



Examining School and Library Broadband Connectivity

A Connected Nation Policy Brief

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The average school and library today has about the same connectivity as the average American home – but as digital learning technology expands both inside and outside the classroom, the need to have more robust broadband capacity at our nation’s community institutions will increase. On June 6, 2013, President Barack Obama announced his Administration’s [ConnectED initiative](#), a plan to bring very high-speed broadband Internet to the nation’s schools. The centerpiece of the ConnectED initiative is a fundamental reform of the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) \$2.3 billion Schools and Libraries Universal Service Fund program, commonly known as “E-Rate.” Created in 1996, E-Rate provides school and libraries with discounts on telecommunications and Internet services.

Today, the FCC [adopted](#) a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) proposing several sweeping changes to the E-Rate program. The action proposes to establish goals for the E-Rate program, including a target that 99% of America’s schools will have broadband speeds of no less than 100 Mbps by 2015, with an ultimate target of 1 Gbps by 2020. While the full text of the FCC’s action has not yet been released, the FCC has released a [Fact Sheet](#), a news release, and Commissioner’s statements on the action ([Chairwoman Mignon Clyburn](#), [Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel](#), and [Commissioner Ajit Pai](#)). The FCC vote today begins an official public debate about this reform that is likely to take many months and engage representatives from multiple stakeholder groups.

The ConnectED initiative’s call for capacity upgrade is a significant, national effort that will require tens of millions of dollars and an understanding of the current status of broadband in our nation’s learning institutions. In this Policy Brief, Connected Nation analyzes data on K-12 school and library connectivity collected across nine states and the territory of Puerto Rico. We find that **there are significant differences in high-speed broadband adoption among states, and that there are substantial gaps in low-income and rural areas.**

- **Approximately 34% of schools and only 3% of libraries surveyed by Connected Nation currently report having 100 Mbps download broadband connections**
- **Connectivity across states analyzed by Connected Nation varies greatly, ranging from 54% of schools with 100 Mbps connections in Nevada to fewer than 1% of schools in Puerto Rico**
- **Community income level is a significant driver of 100 Mbps broadband across schools**

Schools in some states such as Nevada (where 54% of schools report having download speeds of 100 Mbps or faster) are much closer to meeting the President’s high-speed connectivity goal than other jurisdictions, most notably Puerto Rico. These results are similar to other studies and FCC findings discussed today that indicate that the majority of schools and libraries do not have the bandwidth they need to meet current and future needs.

Importantly, very few libraries met this goal of 100 Mbps download speeds. Libraries are one of the most important locations outside of the classroom where students research and complete their schoolwork. Understanding the scope and scale of the needed broadband upgrades across the nation’s libraries is essential to any national initiative to advance digital learning.