



## **E-Rate**

AESA is a strong supporter of the E-Rate (School & Libraries) program, which helps schools and libraries across the country access affordable broadband connectivity. The program was modernized in 2014, a two-pronged approach that both expanded the scope of the program to prioritize broadband AND increased the funding cap of the program to \$3.9 billion annually. Demand for school district connectivity is not going away. As such, it is imperative the E-Rate program not only continue to exist and support schools and libraries, but that it do so in a manner consistent with the founding principles of equity in access. The new chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is Commissioner Ajit Pai. While he has yet to take any direct action that threatens E-Rate, we remain concerned that his overarching focus on maintaining the contribution factor and limiting the size of the Universal Service Fund—both of which directly impact the availability of funding for E-Rate—coupled with his repeated interest in capping E-Rate or making it a per-pupil program, give us great concern. While Congress is not poised to make any changes to E-Rate, we want to ensure that they know what E-Rate is, how schools and libraries use it, why the program matters, that it is working and is important, and what would happen to schools if the program were reduced or cut.

### **AESA Talking Points:**

- Though Congress has no role in determining the changes to E-Rate, they do engage in conversations with the FCC Commissioners. As such, make sure your Senators and Representatives know the critical role that E-Rate dollars play in school connectivity and how important those dollars will be as schools prepare for the online assessments.
- Did you know? E-Rate is the fourth largest stream of federal resources for schools in the country, after Title I, IDEA, and Medicaid funding.

## AESA TALKING POINTS – TUITION TAX CREDITS

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- E-Rate played a critical role in the rapid and significant expansion of connectivity in schools, and the 2014 modernization was a much-needed update to ensure more schools and libraries are connected to broadband.
- Talk about how your district uses its E-Rate funding, how it supports your district's learning and teaching, and what it would mean if E-Rate were cut.
- More changes to the E-Rate are not needed now. The changes instituted by the Commission are only in their third year of implementation. Pushing for new changes to the program now would create great confusion and uncertainty in the applicant community, potentially discouraging those applicants who benefit from the program the most (including rural and low-density applicants who are benefiting from the cap increase).
- AESA opposes a per-pupil formula for a number of reasons:
  - Any formula-driven system is unlikely to account adequately for the needs of low-income schools and libraries, pursuant to the establishing statute and the Commission's interpretations of the statute.
  - Bandwidth is not sold on a per-pupil basis and limiting E-Rate support by a formula linked to per-pupil allocations could very well lead to small rural and large urban schools and libraries receiving support that is inadequate to purchase higher bandwidth levels. While funding fairness may be achieved through a per-pupil system, higher bandwidth levels may be compromised.
  - A formula-driven system would not provide more flexibility for applicants. Although on the surface it would allow them to buy whatever they want, in reality they would only have enough money to buy what they will be able to afford with the subsidy, which may fall far short of what they need.