



THE E-RATE: New Opportunity for Schools

EDITOR'S NOTE: Unlike this issue of the NETC Circuit, our online E-Rate Primer continues to evolve, reflecting changes in the new federal e-rate program. Therefore, we urge you to visit the Primer, which includes many live links to other Internet sites with e-rate-related information. Pay particular attention to the Primer's "News Notes" section to keep abreast of important e-rate developments.

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In this issue, we focus on the "e-rate"—the new \$2.25 billion/year federal program to provide schools and libraries with substantial discounts on telecommunications services, internal connections, and Internet access.

Although this exciting program could give many schools in the NETC service region a boost in reaching their educational technology goals, it also brings such challenges as meeting application requirements and determining exactly what is covered under the program.

The e-rate features in this issue are designed to help schools understand this important program and realize its benefits. (See the **SLC's FAQs** as the "graduate course" that you may choose to tackle after reading the other, more approachable, articles.)

These features also serve as an introduction to the e-rate section of NETC's Web site (<http://www.netc.org/fcc/>). There you will find more detail, links to e-rate Web sites and documents, and frequent updates on the fast-evolving e-rate story.

But before you immerse yourself in our print version of that story, we urge you to turn to **Networking CD-ROM, Other NETC Resources: Arriving Soon at Your School!**

"./fcc/index.html" There, you'll read about three exciting new resources from NETC: The Networking Issues in K-12 Schools CD-ROM, the Classrooms in Transformation video, and a printed guide to addressing the equity gap in technology access and use.



THE E-RATE: Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How?

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WHO can apply? A public or private school is eligible if it meets the statutory definition of an elementary or secondary school found in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, does not operate as for-profit business, and does not have an endowment exceeding \$50 million.

WHAT is the e-rate program? On May 8, 1997, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) issued its Report & Order in the Matter of Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service. (The Joint Board referenced in the title had advised the FCC on implementing universal service provisions of the 1996 Telecommunications Act.) In one section of the document, the Commission authorized a program to allow eligible schools and libraries to purchase telecommunications services, internal connections, and Internet access at discounts ranging between 20 and 90 percent, based on criteria designed to factor in levels of economic disadvantage and the varying telecommunication costs in different regions. (See the [Schools and Libraries Discount Matrix](#) in this issue and see the discussion of what is eligible for discounts in the article [THE E-RATE: Just the FAQs](#).) The discount fund will be subject to a \$2.25 billion annual cap, and funds not disbursed in a given year will be carried forward, and can be disbursed at a later time without regard to the cap. The FCC order further specified that in order for schools and libraries in a particular state to be eligible for discounts, that state must adopt a discount matrix at least as favorable for intrastate services as the FCC adopted for interstate services.

WHEN can schools or districts apply? This is still uncertain as we go to press. The hope is that it will be as soon as possible, because the program commences on January 1, 1998.

WHERE will applications from districts/schools be posted? On a Web site to be administered by the Schools and Libraries Corporation, an "unaffiliated not-for-profit corporation" established at the direction of the FCC. Competing providers will then have an opportunity to bid on the services requested in the applications.

WHY was the e-rate program established? A national goal of "universal service"—local phone access for all Americans at reasonable rates—arose more than half a century ago. In an era of satellites and cyberspace, that original goal has taken on considerably broader implications. One manifestation of this is the provision in the Telecommunications Act of 1996 that the nation's schools and libraries should have access to

telecommunications services at discounted rates for educational purposes.

HOW is all of this really going to work? There is no simple answer to that question. Details of the program are still being worked out, the FCC has already issued several amendments to its ruling, and local circumstances and policies will vary. Furthermore, we think it is especially important for our readers to note that because of the possibility that court challenges could delay e-rate implementation, we've heard government officials recommend that schools making purchase agreements in expectation of e-rate discounts add a "contingent on funding" provision to their contracts.

In this initial time of flux, we urge you to stay informed. Begin by learning how the e-rate is being addressed in your state (see article [THE E-RATE: What's Happening in Your State?](#)), then read about e-rate resources on the Internet (see article [THE E-RATE: Internet Resources](#)). For additional detail (and exposure to the complexity and ambiguity that make the e-rate a challenge as well as an opportunity) read our e-rate FAQs (see article [THE E-RATE: Just the FAQs](#)).

For still more detail, visit the e-rate section of NETC's own Web site (<http://www.netc.org/fcc/>). Note that you can link to the May 8 FCC ruling, as well as other pertinent documents, from that part of the Web site. And pay special attention to the e-rate "News Notes" feature there to keep up with important developments relating to the application process, such as release of the official application forms.



