LOWERING THE COST OF IN-SCHOOL INTERNET SERVICE

Key Actions for State and District Decision-Makers

ExcelinEd Policy Toolkit - 2022

LEVERAGING FEDERAL E-RATE FUNDING

E-Rate is the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) universal service program for schools and libraries. According to the FCC, through E-Rate, "eligible schools and libraries may receive discounts on telecommunications, telecommunications services and Internet access, as well as internal connections, managed internal broadband services and basic maintenance of internal connections." Discounts range from 20 to 90 percent based on characteristics of the school or library, such as poverty level and rural location.

The FCC set a bandwidth goal of achieving **1 Mbps per student**, a speed that allows online teaching, learning, and assessments to function smoothly at school.

School districts report data on their internet service contracts to the FCC, such as their provider, bandwidth, monthly cost and number of students served. Connect K-12 reports on historical trends of bandwidth speeds and the cost of connectivity at the national, state and district levels.

Many school districts can utilize Connect K-12 data to negotiate better bandwidth and pricing—often meeting the FCC bandwidth goal without increasing their budgets for such services. All of the state and school district data and corresponding graphics presented on the site are free, downloadable resources that can inform contract conversations.

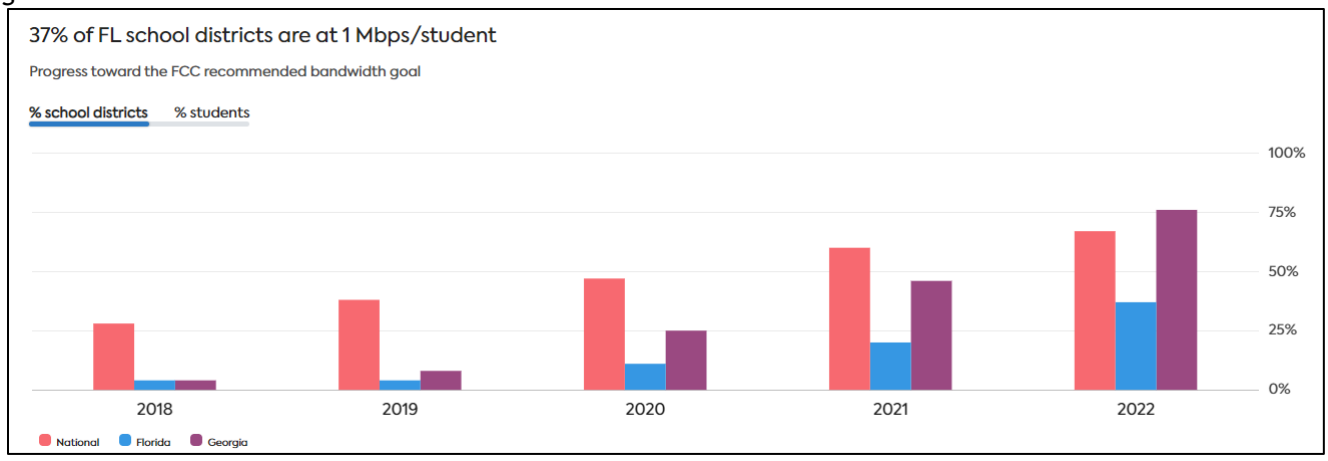
RECOMMENDED USES OF E-RATE DATA

For State-Level Leaders

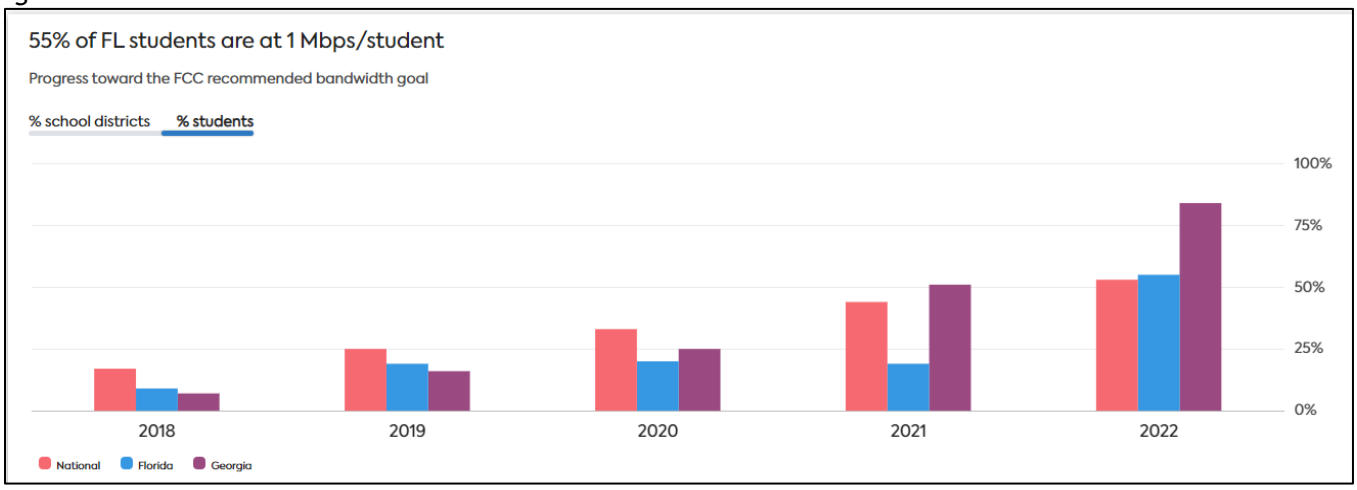
With billions of dollars of federal investment in broadband infrastructure on the horizon, state leaders—particularly state broadband offices—should consider prioritizing school districts and other community anchor institutions as they plan infrastructure projects. E-Rate data from Connect K-12 can be used to pinpoint the greatest areas of need. Here are some practical steps to identify those areas.

