

Minor access to tech

17. USA Today

05/15/97; Edition: FINAL; Section: LIFE; Page 06D

Computer access lags for minority students

By Tamara Henry

WASHINGTON — Nearly all U.S. schools own computers, but those with mostly poor and minority students offer less access to most types of classroom technology, says a survey out Wednesday.

Educational Testing Service researcher Richard Coley says the survey results challenge the general perception that schools with mostly poor and minority students "weren't doing too badly" in the race to add satellite technology, CD-ROMs, videodisc players, Internet access, cable TV and other technology. These schools do get extra federal funds for technology through the federal Title I program, which targets academic help for disadvantaged children, as well as money from corporate sponsors. But

Coley says most of these poorer schools still trail in the technology race.

The survey found:

98% of all schools own computers. The current national student-to-computer ratio is 10 to 1; the government recommends 5 to 1. The ratio is 6 to 1 in Florida, Wyoming, Alaska and North Dakota, but is as high as 16 to 1 in Louisiana.

For college-bound seniors from the class of 1996, word processing exposure was the most frequent type of coursework or experience. Minority group seniors were less likely to have courses or experience in word processing and computer literacy and less likely to use computers in English courses and to solve problems in math and science.

85% of U.S. schools have multimedia

computers and 64% have Internet access. In both cases, poor and minority schools have less access.

Coley says research generally agrees that drill-and-practice forms of computer-assisted instruction are effective in producing achievement gains in students. However, he says that most teachers have not had enough training to use technology in their teaching. In fact, only 15% of U.S. teachers reported having at least nine hours of training in education technology and 18 states don't even require technology courses for teacher licensing.

In another key finding, the survey found it will cost about \$15 billion to make all of the schools "technology rich." Currently, about \$3 billion is spent per year. ■

18. Los Angeles Times

* 05/15/97; Edition: Home Edition; Section: National Desk; Page A-26

Donation Troubles Continue to Haunt House Investigator

Politics: Rep. Burton, heading fund-raising probe, returns money from lobbyist for Zaire President Mobutu. Aides allege 'smear campaign.'

By MARC LACEY
TIMES STAFF WRITER

WASHINGTON — The head of the House investigation of foreign money in U.S. elections found his own overseas fund-raising ties under scrutiny Wednesday as he returned an improper donation from the lobbyist for Zaire's departing president, Mobutu Sese Seko.

Rep. Dan Burton (R-Ind.), chairman of the House Government Reform and Oversight Committee, already has returned illegal donations from two Sikh temples. He also has been accused of threatening the former lobbyist for Pakistan for refusing to raise campaign money, a disputed charge that the Justice Department is investigating.

On Wednesday, Burton aides said that the congressman would return \$500 to Edward J. van Kloberg II, a lobbyist for Mobutu, after it was revealed that Van

Kloberg exceeded the \$2,000 election cycle limit for individual contributions.

Burton dismissed the violation as a minor oversight that resulted from different spellings of Van Kloberg's name on donation logs. But the matter distracted attention yet again from Burton's investigation of Asian campaign money connections, which remains locked in a battle with the White House over the release of documents.

Burton postponed until next week a committee meeting in which he intends to confront White House Counsel Charles F.C. Ruff—and launch contempt of Congress proceedings if Ruff does not comply with the months-old subpoenas.

The White House said it intended to send to Burton late Wednesday all the documents that administration officials have gathered so far relating to the subpoenas—except papers relating to

attorney-client communications or nominations of some of the president's top advisors.

The papers that will be withheld "go to the core of the president's ability to receive confidential and candid advice from his advisors," said White House special counsel Lanny Davis.

It appeared unlikely, however, that the partial delivery would satisfy House investigators, who have questioned the withholding of any of the White House documents they are seeking.

Meanwhile, Burton grappled with a report in The Hill newspaper on Wednesday focusing a spotlight on his connection with Mobutu, the longtime dictator of Zaire whom rebels are poised to overthrow.

In 1995, after the U.S. government restricted visas to Zairian officials deemed an impediment to democracy,

liberal arts or other fields, making it easier for them to pay off loans.

Most students do repay their loans. A report by the Washington-based Student Loan Marketing Association, better known as Sallie Mae, shows that 10.7

percent of loans scheduled for repayment in 1994 were defaulted on either in 1994 or 1995.

Ms. Harris, 22, who said her parents would pay off the \$15,000 she has borrowed for her education, said most

students are worried about getting a job and paying off loans, not purchasing new cars.