NEWS NOTE: NETC Hosts Web Sites That Enhance Educational Practice

We invite you to take a look at a special section of our Web site. Formerly known as the Web Moderators' Project, it is now called the Northwest Educators Web Projects. Each created by an educational professional, the N.E.W. Projects are a Multimedia Site (Chuck Wahle), a Gifted Education Site (Michael Hall), an Educational Technology Research and Practice Site (Darlene H. Hartman-Hallam), and a Novices Site (Jeannie Wray).

What will you find at these sites? You'll find focused educational material that fosters interaction which is useful and practical. The site authors are developing information resources that maintain currency and fluidity in a unique form.

You can visit the N.E.W. Projects at http://www.netc.org/web_mod/ We hope you will find this set of resources valuable. Comments on this and other NETC services are welcomed!

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Unlike this issue of the NETC Circuit, our online E-Rate Primer continues to evolve, reflecting changes in the new federal e-rate program. Therefore, we urge you to visit the Primer. The "FAQs" section there is more complete and more up-to-date than this Circuit article, and the "Internet Resources" section there includes many live links to e-rate information sources (including some that are referenced in this article.) Also pay particular attention to the Primer's "News Notes" section to keep abreast of important developments in the e-rate program.

This article is adapted from the FAQs (frequently asked questions) feature at NETC's Web site (<http://www.netc.org/fcc>).

While our FAQs—and the others you'll find at Web sites described in our Internet Resources article—can certainly be helpful in understanding the e-rate program, the very fact that so many organizations feel compelled to post such guides demonstrates the sometimes-ambiguous nature of the e-rate program. If you don't "get" everything you read here, please be assured that you are in good company!

We've divided our FAQs into four categories: **ELIGIBILITY**, **DISCOUNTS**, **APPLICATION PROCESS**, and **PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION**. The numbers in parentheses following each answer refer to paragraphs in the FCC's May 8 universal service ruling which relate to that answer. (With a few exceptions, they are from Part X, which includes most of the ruling's information about school and library discounts.) Such references do not necessarily encompass every paragraph that has some direct or indirect bearing on a particular question.

Bold text refers to Web sites that offer further clarification on a particular question. See the Internet Resources article in this issue for further information on these sites.

Note that our focus in these FAQs is on how the FCC ruling affects schools. Rules and considerations for libraries may vary from those we describe. Note also that we use the generic term "services" to refer to both services and equipment that are eligible or ineligible for the discount program.

ELIGIBILITY

Q. If our state decides, for some reason, not to set intrastate discounts at least equal to the federal interstate discounts, can it still receive federal universal service support for schools and libraries?

Ordinarily, no. The FCC ruling holds out the possibility of a waiver for states that wish to provide an intrastate discount mechanism that is less than the federal one, but the statement of that possibility is accompanied by the comment that "...we would only expect to grant such waivers on a temporary basis and only for states with unusually compelling cases." (550-551.) Many

states have already instituted the necessary measures to participate in the program.

Q. What schools are eligible for the discounts?

A public or private school is eligible if it meets the statutory definition of an elementary or secondary school found in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, does not operate as for-profit business, and does not have an endowment exceeding \$50 million. (554. See also 552-553, 555.)

Q. What services in schools qualify for discounts?

The FCC ruling provides generalities (e.g., "all telecommunications services, Internet access, and internal connections provided by telecommunications carriers") and examples (e.g., e-mail and "plain old telephone service (POTS) lines"), but there is no complete list.

Elaborating on "internal connections" eligibility, the ruling says, We find that a given service is eligible for support as a component of the institution's internal connections only if it is necessary to transport information all the way to individual classrooms. That is, if the service is an essential element in the transmission of information within the school or library, we will classify it as an element of internal connections and will permit schools and libraries to receive a discount on its installation and maintenance for which the telecommunications carrier may be compensated from universal service support mechanisms.

"Applying this standard," the ruling continues, we agree with the Joint Board's recommendation that support should be available to fund discounts on such items as routers, hubs, network file servers, and wireless LANs and their installation and basic maintenance because all are needed to switch and route messages within a school or library. Their function is solely to transmit information over the distance from the classroom to the Internet service provider, when multiple classrooms share the use of a single channel to the Internet service provider. We also agree with Oracle that "internal connections" would include the software that file servers need to operate and that we should place no specific restrictions on the size, i.e., type, of the internal connections network covered. Consistent with the Joint Board's finding that the installation and maintenance of internal connections are services, we conclude that support should be available to fund discounts on basic installation and maintenance services necessary to the operation of the internal connections network. (425, 444, 459-460, and footnote 1117.)

