

Reed City Area Public Schools Tech Talk
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Reed City Area Public Schools

FCC ENABLES HIGH-SPEED, AFFORDABLE BROADBAND FOR SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES. The Federal Communications Commission recently updated and modernized the USF E-rate program to bring fast, affordable Internet access to schools and libraries across the country. These changes will help ensure that our students can learn and develop the high-tech skills necessary to compete in our 21st Century economy. Over recent years, the program has achieved remarkable success – 97 percent of American schools and nearly all public libraries now have basic Internet access.

Reed City Area Public Schools has received over \$380,000 in technology grants through the E-rate program over the past 10 years. The grants have been in the form of rebates for Internet, local/long distance telephone service, and cell phones. The school district has received up to a 76% matching funds for technology dollars spent in those areas. As the focus on broadband-enabled, cutting-edge learning inside and outside the classroom becomes stronger, it is important to prepare our school buildings for wireless and mobile needs.

According to the FCC, one need is that basic broadband connectivity is too slow to keep up with the innovative high-tech tools that are now essential for a world-class education. According to a recent FCC survey, 78 percent of E-rate recipients say they need faster connections to meet the speed and capacity demands of their students, teachers, and library patrons. If you have used a “smart” cell phone to access the Internet, you can understand that download speeds can be an issue. As curriculum material like electronic books, wireless learning devices, and streaming video becomes more important, the need for faster wireless access increases.

The FCC is launching a pilot program that supports off-campus wireless Internet connectivity for mobile learning devices. Education doesn’t stop at the end of the school day or the library door. Digital textbooks and other innovative wireless devices will allow students to learn in a real-world context, inside the classroom and beyond. Because of their low cost and accessibility, these mobile devices can also help all of our children to have broadband Internet access in rural areas.

Reed City Area Public Schools is working to upgrade existing technology in the school district to support mobile, wireless devices for advanced learning programs. By continuing to apply for grants, and efficient use of technology funds, we are developing a rich learning environment that allows students to excel. The ability to have mobile labs of wireless touch-screen interactive devices is not far from our future. Education is an investment in the future of our children. We continue to plan, integrate, and implement district technology to embrace that future.