

E-Rate 101: Connecting America's Schools and Libraries

What is E-Rate? The E-Rate (Schools and Libraries Universal Service Support Mechanism) is one of four programs supported by the Universal Service Fund (USF) and administered by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). For nearly 30 years, E-Rate has helped ensure that schools and libraries across the country can afford reliable broadband and internet connectivity. Today, E-Rate supports more than 100,000 schools and approximately 11,000 libraries, providing roughly \$3 billion in annual discounts.

Why E-Rate Matters: Reliable, high-speed internet is foundational to modern teaching, learning, and school operations. E-Rate helps ensure that all students—regardless of where they live or their community's wealth—have access to the connectivity needed for digital learning, online assessments, career and technical education, and other essential educational services. Beyond the classroom, E-Rate-supported networks also power critical school operations, including cybersecurity systems, transportation communications, HVAC controls, emergency communications, and student information systems.

How the Program Works: E-Rate is a fiscally responsible program with strong accountability measures.

- Schools and libraries receive discounts of 20% to 90% on eligible broadband, internet, and internal network infrastructure based on community need.
- Applicants must conduct a competitive bidding process, ensuring cost is the primary factor when selecting service providers.
- Funding is limited to eligible connectivity services and network equipment—it does not pay for laptops, tablets, software, or digital curriculum.
- The program operates under an annual funding cap and is subject to rigorous oversight and audits.
 - A January 2026 report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) titled [*Federal Awards: Selected Programs Did Not Fully Include Identified Practices to Enhance Oversight and Fraud Prevention*](#) found E-Rate to be the only one out of the five selected federal programs reviewed that successfully met all nine key requirements and best practices for fraud risk management.

The FCC's Current Proposal: The FCC recently adopted a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) that proposes significant changes to the E-Rate program. While framed as a program review, the proposal seeks comment on changes that could fundamentally alter—or potentially dismantle—a program with nearly three decades of bipartisan success. Among the proposals under consideration are:

- Ending the E-Rate program.
- Restricting eligibility primarily to rural schools.
- Excluding PreK and Head Start programs.
- Reducing or eliminating funding based on Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) compliance issues.
- Conditioning funding on new requirements such as screen-time policies, expanded internet filtering, social media restrictions, or mandatory digital literacy curricula.
- Redistributing funding in ways that could reduce support for many suburban and urban school districts.

These proposals move beyond the FCC's traditional role of supporting connectivity and into decisions about education policy that have historically been made by states and local school districts.

Why Congress Should Care: E-Rate has enjoyed broad bipartisan support because it helps ensure that every community has access to the connectivity necessary for education in the 21st century. It is a Congressionally-authorized program, and the FCC does not have the authority to end it. Weakening the program would increase costs for school districts, create uncertainty for long-term technology planning, and jeopardize the reliable broadband infrastructure that supports both student learning and essential school operations.

- Check out how much E-Rate money the schools and libraries in your state have received over the last five years. [CLICK HERE](#).
- Look up your E-Rate funding data at the state and Congressional district level [here](#).

As the FCC considers these proposals, preserving a strong, stable, and predictable E-Rate program remains critical for schools, libraries, and the millions of students and communities they serve.

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