Additional comments and clarifications that are directly or indirectly related to what is eligible for discounts are widely dispersed in Chapter X of the ruling. (Some we found to be particularly relevant are in paragraphs 426, 428-431, 436, 439-443, 445-448, 461-463, 497, and 540.) The Merit Network's set of FAQs from a May 15 summit on universal service support for Michigan Schools and Libraries has a number of questions and answers relating to what's eligible. So does the "Ask the Experts" forum, accessible from the PBS - Maximizing Your E-Rate page

Q. What services in schools do not qualify for discounts?

As in the case of eligible services, the FCC gives examples but not a complete list. It does "expressly deny support...to finance the purchase of equipment that is not needed to transport information to individual classrooms." With some exceptions,

personal computers do not qualify for discount support, and fax machines, modems, voice mail, training, and asbestos removal are also specifically mentioned as being ineligible for such support. (444, 460, 497, 567.) For additional comment on what is or is not eligible, see the Merit Network's set of FAQs from a May 15 summit on universal service support for Michigan Schools and Libraries, as well as some of the questions and answers from the "Ask the Experts" forum, accessible from the PBS - Maximizing Your E-Rate page.

DISCOUNTS

Q. If the discounts range from 20 percent to 90 percent, what determines which schools receive which level of discounts?

In essence, the determination is based on two sets of criteria: the school's degree of poverty and its location (rural or urban). The reasoning behind these criteria, the ways they will be applied, and available alternatives are described at length in the FCC ruling (492-511, 519-527. See also the Schools and Libraries Discount Matrix from the ruling.)

Q. How does the ruling distinguish between "high-cost" and "low-cost" areas for purposes of the schools and libraries program? Rural areas are considered "high-cost." They are "defined in accordance with the definition adopted by the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Rural Health Policy...[which] uses the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) designation of metropolitan and non-metropolitan counties (or county equivalents), adjusted by the most currently available Goldsmith Modification, which identifies rural areas within large metropolitan counties." (504. See also 494-496, 505-507.) For clarification on what is meant by MSAs, see U.S. Census Bureau - Metropolitan Area Definitions. The "Ask the Experts" forum, accessible from the PBS - Maximizing Your E-Rate page, also includes some information relative to the rural/urban distinction as well as the Goldsmith Modification.

Q. Do students eligible for reduced-price lunches as well as free lunches count in determining the discount a school receives?

Yes. (520. See also 509.)

Q. What are the available alternatives to using the School Lunch Program criteria in determining our school's discount level?

The ruling states that schools which "choose not to use an actual count of students eligible for the national school lunch program may use only the federally-approved alternative mechanisms contained in Title I of the Improving America's Schools Act, which equate one measure of poverty with another." The ruling further notes that "These alternative mechanisms permit schools to choose from among existing sources of poverty data a surrogate for determining the number of students who would be eligible for the national school lunch program. A school relying upon one of these alternative mechanisms could, for example, conduct a survey of the income levels of its students' families." (510. See also 511.)

Q. Why does the FCC encourage schools and libraries to

form consortiums?

The commissioners stated in the ruling that they "agree with the Joint Board that we should encourage schools and libraries to aggregate their demand with others to create a consortium with sufficient demand to attract competitors and thereby negotiate lower rates or at least secure efficiencies, particularly in lower density regions....We concur with the Joint Board's finding that aggregation into consortia can also promote more efficient shared use of facilities to which each school or library might need access." (476.)

APPLICATION PROCESS

Q. Will we need to seek competitive bids, and if so, will we be required to select the lowest bidder?

Competitive bids are required. In the ruling, the FCC commissioners note that the Joint Board intentionally did not recommend that the Commission require schools and libraries to select the lowest bids offered but rather recommended that the Commission permit schools and libraries "maximum flexibility" to take service quality into account and to choose the offering or offerings that meets their needs "most effectively and efficiently," where this is consistent with other procurement rules under which they are obligated to operate.

The commissioners then state that they "concur with this policy, noting only that price should be the primary factor in selecting a bid." They also note factors that they find to "form a reasonable basis on which to evaluate whether an offering is cost-effective." (480-481, 575. See also 482-485.)

Q. What do we need to include in our school's application?

The appropriate forms, of course, once they are available. In the ruling, the FCC discusses several components that will be included in applications:

TECHNOLOGY INVENTORY/ASSESSMENT. The minimum requirements for inclusion are described.

TECHNOLOGY PLAN. Requirement for independent approval; possibility of using plans approved for other purposes. (See additional information on technology plans in answers to the next two questions.)

DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES SOUGHT. Requirement that this include "sufficient detail to enable potential providers to formulate bids."

CERTIFICATIONS. Description of the kinds required under oath from the person authorized to order services. (571-577.)

The Merit Network's set of FAQs from a May 15 summit on universal service support for Michigan Schools and Libraries has questions and answers relating to specific situations that may arise in the application process. (Some are specific to Michigan.)

Q. Who will perform the independent approval of our technology plan?

The ruling is a bit vague on this, but says that "ideally" it will be "by a state agency that regulates schools and libraries." (574.)

