

Wilcox County Board of Education

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SUPERINTENDENT

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Number of Students in the Wilcox County School System	2350
Total number of computers with Internet Access	750
Total hours of technology professional development	430
Impact of Erate funding on technology equity	Priceless

Since 1999, the Wilcox County School District has received over \$1,148,000.00 in erate funding. This funding has enabled the school system to build and maintain a technology infrastructure that provides Internet access to every classroom in every school in the county. The impact of this infrastructure becomes increasingly important after examining the demographics of the area served by the school system. With an unemployment rate of over 11%, Wilcox County is one of the poorest counties in the nation. In fact, U. S. census data ranks Wilcox County the sixth poorest county nationwide based on median income and fully 48.4 percent of children under the age of 18 live below the poverty line. So, by definition, there is no disposable income available in these households. This means that the availability of computers with Internet access in the school setting becomes one of our students' few links to the 21st century since availability at home is all but nonexistent. That is not, however, the whole picture. With such high rates of poverty, the tax base in Wilcox County provides very little local funding for the school system. Funding available on the state level is also on a very limited basis. As a result, without erate, technology would cease to exist in the school system due to lack of funding. Why does this matter? Examine what would no longer be available if erate funding was to disappear - -

- Online High School AP courses (the only AP courses available to our students)
- Student tracking capabilities for attendance, drop-out, scheduling, etc.
- Student research capabilities
- Faculty professional development opportunities
- Access to resources such as the Alabama Virtual Library, Reading A-Z, and World Book online
- Access for parents to provide online literacy training
- Virtual field trips for students who will never leave Wilcox County
- The Outside World!

Examination of this data should provide irrefutable evidence that erate funding impacts classroom instruction daily and closes the gap in equitable access for our students as no other program could. It should also be clear that given the demographics and rural nature of the area, lack of erate funding would mean a return to the technology dark ages for our students and our community.