

**REMARKS OF FCC COMMISSIONER AJIT PAI  
AT THE FCC'S E-RATE MODERNIZATION WORKSHOP**

**WASHINGTON, DC**

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Last week, I had the privilege of visiting the San Fernando Institute for Applied Media (SFIAM). It's a middle school that is using technology to transform the way students learn. Each student at SFIAM has an iPad, and classrooms are connected to the Internet using WiFi. The school illustrates what the FCC's E-Rate program can mean for American education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Here's an example. During my visit, I sat in on Mr. Peña's 8<sup>th</sup> grade class. The class was studying world religions, and that day they were learning about Islam. Soon after I entered the classroom, Mr. Peña introduced the concept of "tessellation." I had never heard of the word, but that was soon to change.

Here's what's neat about the way I—and Mr. Peña's students—learned about tessellation. He asked the students to input the term into Google Images on their iPads. He then asked the students to describe what they saw and why they thought Islamic art and architecture used tessellation so extensively. In their own words—and I confess I did the exercise in my own mind!—the students described an infinitely recurring series of geometric shapes. They then surmised, correctly according to Mr. Peña, that it was used to exemplify the infinite power of God.

Now when I was a grade-school student back in the 1970s and 1980s, I might have learned about tessellation from a teacher lecturing at the front of the room. And I probably would have taken notes passively with my No. 2 pencil. But the SFIAM model is so much more interactive and engaging. I'm pretty confident that those kids didn't just hear, but *learned*—that they will retain more knowledge thanks to a technology-based approach.

After leaving Mr. Peña's classroom, I had an opportunity to meet with SFIAM parents, along with Principal Robledo, officials from the Los Angeles Unified School District, the California Emerging Technology Fund, and the Youth Policy Institute. The parents told me that the school's embrace of technology had had a huge and positive impact on their children. The others suggested that there was even more they could do with a modernized E-Rate program.

What I heard at SFIAM wasn't an anomaly. Parents everywhere expect that schools will help prepare their children for the America of tomorrow, and they know that can't happen in a classroom of yesterday. Filmstrips of the moon landing don't cut it when YouTube carries video from the Curiosity Rover on Mars. Oregon Trail doesn't suffice when the Khan Academy and Coursera offer interactive classes for students. We all know that Internet access can provide teachers a quick and easy way to introduce students to an amazing array of materials—materials never imagined when I was in grade school—and yet we also know that we're not there yet.

That's why the E-Rate program, and our work to reform and modernize it, is so important. Over the next five years, the E-Rate program will collect and distribute over \$12 billion to fund information technology in our nation's schools and libraries. That's real money—\$3 billion more than we committed to the Connect America Fund last month—and it's a real chance for us to make a difference.

The FCC needs to seize this opportunity for the kids of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We should not settle for the existing system and just tinker around the edges—we need real reform. We need a student-centered E-Rate program that focuses on the needs of children. We need a program that replaces today's complexity with simplicity, one that cuts red tape and makes it easier for schools and libraries to apply. We need a program that more fairly distributes E-Rate funds and puts small, rural schools and libraries on equal footing with their larger, more urban brethren. We need a program that promotes more careful

spending, with additional transparency so that parents, educators, and the FCC can see how E-Rate funding is being spent.

Whether you call these reforms a student-centered E-Rate program, the ConnectED Initiative, E-Rate modernization, or E-Rate 2.0, the goal of meaningful change is shared by all schools and libraries, by service providers and equipment vendors, by Democrats and Republicans, by Commissioners and staff. The primary question at this point is how to achieve that goal. And that's where you come in.

Today's workshop can light a path forward. We already have a substantial record of almost 2,500 comments telling us that we need to update the 18-year-old E-Rate program. I hope you will build on that record. Help us make sure that the reforms we enact will bring the full promise of digital opportunity to America's children. Just imagine the impact if every teacher in every classroom in our country were able to do what Mr. Peña does!