Q. What if our school already has a technology plan approved for another program?

According to the ruling, "plans that have been approved for other purposes, e.g., for participation in federal or state programs such

as 'Goals 2000' and the Technology Literacy Challenge, will be accepted without need for further independent approval. With regard to schools and libraries with new or otherwise approved plans, we will receive guidance from the Department of Education and the Institute for Museum and Library Services as to alternative approval measures." (574.)

In regard to the plans already approved for other purposes (e.g., for Goals 2000 or the Technology Literacy Challenge Fund) there appears to be some uncertainty at this point whether a state authority can decide that such plans are not sufficient and require a new technology plan from applicants. We recommend that before you prepare an e-rate application, you consult with your state e-rate representative (see contact information in our states article on pages 3 to 5) for clarification on this point.

Q. Will we have to reapply annually?

Yes. "Moreover, schools and libraries must file new funding requests for each funding year." (536. See also 537.)

We have heard some people state that second year applications will not need technology plans if they were approved the previous year—only a request for the service needed. But as with other details of the unfolding e-rate story, watch for official statements on the exact requirements as they become available.

Q. Can we be assured of getting the same level of discount (or a discount, period) from year to year?

No on both counts. (537.)

Q. When will the application forms be ready?

As we go to press, this is the number one question from people with an interest in the e-rate—in part because no one seems to have a sure answer! We will post an announcement on the NETC Web site's e-rate "News Notes" page as soon as information becomes available.

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Q. Who will administer the program?

In the May 8 ruling, the FCC said the National Exchange Carrier Association (NECA) could serve as temporary administrator of universal service support mechanisms, and stipulated a process whereby a "neutral third-party administrator" would eventually be chosen. A subcontractor would manage the application process for schools and libraries. (571, 866-867.)

But on July 18 a new FCC order changed the rules of the game. It directed NECA to set up the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC), "an independently functioning" non-profit subsidiary that would perform administrative functions on a temporary basis. Billing and collection functions for the e-rate program were among the duties that the FCC designated for this new entity.

In addition, the FCC ordered NECA to create the Schools and Libraries Corporation, an unaffiliated non-profit entity that would administer "the application and other processes" of the e-rate program. The FCC said the Schools and Libraries Corporation would continue to perform its functions even after a permanent administrator is appointed.

What effect these changes will have on the timing and efficiency of e-rate implementation is unclear, but on August 15, the FCC issued a new order in which it specified that NECA could carry

out certain universal service functions until such time as USAC and the Schools and Libraries Corporation are able to take over.

Q. How many years will the discount program last?

No end date is set, but a Federal-State Joint Board will review the discount program in the year 2001 "or sooner, if necessary." (526.)

Q. We understand that discounts will be made available on a first-come-first-served basis. Will there be enough money in the fund to meet the needs of all the schools and libraries that may wish to make use of the discounts?

No one can predict that with certainty.

Q. What happens if funds begin to run short during a given year?

If any funds carried over from previous years are exhausted, and only \$250 million remains available for the current funding year, a system of priorities will govern distribution of the remaining money. The system is designed to afford the greatest protection to the most economically disadvantaged institutions. (539-540. See also 535, 538, 541.)

Q. What happens if there is money left in the fund at the end of a year?

It will be available to support discounts for schools and libraries in subsequent years. (529. See also 530-532, 535.)

Q. How will the funding year be defined?

The calendar year. With the exception of the initial year of the program (1998), requests for support will be accepted beginning on July 1 of the previous year. In the case of that initial year, "requests for support will be accepted as soon as the schools and libraries website is open and the applications are available." (535.)

Q. Who will we pay? Will we have to pay the full cost of equipment and services, then receive a refund to cover the discounted portion?

You will pay the service provider only your discounted percentage of the cost of covered services. The service provider will then apply to the Universal Service Fund for the remainder. For example, if the actual cost of the service is \$1,000 and your allowable discount is 70 percent, you will pay your service provider \$300. The service provider will recover the remaining \$700 from the Fund. (586.)

Q. If my school is receiving discounts, can it expect to be audited?

In the ruling, the FCC stated its agreement with the Joint Board that schools, libraries, and carriers be required to maintain "appropriate records necessary to assist in future audits." It further stated that "We share the Joint Board's expectation that schools and libraries will be able to produce such records at the request of any auditor appointed by a state education department, the fund administrator, or any other state or federal agency with jurisdiction that might, for example, suspect fraud or other illegal conduct, or merely be conducting a routine, random audit." (581.)