"Most of us expect when we graduate to trade in our old clunkers for another clunker that's slightly more reliable." ■

15. Agence France-Presse

05/14/97

Education is new government's first priority

LONDON, May 14 (AFP) - Education is the new British government's stated first priority and topped the list of proposals in its legislative programme announced Tuesday.

"My government intends to govern for the benefit of the whole nation," said Queen Elizabeth II in her speech to both houses of parliament.

"The education of young people will be my government's first priority. They will work to raise standards in schools, colleges and universities and to promote lifelong learning at the workplace."

In a clear change of tone, the tradition of the Queen's speech dealing first with foreign affairs and Europe was ditched in favour of measures on schools and jobs topping her address.

The importance attached to education reflects Prime Minister Tony Blair's general election campaign statement that

a Labour government would have three priorities: "Education, education and education."

Specific measures to be introduced by the education department under Britain's first blind cabinet minister, Education Secretary David Blunkett, were spelled out in two bills.

The first would abolish the assisted places scheme, which subsidises fees at private schools for children from less well-off families.

The money released would fund the key general election pledge to cut class sizes to 30, over the course of a five-year Parliament, for five, six and seven-year-olds. Existing assisted places would be protected.

The second bill, due to be introduced in the autumn after a consultative white paper in June, would launch the raft of measures which the Government plans to

raise school standards.

The measures cover reform of nursery education provision, new literacy and numeracy and other achievement targets for schools, improved vocational training, an increased voice for parents in education authorities, more public/private partnerships to repair school buildings, and a council to promote and regulate the teaching profession and a compulsory qualification for head teachers.

Blair's government has said it will review the use of calculators in primary schools as part of a campaign to boost numeracy standards.

The government has also committed itself to helping 250,000 young unemployed with a welfare-to-work programme financed by a one-off tax on windfall profits of privatised utilities. ■

16. Philadelphia Inquirer

May 16, 1997

States have cut 18,000 families

By Barbara Vobejda
WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON — States have cut off welfare benefits to 18,000 families in recent years, mostly to sanction people who failed to find work or move sufficiently toward that goal, a government study released yesterday found.

About one-third of those families returned to the welfare rolls later, after agreeing to comply with state requirements, the study found. And three-quarters of those who lost benefits were still receiving some form of federal assistance, including Medicaid, food

stamps, disability payments or housing aid.

The study by the General Accounting Office is the first to look systematically at how many welfare recipients have been affected by a flurry of welfare reform efforts around the country aimed at pushing recipients into the work force.

Until now, there has been relatively little firm evidence of whether states would have the political will to actually curtail benefits to families that failed to meet tough new work requirements.

Authors drew no conclusions about the well-being of families who lost benefits, saying a lack of information

made it impossible to know whether their circumstances had improved because they were forced to find work or whether they have fallen deeper into poverty.

In many cases, states could not say what had happened to as many as half of the families who lost benefits.

Said Margie Shields, the primary author of the report: "They might have a job and be doing really well, or they could be desperate, and you don't really know."

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Talking Points on Technology in Poor and Minority Schools

May 22, 1997

Q: A recent Educational Testing Service survey indicates that low income and minority students are less likely to have access to technology? Is the Administration concerned about inequity in technology in our nation's schools?

A: Technology is vitally important to helping students reach high standards and get ready for the 21st Century. It's critical that technology not divide us into a nation of haves and have nots. While the biggest gap in access to computers is in the home, the President and the Vice President are deeply committed to working with our nation's schools to make sure that every child, no matter where they live or their economic circumstances, can log on to the Internet and take advantage of its rich possibilities for learning. Here's what we're doing:

- Signed the Telecommunications Act and fought for the E-rate, which will allow Internet access discounts for schools and libraries. Discounts are on a sliding scale based on need, with poorest schools qualifying for a discount of up to 90%--nearly free.
- Working with private sector partners to connect every single school in each of the 15 Empowerment Zones to the Internet, so they can leap ahead in technology. ATT and America On-Line have committed to providing free Internet access for every school in every EZ, and there are strong public-private partnerships in EZ's including Harlem and Oakland. The President also signed an executive order giving preference to schools in EZ's and EC's for surplus federal computers.
- In order to receive grants under our Technology Literacy Challenge Fund, states must spell out how they will target assistance to communities with the highest rates of poverty and the greatest need for educational technology.
- As we have worked with the private sector on Net Days, have specifically urged them to get involved with low-income areas, such as in DC and LA. And we have worked to involve not just companies, but also unions and other volunteers.

[Attached are more detailed talking points from the Department of Education.]

