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To Whom It May Concern:

It is hard to explain how important and valuable the E-rate Program has been to Lawrence County Alabama Schools without talking about what the state of technology was like at Lawrence County Schools before E-rate.

Prior to E-rate, networking and Internet were minimal, almost nonexistent in the schools of Lawrence County Alabama.

A couple of the schools had peer-to-peer or Novell networked labs where instructional software was available for student use. A few schools had small office local area networks for administrative purposes. The central office had no PC network but did have a few terminals hooked up to an AS400 for administrative use.

Most classrooms, labs and libraries had no Internet access. At the time, Internet access for students and instructional use was limited to single computer dialups at a few schools, usually in the library. Administrative Internet use was limited to single computer dialups at a few of the school offices and a couple of dialups at the central office.

There was little or no use of email for instructional or administrative purposes.

Standardized instructional software and other resources were not available to all students. Some schools had better resources and more student access to available resources than others.

Prior to applying for E-rate the first time, it was proposed that the school district establish local area networks at all the schools and a wide area network for instructional and administrative use. The project was never seriously considered by the school board because of the cost. When the opportunity came to apply for E-rate, the school board was still skeptical of committing but reluctantly agreed.

Lawrence County's first E-rate award, along with the district's matching funds, paid for Internet access, Wide-Area Networking (WAN) and accompanying Local Area Networks (LANs) to be installed at all the schools in the district, with the WAN hub located at the central office. With the implementation of this project, communications within the entire district was transformed.

All of a sudden it became possible for the district to standardize instructional software by purchasing products that would work on the LANs and sometimes across the WAN. Teachers and administrators could monitor individual student progress and group progress by pulling reports based on the aggregated data.

With the Internet just a click away, students and teachers now had access to all kinds of resources for research and study.

It was now possible for application software skills to be taught in any classroom, lab or library, and students had access to application software for school work from any room or computer.

The email immediately began flowing between teachers and administrators and, within a short time, teachers and administrators began using email to communicate with parents and other school-related contacts.

The school district established a website where anyone who was interested could get information about anything from current lunch room menus and community education class offerings to board meeting schedules and grant application. In addition, the website provided a platform for the distribution of documents and resources among teachers and administrators.

Teachers, formerly skeptical about the value of computers and networked resources for instructional use, became keenly interested in trying out the new technologies. Before, many teachers and administrators had little or no computer skills. Now almost all employees have good basic computer skills and many have acquired more advanced or specialized skills.

In addition to the benefits of being networked, with Internet access, the E-rate discounts voice phone lines and telecommunications have saved the school district a lot of money.

Now that we are used to having this great technology, it is hard to imagine how we would ever get along without it. It is affordable to us because of E-rate. Without E-rate it would be a struggle pay for these valuable services that have become vitally important to our students and schools.

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