Top E-Rate Internet Resources Around the Country

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EdLiNC
<http://www.itc.org/edlinc/>

FCC LearnNet
<http://www.fcc.gov/learnnet/>

Merit Network
<http://nic.merit.edu/k12.michigan/usf/>

National Exchange Carrier Association (NECA)
<http://www.neca.org/>

U.S. Department of Education - Technology Initiatives
<http://www.ed.gov/Technology/>



Internet Resources Focused on NETC's Area of Service

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Alaska State Library

<http://www.educ.state.ak.us/lam/usf/>

Idaho State Library

<http://www.lili.org/isl/hp.htm>

Montana Office of Public Instruction

<http://www.metnet.state.mt.us/>

Northwest Educational Technology Consortium (NETC)

<http://www.netc.org/fcc/index.html>

Oregon Department of Education

<http://www.ode.state.or.us/resources/erateQA.htm>

Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

<http://www.wa.gov/dis/discountinfo/>



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Because of strong interest in the e-rate from the education and library communities, many Web sites now include FAQs, summaries, links, etc., to help applicants understand the e-rate program and prepare to apply for discounts. With so many good people striving to understand a sometimes ambiguous government ruling that has been revised several times, it is best to approach all such information (including ours) with caution. Note, for example, the date when information was most recently updated at a Web site; it may reflect information superseded by a subsequent FCC revision of its universal service ruling.

In general, we can expect the best e-rate answers to come from parties with a direct connection to creating or implementing the ruling: the FCC, the U.S. Department of Education, and the National Exchange Carrier Association. Check the e-rate section of NETC's Web site (<http://www.netc.org/fcc/>), for updated information on Internet resources. If you know of an additional site that should appear there, please contact John Ferrell (ferrellj@nwrel.org).

NATIONAL SITES

American Library Association - Office for Information Technology Policy. This site has as a universal service page with a variety of resources. Of special note are the following: 1.) a preliminary analysis of the FCC ruling as it relates to schools and library discounts, with links to pertinent passages; and 2.) a chart indicating in summary form whether states have telecommunications plans or programs or have undertaken activities related to universal service. The chart is linked to further information available at Web sites from those states. <http://www.ala.org/oitp/univserv.html>

Benton Foundation. So far, this site has lots of information on universal service, but not much dated after the May 8 FCC ruling. But given Benton's interest in this area, this is a good place to watch for future postings. <http://www.benton.org/>

EdLiNC. This coalition of more than 30 organizations in the education and library communities has a strong interest in the e-rate. Its site has press releases and filing transcripts relating to the May 8 FCC ruling and to events leading up to it. Of special note

is the transcript of EdLiNC's July 18 comments to the FCC in opposition to the suit filed by Southwestern Bell Co. and Pacific Bell/Nevada Bell (components of SBC Communications Inc.) for a stay pending judicial review of the FCC's ruling. A feature called DiscountTown has still more e-rate information, including a special report and a link to information on subscribing to an EdLiNC listserv "for sharing information on both the federal level discounts and state level discounts." And finally, the home page has links to further e-rate and telecommunications information.

<http://www.itc.org/edlinc/>

FCC LearnNet. Has a variety of documents relating to the e-rate and universal service, including the original version of the May 8 ruling, as well as the June 4 amended version and the June 4 errata sheet that lists the amendments, available for download. There is also a link to directions for joining three technology-related FCC listservs and a set of FAQs, released on July 2, entitled "Frequently Asked Questions on Universal Service and the Snowe-Rockefeller-Exon-Kerrey Amendment."

<http://www.fcc.gov/learnnet/>

JDL Technologies. An "E-Rate Update Page," reached by clicking "Products and Solutions" on the home page, includes FAQs, news, and links to further e-rate and related information.

<http://www.jdltech.com/>

National Exchange Carrier Association (NECA). Because of its role in setting up the support mechanisms that will administer the school and library discount program, NECA is an important player whose Web site should be watched closely. "Late News From Washington," linked from the home page, provides daily regulatory news, including e-rate updates. Two additional links, "Schools and Libraries Fund" and "Resource Library," both lead to substantial, clearly presented information (identical in both places when we checked) on the e-rate program and recent developments in setting up its administrative structure. Readers are invited to contact NECA by e-mail if they have further questions.

<http://www.neca.org/>

PBS - Maximizing Your E-Rate. This page is a follow-up to the June 3 PBS live satellite broadcast of the same name. It includes information about the broadcast and answers to e-rate questions provided by an "expert panel."

<http://www.pbs.org/learn/als/programs/live/erate.htm>

U.S. Census Bureau - Metropolitan Area Definitions. The FCC ruling makes reference to Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA's) in its discussion of how rural areas should be defined for purposes of the discount program. Information at this Web site may prove helpful in understanding that discussion.

