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Funding Status – FY 2020

Wave 8 for FY 2020 was released on Thursday, June 25th for a total of $35.0 million including $260 thousand for 13 North Carolina applicants. Cumulative commitments through June 25th are $998 million including $23.4 million for North Carolina. Nationwide, USAC has now funded over 69% of the FY 2020 applications received during the filing window representing over 34% of the requested funding. Funding percentages will drop slightly as late-filed applications with FCC-approved waivers are introduced into the PIA review process.

Last week, in a move to speed application review and with the concurrence of the FCC, USAC discontinued all or most cost effectiveness reviews of Category 2 funding requests. We believe that the change reflects, at least in part, a desire to give applicants more flexibility in network equipment options within limited Category 2 funding budgets.

E-Rate Updates and Reminders

Upcoming E-Rate Dates:

June 30	Extended deadline to calculate Identified Student Percentage ("ISP") data for use with the Community Eligibility Provision ("CEP") free school meal option. The deadline for electing the CEP option for the 2020-2021 school year has also been extended to August 31st (see USDA's COVID-19: Child Nutrition Response #6).

Remote Learning Update:

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce weighed in last week on "Why Congress Must Act Now on Broadband" promoting the following principles to guide legislative action:

Three principles broadly supporting broadband in underserved areas.
- Technology neutral
- Collocation support
- Speed to market

Five principles specifically addressing immediate remote learning needs.
- Funding from general appropriations (i.e., not from the Universal Service Fund)
- Separate from E-rate (although perhaps leveraging some E-rate rules)
- Targeted to low-income households for the duration of the national emergency
- Technology neutral
- Limited eligibility for connectivity, service equipment, and devices

In terms of funding already available, the U.S. Department of Education has been stressing the use of pre-existing programs that could be used to support remote learning and new "Education Stabilization Funds" available under the CARES Act (see COVID-19 Information and Resources for Schools and School Personnel).

Pre-existing programs, with funds that could be used for remote learning, include:
- IDEA part B supporting assistive technology devices and services
- Rural Achievement Assistance Program
- Title II part A supporting professional development that could be geared to remote learning
- Title III part A supporting tools and curricula could be geared for remote learning
- Title IV part A supporting teachers and digital learning tools including mobile hot spots and data plans

CARES Act Education Stabilization Funds, again with funds that could be used for remote learning, include:
- Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds from which states can hold 10% for state level activities related to COVID relief and statewide procurement
- Governors Emergency Education Relief Fund can be used for off-campus broadband access
- Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund
- Discretionary Grant Programs including microgrants for increased access to remote learning and/or statewide virtual schooling

Note: Although little of the CARES Act funding is specifically earmarked for remote learning, a joint announcement by the FCC and DOE in late April discussed collaborative plans to leverage funding so as to best help students learning from home during the ongoing pandemic (see our newsletter of May 4th).

Funding for remote learning is only one of the hurdles encountered by schools and school districts facing a continuation of full or partial off-campus remote teaching this fall. Now is the time to address all these issues. One useful guide is a webinar entitled Technical and Social Challenges in Remote Learning, a key segment of a statewide online conference entitled "What's the Future of Technology in New Mexico in the Year of Covid-19" held on May 28, 2020, sponsored by the New Mexico Public Education Department ("NMPED') and New Mexico's Public School Facilities Authority ("PSFA"). This conference excerpt relates the experiences of Rio Rancho Public Schools this past spring to determine, among other issues, which students/households need

devices and connectivity, how to coordinate access with local providers <u>and</u> parents, and how to recast the district's helpdesk support to solve off-campus technical problems.

USAC News Brief Dated June 26 – Multifactor Authentication ("MFA")

USAC's Schools and Libraries News Brief of June 26, 2020, discusses USAC's plan to add multifactor authentication to the EPC and BEAR Form login process effective later this July. MFA is a technique increasingly used by secure websites to validate users. Currently, both EPC and the BEAR system can be accessed via a username (email address) and a password (or BEAR PIN). With MFA, access will require the username, a recurring password, and a separately generated security code to be sent to the user's cellphone or email account each time the user logs in to EPC and/or the BEAR system.

USAC will be implementing MFA by creating a single "One Portal" account for both EPC and BEARs. Initially, access to the BEAR system will require a two-step process of first logging into the One Portal dashboard, then logging in to the BEAR system using the BEAR PIN. In the future, if a user has authorization to use both EPC and the BEAR system, the One Portal login will provide direct access to both EPC and BEARs without a separate BEAR PIN.

Additional information on the MFA transition will be provided in upcoming USAC News Briefs.

Last Friday's News Brief also references the FCC's deadline extension Order (DA 20-364) that, among other extensions, included an automatic 120-day invoice deadline extension for all invoices with previous deadlines falling between March 11, 2020, and October 28, 2020. The FCC also authorized USAC to grant an additional 30-day invoice extension upon applicant (or service provider) request. The News Brief outlines the steps necessary to request this extra extension.