



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



BIG DEAL: Federal Communications Commission to Modernize E-Rate Program to Focus on High-Speed Internet Connectivity in Nation's Schools and Libraries

On February 5, **Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Tom Wheeler** announced major changes to the federal program that provides internet connections to the nation's schools and libraries during a [Digital Learning Day event at the Library of Congress hosted by the Alliance for Excellent Education](#). Most significantly, the FCC would double its investment in high-speed broadband to \$2 billion to connect more than 15,000 schools and 20 million students over the next two years.



Wheeler called the change to the E-rate program a “BIG DEAL” (emphasis his) and a “top priority” for him and the FCC. “During my tenure as chairman of the FCC, there may be no bigger and more significant issue than making sure our schools and libraries are connected to high-speed broadband networks,” Wheeler said. “That is why E-rate modernization is at the top of my agenda and why I support President Obama’s goal of connecting 99 percent of all students to high-speed broadband capacity in five years—or faster.”

Wheeler outlined three principles that will guide the FCC in modernizing E-rate: (1) focus on high-speed connectivity to every school and library; (2) streamline the program to make it easier and more productive for schools and libraries; and (3) ensure sufficient resources are available, beginning with a \$2 billion “down payment” to expand high-speed connections over the next two years.

To fund the \$2 billion to be spent on high-speed connections beginning this year, Wheeler credited a “business-like approach” that “identified opportunities for greater productivity with the program,” including “significant” improvements in the way funds are deployed. For example, Wheeler said that only about half of E-rate funds go toward broadband connectivity and less than half go toward the 100 megabits-per-second and higher speeds necessary for today’s learning environments.

In the future, Wheeler said the FCC would “do what is appropriate” should it be necessary to increase the permanent funding levels for the E-rate program, which is capped at about \$2.4 billion annually. He added that any funding change must be preceded by an assessment—already underway at the FCC—of how funds are used combined with a “fact-based” analysis of the needs of the program to meet its goals.

“I was recently at one middle school where the students told about how the network would crash if too many of them pushed ‘Enter’ simultaneously,” Wheeler said. “They told of having to walk around the room holding their tablets up until they got a WiFi signal.”

Wheeler outlined several management changes designed to connect more students to broadband more quickly. For example, the FCC would prioritize applications impacting the most students, including those submitted by large metropolitan areas as well as joint applications submitted by a consortium of several school districts. These changes will take effect immediately with Fiscal Year 2014 applications and will be completed by the end of March 2014.

“To those participating in the program, let me be clear, we will fund all Priority One services¹ in 2014, but one of the first ways to accelerate progress is to get cash that is already in the program working to support broadband projects more quickly,” Wheeler said.

Later this spring, Wheeler hopes to issue an order to make other fundamental and structural changes to “effectively target high-capacity connections to all libraries and schools and to provide resources to make sure high-speed Wi-Fi delivers that connectivity within the classroom and library.” Wheeler added that the FCC will release a public notice in the coming weeks seeking comment on several issues, including how to “appropriately phase-out legacy services, including low-bandwidth connections, and reprioritize on broadband.” Wheeler’s goal is to have this process completed before students return to classrooms in the fall.

A transcript and video of Wheeler’s remarks are available at <http://www.fcc.gov/events/digital-learning-day-national-event>.

For more information on E-rate and the need to connect schools and libraries to high-speed broadband, visit the Alliance’s 99in5.org website.



ConnectED: Obama Announces \$750 Million from Private Sector to Bring Technology Into Classrooms

In a [February 4 speech at Buck Lodge Middle School in Adelphi, Maryland](#), President Obama announced more than \$750 million in private-sector commitments from eight companies to deliver cutting-edge technologies to classrooms, including devices, software, teacher professional development, and home wireless connectivity.

- **Apple** pledged \$100 million in iPads, MacBooks, and other products along with content and professional development tools to enrich learning in disadvantaged schools.
- **AT&T** pledged more than \$100 million to provide middle-school students with free internet connectivity for educational devices over their wireless networks for three years.
- **Autodesk** pledged to expand its “Design the Future” program to be available—for free—to every secondary school in the country, and is valued at more than \$250 million.

¹ There are two categories of eligible services within E-rate: Priority One (wires into the building) includes local, long-distance, and wireless telephone services; leased high-speed data lines; internet access; web hosting; voice-over internet; and some installation of these services. Priority Two (connections within the building) includes cabling, routers, wireless network components, maintenance, and basic technical support.