<http://www.census.gov/population/www/methodmet.html>

U.S. Department of Education. A page on "Technology Initiatives" links to a variety of resources on the e-rate including the July 31 recommendations to the FCC from the E-Rate Implementation Working Group; a June 1997 "Dear Educator" letter from Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley; an e-rate status report; a fact sheet; questions and answers; and a summary

of Section X of the FCC ruling, with references to relevant paragraphs.

<http://www.ed.gov/Technology/>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services - Information on the National School Lunch Program. This information is from the June 1997 Update of the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance, described elsewhere at the Health and Human Services site as "a government-wide compendium of all 1,327 Federal programs, projects, services, and activities that provide assistance or benefits to the American public."

<http://aspe.os.dhhs.gov/cfda/p10555.htm>

REGIONAL SITES

Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory (McREL).

A "Telecommunications Discounts for Schools" page includes numerous links to e-rate and other telecommunications information.

<http://www.mcrel.org/connect/tech/telecom.html>

North Central Regional Technology in Education Consortium (NCRTEC). From the home page, follow the link to "Increasing Technology Capacity," and from that link to "E-Rate Information and Workshop." Includes a variety of e-rate links and news about upcoming workshops in the NCRETC region.

<http://www.ncrtec.org/>

STATE SITES

Alaska State Library. A "Universal Service Fund for Schools and Libraries." page includes a nicely arranged guide under the heading "How Alaska's Schools and Libraries Can Start Preparing" that presents "action steps" together with e-rate FAQs.

<http://www.educ.state.ak.us/lam/library/dev/usf.html>

California Department of Education. A "Telecommunications Update" page includes a set of e-rate FAQs keyed to paragraphs in the FCC's May 8 ruling.

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ftpbranch/retdiv/k12/telecom/>

Florida Department of State, Division of Library and Information Services. This site's page on "Federal Telecommunications Discounts for Libraries" is a gateway to numerous links and onsite resources relating to the e-rate and telecommunications. Of special note is an "evolving analysis" of school and library provisions of the FCC ruling, prepared by staff of several Florida agencies.

<http://www.dos.state.fl.us/e-rate/>

Idaho State Library. The library's "Telecommunications Act of 1996 Discount Rates for Schools and Libraries" page includes a lengthy summary of the FCC ruling and a library-oriented checklist/guide to the discount process (planning, preparing applications, going through the bid process, etc.). Both are conveniently keyed to pertinent paragraphs in the ruling text.

<http://www.state.id.us/isl/telecom.htm#anchor1557924>

Indiana Department of Education. The department's "Universal Service Fund Information & Resources" page has links to a variety of e-rate resources and related information, including a guide to assist schools and libraries in taking inventories of their telecommunications facilities and services.
<http://doe.state.in.us/usf/>

Merit Network. The Universal Service Fund page of this nonprofit corporation "charged with promoting computer networking in Michigan and beyond." has a rich collection of links and a substantial body of information (in some cases specific to Michigan) on such topics as determining an organization's discount percentage and action steps an organization can take on the way to receiving discounts. A notable feature is a lengthy set of FAQs which originated with a May 15 Universal Service Fund Summit in Michigan and were subsequently updated. Another notable feature is a large archive of e-rate postings from a Michigan Information Network Working Group listserv (MINWG-Share).
<http://nic.merit.edu/k12.michigan/usf/>

Montana Office of Public Instruction. OPI has an e-rate section accessible directly from its home page, with information of interest to Montana educators (including directions for joining an e-rate listserv) and numerous links.
<http://161.7.114.15/OPI/opi.html>

Oregon Department of Education. A set of e-rate FAQs focuses strongly on how the program will work for Oregon schools. <http://www.ode.state.or.us/resources/erateQA.htm>

State and Local Government on the Net. Here's a site that may be helpful in finding information about action in your state on implementing intrastate discounts to complement the interstate discounts approved in the FCC ruling.
<http://www.piperinfo.com/state/states.html>

Washington Office of Public Instruction. An e-rate page has a set of FAQs and links to additional information on the e-rate and educational technology, including a summary of the FCC's May 8 ruling from the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission. Washington has also established a service to provide e-rate updates by e-mail. See Washington article on page 4 for instructions on joining.
<http://www.wa.gov/dis/discountinfo/>

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Has many annotated links to information about the FCC ruling and universal service.
http://badger.state.wi.us/agencies/dpi/www/telecom_act.html



THE E-RATE: What's Happening in Your State?

EDITOR'S NOTE: Unlike this issue of the NETC Circuit, our online E-Rate Primer continues to evolve, reflecting changes in the new federal e-rate program. Therefore, we urge you to visit the Primer. The "State Action" section there includes information on how the e-rate is being handled not just in NETC's service area, but in states across the country. Among the other Primer features is an "Internet Resources" section that includes many live links to other Internet sites with e-rate-related information. Also pay particular attention to the Primer's "News Notes" section to keep abreast of important developments in the e-rate program.