1. Compare your state's progress toward providing access to the FCC recommended bandwidth goal of 1 Mbps/student to neighboring states at the district and student levels. Use this data to spur conversations with state and district technology and procurement staff and with telecommunications providers about how to improve access where needed.

The graph below compares the percentage of Florida school districts with access to the FCC recommendation to Georgia school districts.



The graph below compares the percentage of Florida students with in-school access to the FCC recommendation to Georgia students.



2. Identify districts within your state that have the highest cost or lowest bandwidth per student. Reach out to district leaders and encourage them to review their contracts for opportunities for improvements.

The table below shows Florida school districts listed in order from highest to lowest monthly cost per Mbps.

Sort by Monthly Cost/Mbps (High... | Download Data

School District	Monthly Cost/Mbps	Bandwidth/Student	Service Provider(s)	# Students
Taylor County School District	$6.32	550 kbps	Crmsa	3,041
Okeechobee County School District	$4.91	190 kbps	Crmsa	6,295
Gulf County School District	$4.87	500 kbps	Crmsa	1,994
Holmes County School District	$4.53	670 kbps	Information Transport Solutions	3,262
Glades County School District	$3.30	600 kbps	Centurylink	1,657
Calhoun County School District	$2.85	480 kbps	Information Transport Solutions	2,154
Jackson County School Board	$2.66	290 kbps	Uniti Fiber	6,420
Highlands County School District	$2.50	680 kbps	Crmsa	12,258
Monroe County School District 44	$2.20	590 kbps	Crmsa	8,744

3. Identify districts that have high bandwidth for lower costs as exemplars and seek to highlight their best practices in contracting.

The table below shows Florida school districts listed by the highest bandwidth per student to the lowest.

