income students of color have used student-centered approaches to outperform most schools in their respective communities serving similar student populations.

"The numbers are compelling," said **Stanford University Professor and SCOPE Faculty Director Linda Darling-Hammond**. "Students in the study schools exhibited greater gains in achievement than their peers, had higher graduation rates, were better prepared for college, and showed greater persistence in college. Student-centered learning proves to be especially beneficial to economically disadvantaged students and students whose parents have not attended college."

The report focuses on four California schools—City Arts and Technology High School (San Francisco); Dozier-Libbey Medical High School (Antioch); Life Academy of Health and

Bioscience (Oakland); and Impact Academy of Arts and Technology (Hayward). The schools are non-selective in their admissions and use either a "Linked Learning" initiative or "Envision Education" model. Linked Learning is a statewide initiative in California pairing rigorous academics with career-based learning and real-world workplace experiences. Envision Education is a small charter network that creates personalized learning environments for students to develop twenty-first century skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration.

At Dozier-Libbey and Impact Academy, 90–95 percent of African American students graduate from high school, compared to district and state averages of about 66 percent. At City Arts and Tech, 99 percent of students complete all courses required for admission in California colleges. Additionally, 97 percent of City Arts and Tech graduates were still enrolled in four-year colleges in their fourth year of college, far exceeding national averages, particularly for students who are the first in their family to attend college.

"Survey data of graduates suggest that particular high school practices of relationship-building, high standards, deep learning, and instructional relevance contribute to students' success in college," the report notes. (To watch City Arts and Tech students in action, click on the image to the right.)

The report identifies four practices that promote student success: (1) building relationships with students through advisory programs, a culture of celebration, student voice and leadership opportunities, and connections to parents and community; (2) providing rigorous, relevant, and engaging instruction and assessments; (3) offering academic supports for student success both in and out of class; and (4) facilitating shared leadership and professional development, including creating a shared schoolwide vision, supporting grade-level teacher collaboration, and distributing leadership to include teachers, among other elements.

The report also highlights areas of support that enable student-centered schools, including funding policies that shape what resources are available and how they are used; human capital policies that influence teachers' and school leaders' capacity to enact student-centered practices; and instruction and assessment policies, including project-based instruction and performance-based assessments, that impact what is taught and how student learning is measured.

Additional information on SCOPE's research on the four high schools, which includes a research brief, cross-case analysis, technical report, policy brief, educators' tool, and case studies, is available at https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/news/articles/1217.