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ALASKA

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In Alaska, the state library is taking the lead in e-rate coordination, and its Web site includes an e-rate section (<http://www.educ.state.ak.us/lam/library/dev/usf.html>). The State Librarian serves as chair of the technology-plan certifying committee for both schools and libraries. Della Matthis (see contact information above) serves as a staffer for the committee, which includes representation from the business and educational communities.

In addition to providing answers to e-rate questions, the committee is supplying sample technology plans to school districts and public libraries that request them. It is also mailing printouts of text from the State Library's e-rate Web pages to those who may lack electronic access.

The committee is planning March workshops for small libraries that have been unable to complete technology plans by then. It also hopes to arrange for a workshop to help all Alaska school districts improve their technology plans.

IDAHO

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The Idaho State Library's Web site has an e-rate section (<http://www.state.id.us/isl/telecom.htm#anchor1557924>), and the Department of Education plans to place one at its site (<http://www.sde.state.id.us/Dept/>) in the future. In the meantime the Department is disseminating e-rate information through its quarterly newsletter and through the Idaho Educators listserv. Contact Dawn Wilson (see information above) for instructions on joining the listserv or for e-rate information. Once the official e-rate applications have been released, Wilson will go on a statewide tour to disseminate information about the program and the application process.

MONTANA
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In early September, representatives from various Montana organizations and agencies with a stake in the e-rate met and agreed upon ways to assure that they speak with one voice on matters relating to this important program. A committee representing several of these stakeholders, including the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI), is designing a template that schools can use in preparing technology plans and inventory/assessments for their e-rate applications. OPI is working with Apple Computer to put together two "live" e-rate conferences, the first in Missoula, November 10-11, and the second in Billings, November 12-13. The OPI Web site has an e-rate section, accessible directly from the home page (<http://161.7.114.15/OPI/opi.html>), with information of interest to Montana educators, including directions for joining an e-rate listserv.

OREGON
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The Oregon Public Utility Commission has passed a temporary rule that allows schools to take advantage of the e-rate, and it is working on a permanent rule. Oregon has received informal permission from the Federal

Communications Commission (FCC) to aggregate all schools in the state under the same discount rate, approximately 60%, since the state already subsidizes the schools through the basic school support formula based upon poverty. The state is now waiting for formal approval from the newly formed Schools and Libraries Corporation, which the FCC has designated to play an administrative role in the e-rate program.

The Oregon Department of Education has compiled a list of the e-rate contact persons for each district in the state, and it will be corresponding with each of them as the e-rate program continues to evolve.

The e-rate section at the Department's Web site will eventually include the names of these district contacts. It already has a set of e-rate FAQs focusing strongly on how the program will work for Oregon schools

(<http://www.ode.state.or.us/resources/erateQA.htm>)

On Saturday, October 25, 1997, the Department will hold an e-rate workshop in Salem for district-appointed e-rate contacts and district technology plan leaders.

WASHINGTON

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In developing print and electronic resources to assist Washington schools with the e-rate, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is working with the Washington State Utilities and Transportation Commission, the Department of Information Services, the State Library, the Department of Health, Rural Development Council, and others. The latest information can be found on the World Wide Web

(<http://www.wa.gov/dis/discountinfo>).

By the time we go to press, copies of an e-rate guide will have been sent to all Washington school districts. Regular updates will go out to the districts as new information becomes available. The guide will also be posted and updated at the Web site.

Educators who wish to receive e-rate updates by e-mail can do so through the free mailing list, wa-erate. To join, send an e-mail message to majordomo@ospi.wednet.edu with no subject and the message subscribe wa-erate.

WYOMING

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Wyoming's Public Service Commission has taken action to assure the state's participation in the e-rate program, and the Wyoming Department of Education and State Library are working together to help their constituencies benefit from the e-rate.

The state Department of Education is encouraging school districts to enter into consortium arrangements with libraries and others to aid them in achieving so-called "pre-discounts" in their purchase arrangements with providers in addition to the e-rate discounts they achieve under the federal program.

Because of its small population and lack of service providers, Wyoming has some concern that it may not attract sufficient bids under the e-rate program. The state has issued an RFP seeking bids to provide statewide connectivity.

Wyoming does have a state leased network, which supports services for video and data for libraries and some schools. The state will be looking at aggregating applications for services that are provided over that network. Otherwise, the school districts and libraries will be responsible for their own applications.

The state Department of Education will be taking the lead in reviewing school technology plans for e-rate applications, while the state library will review the library plans.



NEWS NOTE: A Guide to Networking Joins NETC "Hot Topics"

A Guide to Networking for K-12 Schools is now among the numerous "Hot Topics" resources you'll find at NETC's Web site (<http://www.netc.org/>).