Sort by Bandwidth/Student (High... | Download Data

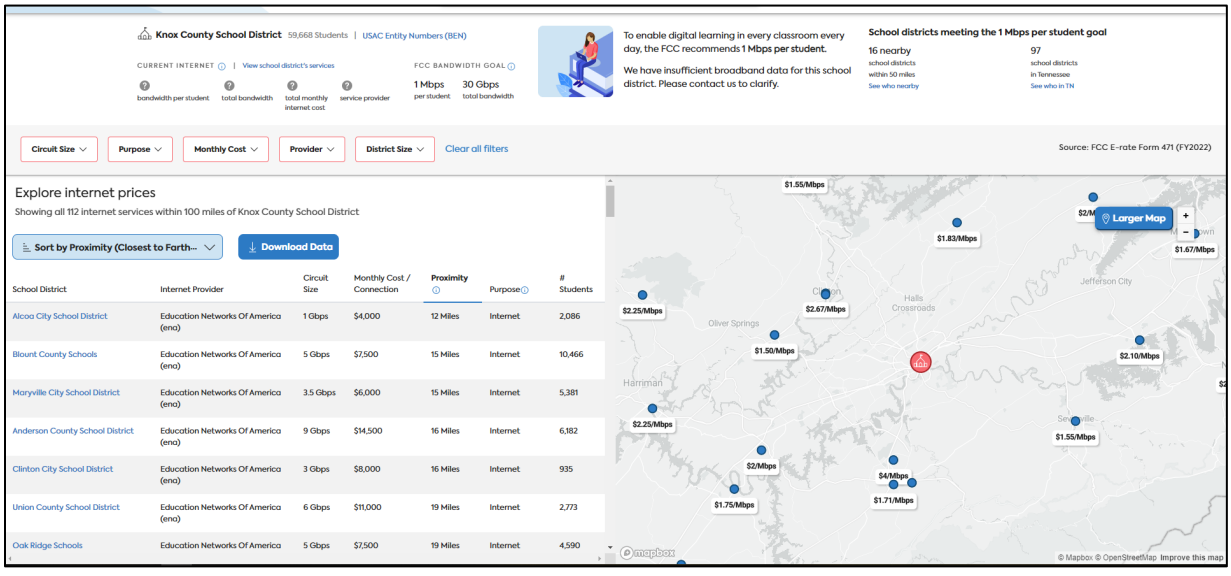
School District	Monthly Cost/Mbps	Bandwidth/Student	Service Provider(s)	# Students
Polk County School Board	$1.26	950 kbps	Education Networks Of America (ena)	99,521
Indian River Co School District	$0.41	940 kbps	Education Networks Of America (ena)	15,418
Flagler County School District	$0.39	900 kbps	Education Networks Of America (ena)	12,328
Madison County School District	$1.07	900 kbps	Centurylink	2,450
Charlotte County School District	$0.34	880 kbps	Education Networks Of America (ena)	16,624
Union County School District	$1.31	870 kbps	Southeastern Services	2,395
Levy County School District	$0.89	870 kbps	AT&T	5,503
Alachua County Public Schools	$1.76	840 kbps	City Of Gainesville, Crmsa	27,419
Santa Rosa Co School District	$1.68	810 kbps	Crmsa	28,712

For District-Level Leaders

District-level leaders can examine the contract details of nearby districts to glean insight about what speeds are being offered at what prices. This will empower district staff when negotiating with service providers for their contracts, particularly if there are inequities in the pricing offered.

1. Compare your district's data to both neighboring districts and to districts with similar numbers of students. Identify any opportunities to improve your costs or bandwidth.

The table below compares data from Knox County, TN with nearby districts.



Next Steps

State- and district-level education leaders can make use of Connect K-12's data through its website, ConnectK12.org. After identifying opportunities for improvement, leaders can reach out to local internet service providers and seek out options that provide the internet speeds their students need at affordable costs.

As a broader solution, state policymakers might also consider establishing a statewide procurement option for broadband from which districts may adopt to both ensure alignment with E-rate requirements and secure cost-effective pricing. For example, Tennessee established the Tennessee Education Broadband Consortium. More information on this option is available in Excel*in*Ed's policy brief on statewide RFIs, which includes a template that can be adapted for state-specific needs.