

For Immediate Release

SIIA Contact: Laura Greenback, Communications Manager, 202-789-4461, lgreenback@siia.net

PR Contact: Farrah Kim, 202-568-8986, farrahkim@rational360.com

WASHINGTON, D.C. (September 16, 2013) -- In comments submitted today to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the Software & Information Industry Association (SIIA) strongly supported the Commission's effort to review, modernize and enhance the E-rate program. SIIA is the principal trade group of the software and digital content industry and has a division dedicated to digital learning and related educational technologies. SIIA submitted comments in response to the FCC's notice on "Modernizing the E-rate Program for Schools and Libraries." The E-rate program provides schools and libraries with discounts off advanced telecommunications and information services in order to ensure their affordable access.

As part of its comments submitted today, SIIA said:

"SIIA views robust Internet access through high-speed broadband connectivity as critical to a 21st

century education system, and to providing educators and students with access to technology-based tools and resources that are mission critical for teaching and learning in today's digital age. Learning technologies are needed to increase educational opportunities, improve student engagement and enhance the personalization of learning to meet the needs of an ever more diverse student body.

"E-Rate funding has been relatively flat at \$2.25 billion since its creation in 1996, while the need for, and the demand for connectivity has grown dramatically as evidenced by the \$4.9 billion in applications sought for this funding year by schools and libraries. SIIA's recently released 2013 [Vision K-20](#)

educator survey results found that, while their goal for access to robust bandwidth is 3.98 (on a 1-4 scale), educators rate their actual access as only 3.14. Similarly, their need for ubiquitous, wireless access to resources and services ranks as a 3.89, but their actual access is only a 2.64.

“SIIA supports the FCC proposal “to focus funding on those services that provide high-capacity broadband to school and library buildings and those services and equipment that disseminate the high-capacity broadband within those buildings...”

SIIA’s full comments can be found [here](#) .

SIIA outlined 10 specific recommendations in its comments to the FCC:

1. Robust Student Connectivity. Update the E-rate’s implicit goal from basic school connectivity to robust student connectivity, focusing on advanced Internet bandwidth to the point of use (i.e., student and device) and not simply to the school building.

2. Affordable Access. Exercise the FCC’s authority to increase E-rate funding as needed and appropriate to meet evolving and expanding demand, as authorized by Congress under the Telecommunications Act that created the E-rate program.

3. Timely Modernization and Enhancement. Move swiftly to modernize and enhance the E-rate program in order to meet urgent demands, and if necessary, increase funding under the existing rules *prior* to program changes in order to expedite the increase of resources to the field.

4. Advanced Eligible Services. Update the priorities and eligible services to ensure the program continues to meet the law’s emphasis on enhancing “access to *advanced* telecommunications and information services.” [emphasis added]

5. Access Goals and Flexibility. Center E-rate program accountability around the broad goal of providing high-speed broadband access to all students, while also providing the flexibility for eligible schools and libraries to determine their precise goals and their additional goals.

6. Educational Goals and Flexibility. Provide flexibility to determine and measure E-rate goals and impact, while not measuring E-rate effectiveness by student performance outcomes or similar learning indicators.

7. Anytime, Anywhere Learning. Ensure that schools and libraries continue to be the primary beneficiary of E-rate funding, but provide flexibility to leverage that funding to meet the connected learning needs of students outside of the school building and school hours.

8. Program Efficiencies. Continue to streamline the E-rate application and operational procedures, while recognizing the importance of program accountability.

9. Program Data. Continue to enhance program data access to support program accountability and enhanced cost effectiveness, while recognizing that not all data should be made publicly available.

10. Gift Rule. Modify and clarify E-rate gift rules to avoid unintended consequences that limit public-private partnerships and educator professional learning opportunities.

About SIIA

SIIA is the leading association representing the software and digital content industries. SIIA represents approximately 800 member companies worldwide that develop software and digital information. **The SIIA Education Division** serves and represents more than 200 member companies that provide software, digital content, and other technologies that address educational needs. The Division shapes and supports the industry by providing leadership, advocacy, business development opportunities, and critical market information. For more information, visit www.siiia.net/education.