- **Microsoft** committed to launch a substantial affordability program open to all U.S. public schools by deeply discounting the price of its Windows operating system, which will substantially bring down the cost of Windows-based devices.
- **O'Reilly Media** is partnering with **Safari Books Online** to make more than \$100 million in educational content and tools available, for free, to every school in America.
- **Sprint** committed to offer free wireless service for up to 50,000 low-income high school students over the next four years, valued at \$100 million.
- **Verizon** announced a multi-year program to support the ConnectED vision through cash and in-kind commitments of up to \$100 million.

In addition to the commitments from these companies, Obama discussed “ConnectED,” his initiative to close the technology gap in schools and connect 99 percent of America’s students to high-speed broadband internet within five years.

“Today, the average American school has about the same internet bandwidth as the average American home, but it serves 200 times as many people,” Obama said. “Only around 30 percent of our students have true high-speed internet in the classroom. In countries like South Korea, that’s 100 percent. We shouldn’t give that kind of competitive advantage over to other countries. We want to make sure our young people have the same advantages that some child in South Korea has right now. In a country where we expect free Wi-Fi with our coffee, we should definitely demand it in our schools.”



GUIDANCE SYSTEM: U.S. Department of Education Outlines ESEA and IDEA Funds That Could Support Use of Technology to Improve Instruction and Student Outcomes

Coinciding with Digital Learning Day, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) released guidance on February 5 that outlines how states, school districts, and eligible partnerships could use federal education funding to support innovative technology-based strategies to personalize learning. The guidance, offered in a [letter from Richard Culatta, director of ED’s Office of Educational Technology](#), provides examples of how programs under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) may support the use of technology to improve instruction and student outcomes.

Specifically, the guidance focuses on four main areas: (1) improving and personalizing professional learning and other supports for educators; (2) increasing access to high-quality digital content and resources for students; (3) facilitating educator collaboration and communication; and (4) providing devices for students to access digital learning resources.

“Funding these four areas is important because technology itself is not a panacea,” Culatta writes. “Technology can help improve learning and educational outcomes for students only when teachers are well-supported with appropriate resources and have an opportunity to integrate technology with high quality instruction.”

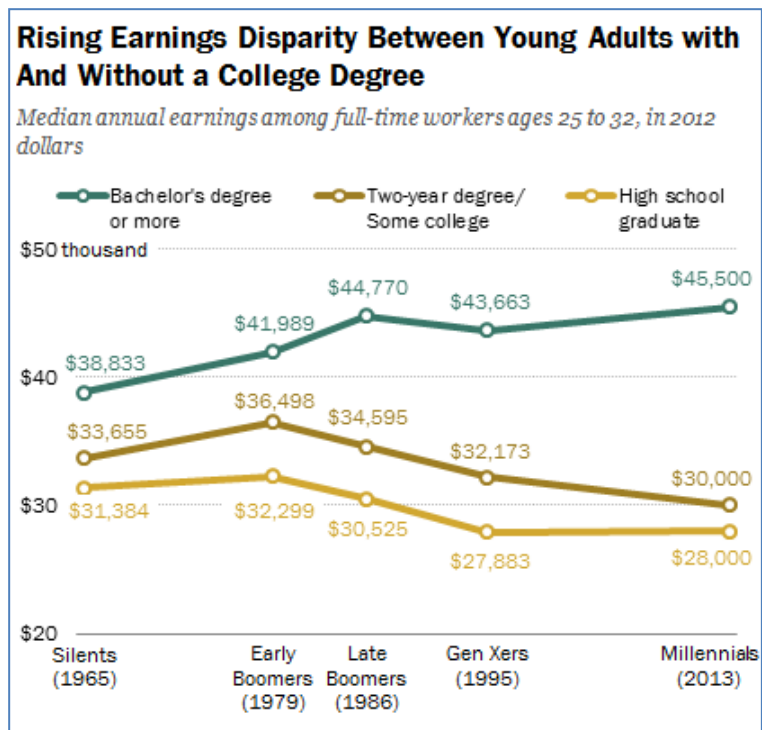
Although the guidance focuses on ESEA and IDEA funds, it adds that funds from “many other” formula and competitive grant programs administered by ED may also be used for this purpose.