A project of the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, prepared by NETC, the Guide (which is also available in print form) complements the new NETC CD-ROM, Networking Issues in K-12 Schools (see [Networking CD-ROM, Other NETC Resources: Arriving Soon at Your School!](#)), and is, in fact, among the library of publications included on the disk. It provides basic networking information and planning assistance for technology coordinators and others involved in building networks for K-12 schools.

In addition to the Guide, The NETC Web site's Hot Topics area includes the E-Rate Primer, the Northwest Educators Web Projects (see the News Note NETC Hosts Web Sites That Enhance Educational Practice), recent presentations by NETC staff, and other features whose titles convey the wide range of Hot Topics subject matter: Distance Education Resource Directory for Northwest Schools; Equity in Educational Technology; Grant and Funding Information; Internet Basics: Tips, Tricks, and Search Strategies; Preservice Teacher Education; Software Evaluation; Technology Literacy Challenge Fund; Technology Planning; U.S. Department of Education Technology Initiatives; and Web Development.

The word "Hot" in the Hot Topics title highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of these Web site features, so be sure to check back for new additions.

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Networking CD-ROM, Other NETC Resources: Arriving Soon at Your School!

We are proud to announce the debut of *Networking Issues in K-12 Schools*, a new CD-ROM that will provide you with a wealth of information related to the critical issues involved in networking schools.

The CD-ROM is divided into five topic areas: Planning a Network, Building a Network, Impact on Schools, Resources, and Tours. The last of these is a key feature of the CD-ROM: a set of electronic tours designed for specific audiences. Whether you are a teacher, an administrator, a school board member, or a technology coordinator, you can select an appropriate tour option suited to your particular needs.

In fact, whether you are a novice or a networking specialist, you'll find material that fits your level of knowledge and interest. Hypertext links within the CD-ROM will make it easy to move around as you see fit, and a variety of media types—graphics, sound, video, still photos, and animation—will enhance the learning experience.

Recognizing that CD-ROM drives are more plentiful in the states served by NETC than high-speed Internet connections, we have also placed copies of features from the NETC Web site on the CD-ROM. And, as yet another bonus, the disk includes a library of 16 complete publications relating to networking or other aspects of educational technology.

But the good news isn't over yet! We're also pleased to announce the debut of two additional resources: a video on the transformative potential of technology in the classroom and a printed action guide to help you assure equity in technology access and use.

Classrooms in Transformation, a 23-minute video co-produced by NETC and Seattle Public Schools, explores what learning and teaching look like in classrooms where technology has provided a context for changing familiar structures and cultures. In the video, educators reflect on the rewards and challenges of a process that has led to fundamental shifts in their classroom practice, including new roles and relationships for themselves and their students.

Closing the Equity Gap in Technology Access and Use, a publication produced cooperatively by NETC and the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's Center for National Origin, Race and Sex Equity (CNORSE), begins with the recognition that "Without consistent attention, equity is an illusive goal." After presenting questions to help educators identify inequities in technology access, types of use, and curriculum content, it provides steps for addressing these inequities and suggested sources of additional information and assistance.

By now you may be wondering **how to obtain these exciting new resources**. Well, here is the final piece of good news: A package containing a copy of each will soon be mailed to the Technology/Media Coordinator in every K-12 public school in NETC's six-state region.

We call it **The Best of NETC, Volume One**, and from our contacts with educators in the states, we believe this combination of resources will be very effective in meeting a range of school

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technology needs, from awareness of the potential power of well-integrated technology programs, to savvy on the technical side of implementing such programs, to sensitivity about equity concerns in educational technology use.



Talented People, Doing Their Jobs Better

In March, I came to NETC from a dual background as an archivist and environmental writer-editor. The experience was rather like moving to a strange land and trying to learn the culture of the natives instantly—so I could turn around and help them learn it better! It was fun, but the challenge certainly made me empathetic to educators who are striving to quickly master new technological learning tools.

Recently, news about a co-worker from my archival past set me to thinking just how valuable such efforts can be—and not just for K-12 teachers or their students. In 1988 Bob K. joined me on a U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum project to catalog Holocaust-related documents in a prototype database. A versatile man, Bob met his match with that software and the hardware that housed it. He managed to learn the basics, but the underlying systems remained a mystery to him. What kept Bob going was the thrill of discovering fascinating documents to describe in the database—documents important to Holocaust scholarship. Despite his untimely death this year, that database and another innovation we could not even foresee in 1988—the World Wide Web—mean that Bob's descriptions, rather than being hidden away in a printed archival inventory, will live on in searchable form, accessible to historians and students everywhere. Such will be the stories of the digital era: new tools helping talented people use their talents more effectively—even people with little affinity for the tools.

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