January 14, 2026

The Honorable Arielle Roth
Administrator
National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)
U.S. Department of Commerce

Dear Administrator Roth,

Our coalition of education, library, and non-profit leadership organizations is writing to follow up on the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA) recent listening session on the use of screens in schools. The session surfaced a wide range of perspectives from families, educators, and researchers about how technology is used in classrooms and how it shapes instructional practice. We share NTIA's goal of ensuring that technology supports effective, safe, and accessible learning environments for all students. We are concerned, however, that many topics discussed during the listening session were incorrectly described by some of the public comments, including those on screen time use, existing data privacy and online safety protections, the importance of broadband for student learning and school operations, and the purpose of federal programs (e.g., E-Rate) that receive bipartisan support from rural and urban communities around the country. For that reason, we offer our perspective, data, and expertise on these important issues and clarify how broadband, education technology, and E-Rate programs actually work.

Our organizations bring deep, real-world experience with how technology is deployed, managed, and integrated into K–12 learning and school administration every day. Educators must balance instructional goals, privacy and security obligations, classroom management and student needs, and the vitally important expectations of families and communities. We believe this real world perspective is essential to shaping sound federal guidance and policy on using education technology, including artificial intelligence tools, in schools.

Broadband and School Technology Are Essential for Learning

Reliable, secure broadband—delivered to rural, urban, and all communities—is foundational to delivering the digital tools and rich content that teachers rely on to differentiate instruction, assess student understanding, and create opportunities for small-group and individualized learning. School technology also enables students with disabilities and students without home internet access to fully participate in modern learning environments.

According to a 2021 Institute of Education Sciences Report, schools reported that technology use helped students:

- Learn more actively (41%)
- Learn at their own pace (35%)

- Become more independent and self-directed (33%)
- Learn collaboratively with peers (30%)
- Develop critical thinking skills (27%)[1]

Broadband access is also vitally important to students. The Quello Center on Media & Information Policy found "...that students who do not have access to the Internet from home or are dependent on a cell phone alone for access perform lower on a range of metrics, including digital skills, homework completion, and grade point average. They are also less likely to intend on completing a college or university degree."[2]

Employers increasingly expect students to be fluent with digital collaboration tools, online research, data literacy, and artificial intelligence (AI). As the Trump Administration identifies AI readiness as a national priority, schools play a critical role in preparing students for a workforce shaped by rapid technological change. Pulling back on educational technology would leave students less prepared for both today's and tomorrow's demands.

Broadband access from libraries enables public access and participation in modern school, work, and civic life. Approximately 20% of U.S. households lack home broadband internet service and America's public libraries work to bridge these gaps with more than 17,000 technology-enabled and convenient locations and trusted staff trained to connect people with the resources they need.[3]

Broadband is Essential for School Operations

The E-Rate program supports Internet connectivity for schools that enables a range of essential operational activities. The school network is critical for supporting student information systems, bus and cafeteria scheduling applications, personnel software, heating/cooling systems, as well as essential safety features (security cameras, door locks, parent/stakeholder communications, etc.).

Intentional Use of EdTech Is Key

Technology is now integral to the environment in which students live and learn, so the focus must be on intentional implementation rather than assumptions about "more" or "less" tech. Effective learning depends on selecting the right tools for specific instructional goals.

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[1] Gray, L., and Lewis, L. (2021). Use of Educational Technology for Instruction in Public Schools: 2019–20 (NCES 2021- 017). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, p.5, Retrieved December 15, 2025 from https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2021017.

[2] Hampton, K. N., Fernandez, L., Robertson, C. T., & Bauer, J. M. Broadband and Student Performance Gaps. James H. and Mary B. Quello Center, Michigan State University, March 3, 2020. Retrieved December 15, 2025 from https://doi.org/10.25335/BZGY-3V91

[3] American Library Association. (2025). Libraries Connecting Communities: Policy Recommendations for the Universal Service Fund. Retrieved December 16, 2025, from: https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/2025-10/Libraries%20Connecting%20Communities_USF2pager_Oct2025.pdf

