

High-speed Internet access a classroom necessity

JULIÁN CASTRO AND JESSICA ROSENWORCEL FOR THE EXPRESS-NEWS | JUNE 25, 2013

Across the nation, school bells have gone quiet, halls have emptied, and backpacks have been stowed away for summer vacation. But for those

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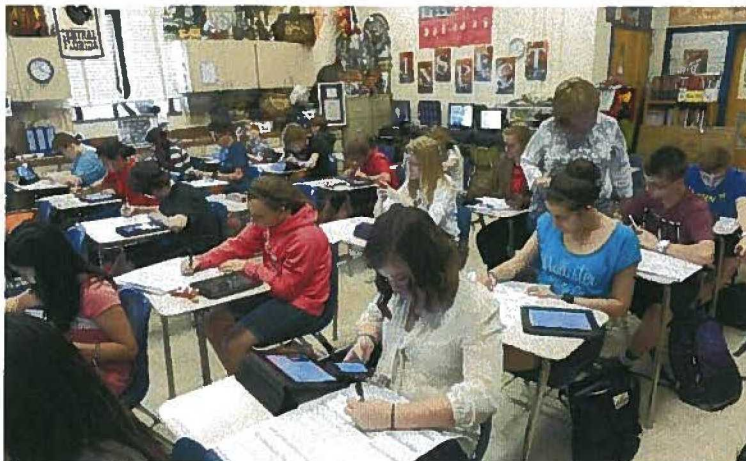


Photo By Todd Anderson / New York Times

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Students need access to high-speed Internet to compete in this digital age. That's why it's essential to upgrade the E-Rate program.



connected to the Internet.

Connectivity is essential, but it's not enough. Indeed, 80 percent of schools have reported to the Federal Communications Commission that they do not have the really high-speed Internet access it takes to teach in the digital age.

This merits our attention and concern, not just as a mayor and a member of the Federal Communications Commission but as parents of young children. Access to adequate broadband for digital learning is not a luxury — it's a necessity for students to have a chance to compete. As jobs and capital migrate to places where workers have digital-age skills, our students, our children, will fall short without access to the broadband capacity they need for digital-age learning.

Earlier this month, President **Barack Obama** went to Mooresville, N.C., to demonstrate the power of digital-age education. We can do it here, too. We believe that it is time for every American student, whoever they are and wherever they live, to have a chance to compete. It is time to upgrade the E-Rate program for the 21st century — call it E-Rate 2.0. This doesn't require action from Congress. We just need to revamp the existing program to put our schools on a path to higher speeds and greater opportunities in the days ahead.

Let's start by setting some goals. By 2015, every school should have access to broadband at 100 megabits, and by the end of the decade, 1 gigabit. These are the speeds our students need to compete.

So before school starts up in the fall, let's start working on E-Rate 2.0 and bringing higher broadband speeds to San Antonio's schools and schools across the country.

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of us committed to improving educational opportunities in San Antonio and beyond, there is no summer break.

This week, we are joining thousands of educators and education leaders here in San Antonio to discuss and see the latest and greatest digital-age education technologies at the **International Society for Technology** in Education's annual conference.

We are seeing more evidence that broadband and cloud computing are revolutionizing education. The traditional teaching tools that we grew up with — chalky blackboards and hardback books — are being replaced with interactive digital content delivered through high-speed broadband. This means third-graders can explore the surface of the sun through high-definition video as they learn about the solar system. It means middle schoolers can experience history lessons through interactive videos. It means high schoolers can explore geometry through gaming.

But all of this requires schools to be connected to adequate broadband capacity. Today, the **Federal Communications Commission's** little-known E-Rate program distributes support to schools and libraries for broadband connectivity. With that support, many San Antonio schools — public and private — are