July 1, 2013

The Honorable Mignon Clyburn, Acting Chairwoman
The Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel
The Honorable Ajit Pai
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: ConnectED initiative and e-Rate program

Dear Chairwoman Clyburn, Commissioner Rosenworcel, and Commissioner Pai:

The nation’s education system is the nation’s operating system and it is in need of an upgrade. Therefore, the undersigned organizations are pleased to endorse ConnectED, President Obama’s plan for connecting all schools to twenty-first-century technology. We ask you to take swift action in implementing the President’s call to modernize and leverage the existing e-Rate program in order to provide 99 percent of America’s students with high-speed wireless internet access through next-generation broadband in schools and libraries within five years.

The mismatch between student preparation and employer demands requires the technological transformation supported by ConnectED and e-Rate. More than 20 percent of the nation’s students do not graduate from high school on time, if at all, and by 2020, U.S. companies will have fewer than half the number of qualified applicants for the 123 million high-skill jobs they will need to fill. Although there have been improvements over time, the pace of academic progress must be significantly accelerated. ConnectED and e-Rate will help support the changes needed in today’s classrooms to ensure that the United States maintains its competitive edge in the twenty-first-century global economy.

The availability and effective use of technology is a vital component of the reform that is necessary to strengthen the nation’s schools. Yet too many schools lack the infrastructure to benefit from the advances in technology that have revolutionized the way in which much of the world operates. Results from a 2010 FCC survey of e-Rate–funded schools showed that the broadband connections of nearly 80 percent of respondents did not fully meet their needs. This must change in order for students to benefit from the promise of technology.

Digital learning opportunities, including blended learning, allow for personalized and engaging teaching and learning. High-speed broadband can literally open the world to the nation’s students by increasing the availability of high-quality instruction, expanding access to rigorous course work, and providing additional opportunities for supporting student success in and beyond the classroom. Moreover, the implementation of college- and career-ready standards and aligned assessments—now driving reform in all fifty states and the District of Columbia—is largely dependent upon technology that is not yet readily available in far too many school districts across the country.

The ConnectED initiative and the expansion and modernization of the e-Rate program will help transform the technological infrastructure in the nation’s classrooms and libraries, allowing schools and communities to provide students with a twenty-first-century education. We, the undersigned, stand ready to support the FCC at this historic moment to connect all schools to the digital age.

Sincerely,
Afterschool Alliance  
Alliance for Excellent Education  
American Association of School Administrators  
American Association of School Librarians  
American Federation of Teachers  
American School Counselor Association  
Association for Career and Technical Education  
Association for Middle Level Education  
Association of Education Service Agencies  
Center for American Progress  
Consortium for School Networking  
Council for Exceptional Children  
Council of Chief State School Officers  
Democrats for Education Reform  
Digital Promise  
Flipped Learning Network™  
Friday Institute for Educational Innovation, NC State University College of Education  
International Association for K-12 Online Learning  
International Society for Technology in Education  
KnowledgeWorks  
League of United Latin American Citizens  
Learning First Alliance  
Learning Forward  
NAACP  
NALEO Educational Fund  
National Association of Elementary School Principals  
National Association of Secondary School Principals  
National Association of State Boards of Education  
National Association of State Directors of Special Education  
National Conference on Teaching and America's Future  
National Council for Agricultural Education  
National Council of Teachers of English  
National Education Association  
National FFA Organization  
National Indian Education Association  
National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition  
National Rural Education Association  
National School Boards Association  
National School Public Relations Association  
National Youth Leadership Council  
One Economy Corp.  
Parents for Public Schools  
Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers  
Partnership for 21st Century Skills  
Project Tomorrow