Fragmented or inconsistent implementation—not technology itself—is what overwhelms teachers and families. Districts across the country already demonstrate balanced use of digital and nondigital methods, supported by ongoing professional learning that helps educators minimize distractions and use technology with purpose. Clear communication with families builds trust, reinforces healthy habits at home, and aligns expectations across school and family contexts. Yet, according to the IES study, nearly two-thirds of schools said that lack of time for teachers to learn and integrate technology was a moderate or large challenge.[4]

Distinguishing Classroom Technology From Consumer Technology

The listening session underscored the importance of differentiating between educational screen use and recreational or consumer screen use. In reality, "screen time" is not a single category and should not be evaluated as such. Classroom use of digital tools, aligned to curriculum, guided by educators, and governed by locally developed school district privacy and security policies, is fundamentally different from a student's unsupervised or entertainment-based device use. Conflating these categories obscures what is actually happening in classrooms and undermines thoughtful policymaking. Using screen time concerns to justify denying essential access and connectivity diminishes opportunity for all school districts, communities, families, and students.

Data Privacy and Online Safety Protections Are Well-Established

While the listening session highlighted questions about student data privacy and online safety, it is important to note that student information is already protected by federal laws such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), and by more than 40 state statutes that govern data collection, parental consent, security requirements, vendor responsibilities, breach notification, and data deletion. Additionally, for more than 25 years, the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) has required schools and libraries receiving E-Rate support to block harmful content, on campus and on school-issued devices and hotspots used off campus, denying access to content that is obscene, pornographic, or harmful to minors.

CIPA also requires districts to adopt internet safety policies, monitor online activity, and educate students about appropriate online behavior, including safe interactions on social platforms and cyberbullying prevention and response. These longstanding frameworks demonstrate both the seriousness with which schools approach online safety and the robust legal architecture already in place. While no filtering system is perfect, children are much safer when they are on the school network than on personal devices. Rather than banning technology from classrooms, a better public policy would be to support adequate funding, professional development, and technical support to ensure schools have effective filters and safeguards in place. Further reducing barriers to E-Rate for libraries and schools would ensure that even more library and school networks are compliant with all CIPA regulations.

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[4] Gray & Lewis, Use of Educational Technology for Instruction in Public Schools, at p.4.

Local Decision-Making Matters

The listening session highlighted wide variation in community expectations. This variation reinforces why decisions about devices, classroom technology, and local screen-use practices should remain in the hands of local educators and families who best understand their own students' needs. Effective education technology (edtech) use requires strong classroom management strategies, appropriate filtering systems, high-quality teacher training, and transparent communication with families—not one-size-fits-all mandates. Federal or state overreach risks limiting the community-driven decision-making that is essential for addressing the concerns raised during the session.

Bans on All Technology Do Not Prepare Students for the World They Will Enter

Rather than efforts to broadly prohibit access to technology, schools and parents should focus on equipping young people with the skills to use technology responsibly. Schools have a responsibility to ensure that all students have equitable access to resources needed to complete assignments and fully engage in learning. Parents, with support from schools, should play a leading role in ensuring children develop the skills to self-regulate personal screen use outside of school/at-home.

Appropriately Measuring E-Rate's Impact

Broadband programs should be measured by broadband metrics. Congress created the E-Rate program to ensure that all schools and libraries—regardless of the community where they are located—are connected to the Internet. It goes without saying that broadband connectivity and access are still vitally important for students, school systems, and library communities to thrive in modern education and workforce. As a result, policymakers should focus on whether the program is effectively delivering secure, high capacity connectivity as required by the Telecommunications Act of 1996. For example, we should be discussing how schools and libraries need multi-gigabit connectivity to meet their current and future broadband needs and what this access means to our nation's rural, tribal, urban, and suburban communities who need reliable broadband for school, work, paying bills, civic participation, healthcare, and connection to family and friends.

Next Steps

Our coalition remains committed to sharing on-the-ground insights to help ensure federal policy reflects what best supports teaching and learning. We appreciate NTIA's engagement and welcome continued collaboration on these issues.

Thank you again for your leadership and for engaging the education community. We look forward to continued partnership.

Sincerely,
 On behalf of the Coalition
 [Insert organizational signatories]

AASA, The School Superintendents Association

AESA, Association of Education Service Agencies

American Federation of School Administrators

American Library Association (ALA)

Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)

Benton Foundation

CoSN - The Consortium for School Networking

Consortium of State School Boards Associations (COSSBA)

National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)

National Catholic Educational Association

SHLB