

Education Alert

Legislation of Vital Concern to Miami-Dade County's Students

Date: October 14, 2003
To: Selected Members of the Florida House Delegation
From: Merrett R. Stierheim, Superintendent of Schools
Re: **PRESERVE AND REFORM E-RATE**

Floridians expect schools to be equipped with the technology and Internet resources that prepare children for the 21st century, and the federal E-Rate program helps to accomplish this objective. As the House Commerce Committee considers reforms to this program, **Miami-Dade County Public Schools strongly urges Congress to streamline the cumbersome E-Rate application process and address abusive practices, without undermining its vast positive impacts.**

BACKGROUND: Over the next several weeks, the House Commerce Committee will review instances of abuse and bidding irregularities presented to the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations and the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) School and Library Division (SLD). The Consortium for School Networking, of which Miami-Dade County Public Schools is a member, has strongly supported empowering the FCC and SLD to sanction any entity that willfully and consistently violates program rules and believe that any sanctions imposed should be proportionate to the offense committed.

At the same time, the House should consider the impact of E-Rate rules and regulations whose compliance requires schools to exert copious amounts of time and money. A recent report commissioned by the Education and Library Networks Coalition found that "schools and libraries are devoting significant resources and exercising great care in completing E-Rate applications." Before selecting a service provider, the Miami-Dade school district updates its technology plan, undertakes an extensive bid review process, convenes a committee of technical experts to review each bid, and carefully considers the financial aspects of each bid.

Since its inception in 1998, E-Rate has provided \$11 billion in deep discounts on telecommunications, Internet access and internal connections to public schools nationwide. Internet access rates for public school classrooms have risen to 87%, and low-income urban and rural communities have not been left behind. E-Rate is helping schools improve student achievement by delivering online distance learning courses and teacher accreditation courses, helping facilitate parental contact with parents and school administrators, and providing teachers new resources to identify student academic weaknesses and target assistance to those areas.

RECOMMENDATION: America's educational infrastructure must continue to include technology, even as legislators seek to reduce inefficiencies in the current funding process. To meet the needs of our students, Miami-Dade County Public Schools **respectfully requests your advocacy to address reforms to E-Rate while preserving its important role in public education.**

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