THE RISING COST OF NOT GOING TO COLLEGE: New Pew Research Center Report Spotlights Growing Earnings Disparity Between College Graduates and High School Graduates Compared to Previous Generations

In 2013, individuals aged twenty-five to thirty-two (Millennials) with only a high school diploma earned \$28,000 annually compared to \$45,500 for similarly aged college graduates—a “pay gap” of 62 percent that was significantly narrower in previous generations, according to *The Rising Cost of Not Going to College*, a new report from the Pew Research Center. In 1979, for example, high school graduates earned 77 percent of what a college graduate earned, as shown in the image below taken from the report. The report also finds that college-educated Millennials are more likely to be employed full-time than their less-educated counterparts (89 percent vs. 82 percent) and significantly less likely to be unemployed (3.8 percent vs. 12.2 percent).

“On virtually every measure of economic well-being and career attainment—from personal earnings to job satisfaction to the share employed full time—young college graduates are outperforming their peers with less education,” the report notes. “And when today’s young adults are compared with previous generations, the disparity in economic outcomes between college graduates and those with a high school diploma or less formal schooling has never been greater in the modern era.”



The report acknowledges that the so-called “Great Recession” hit the Millennial generation “particularly hard.” In fact, 22 percent of Millennials with only a high school diploma were living in poverty in 2013, compared to 15 percent of similarly situated individuals from the previous generation, Generation X, in 1995, and only 7 percent of Baby Boomers in 1979, when those individuals were in their late twenties and early thirties.

The news was not all bad for Millennials. According to the report, Millennials are the best-educated generation in history as more than one-third (34 percent) have at least a bachelor’s degree, compared to 24 percent of similarly situated Baby Boomers in the late 1970s and 1980s.

“At the same time the share of college graduates has grown, the value of their degrees has increased,” the report notes. “Between 1965 and 2013, the median annual earnings of twenty-five- to thirty-two-year-olds with a college degree grew from \$38,833 to \$45,500 in 2012 dollars, nearly a \$7,000 increase.”

During the same time period, however, the median annual earnings for a high school graduate fell from \$31,384 in 1965 to \$28,000 in 2013.

Findings from the report are based on a new nationally representative Pew Research Center survey of 2,002 adults and are supplemented by a Pew Research analysis of economic data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

The complete report is available at

<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2014/02/SDT-higher-ed-FINAL-02-11-2014.pdf>.



STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESSES: Connecticut, Delaware, Oklahoma, and Utah Governors Propose Investments in Early Education, K–12 Education, Common Standards, STEM, and Higher Education

Connecticut: Malloy Outlines Five-Step Plan to Improve Education

“We know the best way to increase someone’s chances for success is a quality education,” **Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy (D)** said early in his [February 6 state of the state address](#), which focused on education more than any other topic.

During his speech, Malloy outlined five ideas spanning early education through college to ensure that every student has access to a quality education. First, he emphasized the need for universal pre-kindergarten for all children and pledged an additional 1,200 early childhood education opportunities next year, expanding to 4,000 by 2019.

Second, he announced a college savings plan for every child born or adopted in Connecticut to help make college more affordable. Under the plan, the state would help parents start a tax-free savings account with \$100 in it. If parents add \$150 to it within the first four year’s of the child’s life, the state will match that number for a total state investment of \$250.

Malloy’s third idea to improve education is a public-private partnership to increase the number of Connecticut’s high school graduates that are ready for college and a career. The state will partner with IBM Corporation and other local companies to expand dual enrollment opportunities for high schools, allowing students to graduate with a high school diploma and an associate’s degree.

Fourth, Malloy pledged an initial investment of \$134 million in an initiative called “Transform Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) 2020” that would bring all seventeen state college and university campuses into a “single, student-centered, technology-rich” system.

Finally, Malloy discussed the need for Connecticut to graduate more students from college. He proposed a “Go Back and Get Ahead” program that would offer students who dropped out of college more than 18 months ago one free course for each course they take at a public college for up to four courses. The caveat? They have to finish their degree.

“I want to work with you on these five initiatives,” Malloy told state legislators, “because years from now, when the Great Recession is a distant memory, long-after the political battles of this

year have faded, this should be our legacy: that we made sure all Connecticut kids get a great education, one that starts early and takes them as far as their dreams and hard work will allow.”

