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## **New Report Shows How E-Rate is Connecting Communities and Schools to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Academic and Employment Opportunities**

WASHINGTON, DC (February 28, 2007) – From coast-to-coast, from economically challenged inner cities to remote rural areas, students, parents, educators, business leaders and communities have benefited from the E-Rate, a ground-breaking telecommunications program created in 1997 that provides deep discounts on telecommunications, Internet access and internal networking to America’s public and private schools as well as public libraries. A new report, *“E-Rate: 10 Years of Connecting Kids and Community,”* released today by two education coalitions – the Education and Libraries Networks Coalition (EdLiNC) and the National Coalition for Technology in Education and Training (NCTET) – states that the E-Rate has transformed America’s schools and libraries into modern institutions but that its mission is not yet complete.

Released today during a Capitol Hill briefing, the new report indicates that E-Rate supported connectivity allows 100% of public libraries to provide free Internet access to their communities. The report also credits the E-Rate for increasing the overall number of public classrooms with Internet access from 14% in 1996 to 95% in 2005. After 10 years of E-Rate support, more than 90% of classrooms in rural, high-minority and low-income school districts now have Internet connections, allowing them to leverage modern communication tools to support student achievement. An additional 2,800 private schools have also received support from the E-Rate to support educational goals.

“As this report clearly shows, just a decade after E-Rate first began, more people than ever before are reaping the benefits of the information age. E-Rate has made technology and the Internet accessible for our students, our teachers, and people of all ages through our local libraries,” said Senator John D. (Jay) Rockefeller IV (D-WV). “Thanks to E-Rate, we are quickly advancing toward a world where the digital divide will no longer exist.”

The E-Rate was enacted as an amendment to the Telecommunications Act of 1996 and represents an expansion of the universal service fund (USF), including Internet access support for schools and libraries for the first time in the USF. The authors of the provision – Senators Jay Rockefeller, Olympia Snowe (R-ME), James Exon (D-NE) and Bob Kerrey (D-NE) – and Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA) understood the importance of providing schools and libraries, particularly those in rural and low-income urban areas, with access to new telecommunications technology and the Internet’s vast resources. In 1997, the Federal Communications Commission unanimously approved the rules to implement the E-Rate and established a \$2.25 billion annual cap for E-Rate discounts. Since its inception, the E-Rate has provided nearly \$19 billion in discounted services.

“Information is the key to education and to keeping America competitive in an increasingly global economy. The E-Rate program began a decade ago to provide communities’ public libraries and schools with the communications tools and resources necessary to share information and educate America’s children,” said Senator Olympia Snowe. “While the first ten years of the E-Rate have helped schools and libraries upgrade and build their technology infrastructure, maintaining and upgrading these public institutions will require a continued effort and continued support of the program. Today’s report outlines how essential the E-Rate is to our country’s future.”

Over 30,000 applications for E-Rate discounts are filed each year from all corners of the country. School and library discounts, which range between 20% and 90%, are based upon poverty level, with the lowest income applicants receiving the deepest discounts. The report released today highlights a handful of E-Rate recipients.

- *Ho’okena Elementary School* in Hawaii, a community where 70% of the population are migrant farmers who live in homes that lack telephones, let alone computers. The E-Rate has transformed the school’s operations by enabling the school to provide every classroom a working telephone, cable television access and Internet connectivity. The teachers routinely participate in professional development activities offered by the school district via E-Rate supported videoconferencing. According to Kela Luczon, the school’s technology coordinator, “Our kids leave here knowing how to use scanners, digital cameras and email to reach and interact with someone in another country. They have 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills even though they are not growing up in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century environment.”
  
- *Archdiocese of Boston Catholic Schools*, a socio-economically diverse parochial school system where E-Rate support allows up to 6,000 students to engage in

distance learning opportunities on a daily basis. Through the high-speed access supported by the E-Rate, students at Cathedral High School, an Archdiocesan school, take online calculus courses for college and high school credit that equip them with the information and communication literacy skills they need to thrive and succeed in post-secondary institutions.

- **Woodland Library Cooperative** in southern Michigan serves 36 public libraries and roughly 525,000 patrons within a 4,600 square-mile radius and uses E-Rate support to allow community members to stay in-touch via the Internet with friends and family members serving in Iraq. These libraries have also become critical business and employment resource centers for local professionals who lack reliable Internet access at home and for community members in search of new jobs or careers.
  
- **Clark County School District** in Nevada has leveraged its E-Rate discounts to establish a virtual high school to support its rapidly growing student population. Using E-Rate supported services, the district's distance learning program offers synchronous and asynchronous instruction to the district's over 300,000 public school students. According to Dr. Phil Brody, the district's Assistant Superintendent and Chief Technology Officer, E-Rate has helped the district provide "the same application or service to all of the students in the district – those at the most affluent school and those at the poorest school – at the same time. It creates an element of equity."

A full copy of the report is available online at: [www.edlinc.org](http://www.edlinc.org) and [www.nctet.org](http://www.nctet.org). The report was commissioned by EdLiNC and NCTET and made possible through the generous support of AT&T, Best Buy, Cox Communications, Education Networks of America (ENA) and Verizon. The report was researched, written and managed by the Bernstein Strategy Group.

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**The National Coalition for Technology in Education and Training (NCTET)** is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that promotes and supports the effective use of technology to improve education and training in America by acting as a convener, catalyst and resource for relevant and timely information. [www.nctet.org](http://www.nctet.org)

**The Education and Libraries Networks Coalition (EdLiNC)** represents the viewpoint of public and private schools and libraries dealing with the implementation of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. The Coalition seeks to expand the use of educational technologies in schools and libraries by making sure that these entities receive affordable rates guaranteed to them in the Universal Service Provisions of the Telecommunications Act. [www.edlinc.org](http://www.edlinc.org)