Delaware: Markell Prioritizes Teachers

Delaware Governor Jack Markell (D) announced a pilot program that would give a handful of school leaders flexibility to spend a portion of their state funding in implementing their own school improvement plans in his [January 23 state of the state address](#). This program is part of Markell’s focus on prioritizing educator opinions and experiences in improving Delaware’s K–12 education system.

Markell also announced that the Delaware Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Council will partner with local business to give financial rewards to the state’s best STEM teachers and help them share effective teaching strategies. In addition, Markell is looking at ways to give teachers additional compensation for pursuing leadership opportunities while remaining in the classroom.

“The magic of education happens with our teachers,” Markell said.

Markell emphasized the need for more students to be prepared for college and twenty-first-century jobs after high school. “Before the end of the decade, 60 percent of our jobs will require training beyond high school,” Markell said. “And yet, only 20 percent of our kids graduate from high school ready for college or a career.”

Markell proposed a scholarship program that targets low-income, high-achieving students who often do not apply to or finish college because of financial circumstances. The scholarship would allow these students to take credit-bearing courses during their senior year of high school.

To further remedy the jobs-skills gap in Delaware, Markell announced a new two-year comprehensive manufacturing program for high school juniors and seniors that offer mechanical, electrical, and computer engineering classes. Students who complete the program will receive a nationally recognized manufacturing certificate, as well as a “real-world” opportunity to learn in the field during the summer between their junior and senior years.

Oklahoma: Fallin Says Education Beyond High School Is the “New Minimum” for Success

“Improving the quality and outcomes in education is the single most important thing we can do to attract and retain jobs, alleviate poverty, and help Oklahomans have fulfilling and productive lives,” said **Oklahoma Governor Mary Fallin (R)** in her [February 3 state of the state address](#). “Here’s a fact: the best indicator of personal income is educational attainment. Similarly, the best predictor of social problems like drug use, teen pregnancy, and crime is educational attainment.”

To achieve the kind of success she wants to see in her state’s education system, Fallin began by addressing the need for better safety in schools. She announced a one-time increase in bonding capacity for school districts to fund upgrades like storm shelters, safe rooms, and protections against threats like intruders.

Fallin also announced an additional \$50 million in funds to help K–12 schools graduate more students from high school ready for college and a career, and an A–F grading system for schools so that students, parents, and teachers know how any given school is doing at a glance.

“Today in Oklahoma, only one-third of all jobs are available to those with just an academic high school diploma or less,” Fallin remarked. “The ‘new minimum’ for success is education beyond high school. Many Oklahomans are falling short of this new minimum. That’s not just a problem; it’s a crisis.”

To further address the crisis, Fallin praised the new, higher standards that Oklahoma will implement in K–12 schools this year. The new standards, she said, will ensure that Oklahoma graduates more high school seniors who are ready for college and a career. She emphasized that while the state has adopted common standards, it will not tell teachers how to teach lessons or what books to use; “those are decisions that will always be made locally,” Fallin said.

Utah: Herbert Increases Teacher Compensation Fund by \$61.6 Million

Utah Governor Gary Herbert (R) called attention to the state’s fast-growing student population, which creates a major funding demand, in [his January 29 state of the state address](#). “It costs us \$70 million per year in additional money just to pay for our new students,” he said.

Herbert pledged to do what he can to improve the state’s education system, starting with enhancing accountability in schools through school “report cards” that will allow parents, students, and teachers to know how a school is doing at a glance.

Herbert pledged an additional \$4.5 million to the state’s science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) Action Center. In addition, he announced a public-private partnership to recruit students into STEM fields.

Other funding increases included \$2 million to improve high school career counseling and \$61.6 million to increase teacher compensation, the largest increase since 2008.

“We must continue to align classroom instruction with changing workforce needs, so our high school graduates are ready for college and the workplace,” Herbert said.

Straight A’s: Public Education Policy and Progress is a free biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events in Washington, DC and around the country. The format makes information on federal education policy accessible to everyone from elected officials and policymakers to parents and community leaders. Contributors include Jason Amos, editor; Cyndi Waite; and Kate Bradley.

The Alliance for Excellent Education is a Washington, DC–based national policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all students, particularly those traditionally underserved, graduate from high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship. For more information, visit www.all4ed.org. Follow the Alliance on Twitter (www.twitter.com/all4ed), Facebook (www.facebook.com/all4ed), and the Alliance’s “High School Soup” blog (www.all4ed.org/blog).