Educational Technology Talking Points

► **ERATE**

The President, Vice President and Secretary Riley fought hard for affordable access to telecommunications services for schools and libraries. On May 7 the FCC unanimously ruled that all K-12 schools and libraries are eligible to receive up to \$2.25 billion a year in discounts on telecommunications services. The discounts range from 20-90 percent and the average discount will be about 60 percent. The poorest schools--about one-third of all schools--will receive discounts of 80-90 percent. These discounts will help prepare all students and citizens for the Information Age by connecting them to the vast learning resources available on the Information Superhighway. Now, all classrooms and libraries--even those in the most rural and most disadvantaged areas--will be able to benefit.

► **Technology Literacy Challenge Fund**

Launched this October with a \$200 million appropriation, President Clinton proposed this funding as the first installment of a \$2 billion, five-year Technology Literacy Challenge Fund to motivate and catalyze state, local and private sector efforts to work together to integrate technology into teaching and learning and reach the four national goals for education technology: 1) provide all teachers the training and support they need to help students learn through computers and the information superhighway; 2) develop effective and engaging software and on-line learning resources as an integral part of the school curriculum; 3) provide access to modern computers for all teachers and students; and, 4) connect every school and classroom in America to the information superhighway. The FY98 budget request is for \$425 million. Ninety five percent of a state's award under the TLCF must go to local school districts and is targeted to communities with high rates of poverty and the greatest need for educational technology so that their students will have access to the benefits of educational technology.

► **NetDays**

In March 1996 the President and Vice President joined more than 20,000 other volunteers to wire 3000 California schools in an "electronic barnraising." Companies contributed wiring kits, more than six million feet of cable, technical assistance, free Internet access, and free or discounted hardware and software. Over 40 states organized and participated in NetDays this fall, wiring over 25,000 schools, using over 250,000 volunteers and these efforts will continue. This spring several more states participated in NetDays which focused on reaching the least served and low income areas. These efforts help us make significant progress in meeting our goal of wiring classrooms to the Internet.

► **Affordable Computers**

On April 17, 1996 the President signed an Executive Order making it much easier to get computers no longer needed by the federal government into America's classrooms. Procedures have been simplified, and private organizations will ensure that the computers are fully

functional and equipped to use modern software. Computer donations have been targeted toward the empowerment zones. On May 14 Education Testing Service released a study, *Computers and Classrooms: The Status of Technology in U.S. Schools*. This study revealed that major inequities still exist --- students in schools with the largest percentage of poor and minority students have less access to technology. The Technology Literacy Challenge Fund and the Computer Donation program are important initiatives that will help close the gap between the have and have nots.

► **High Quality Content -- The Technology Learning Challenge Grant Program**

In 1995 the Administration initiated a "Technology Learning Challenge," to challenge communities to form partnerships of local school systems, students, colleges, universities and private businesses to develop creative new ways to use technology for learning. 19 grants were awarded in FY95 involving 134 school districts in 23 states demonstrating the innovative uses of computers, networking and multi-media across the curriculum. In FY96 the Department received 586 applications and 24 new five year grants were awarded on October 2. \$57 million has been appropriated for fiscal year 1997 which means the Department of Education will be issuing approximately 14 new grants. The FY98 budget request is for \$75 million.

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

May 23, 1997

PRESS BRIEFING
BY MIKE MCCURRY

The Briefing Room

2:10 P.M. EDT

* * *

MR. MCCURRY: '95, right. You got that?

Back to your question. This came up yesterday a little bit -- the whole question of -- maybe related a little bit to the question about computer use yesterday. One of the things the President was stressing yesterday is the importance of computers in classrooms. And April asked a good question yesterday: What about poor school districts where people can't afford it? That obviously is a problem. There are some things that we're doing related to that.

First of all, in the Telecommunications Act, remember we fought for something called the e-rate which allows discounted access to the Internet. That's especially important to school districts that have fewer resources available because they can get -- according to a sliding scale that is based in part on need and on resources -- discounted access to time on the Internet. And that's important to particularly inner city, urban school districts.

We've also been working with private sector partners in all 15 of the empowerment zones to figure out ways that we can provide computer technology to classrooms in communities that are distressed. They've been doing a lot of interesting stuff in Oakland and Harlem -- particularly with bringing America Online into classrooms that are located within the empowerment zones.

And we've also got some grant funding that's available under our technology literacy challenge fund. You remember that? That's the -- that's where we go out and sort of figure out ways through state governments to make literacy funding available. And some of that funding is specifically earmarked for poor school districts so that they can bring computer technology into the classrooms.

So that's, obviously, important as we reach towards that goal of wiring every classroom to the Internet -- that we think about ways that we help school districts where there are fewer resources

Need 2 copies -

1) low - income
access to
Internet in
schools

2) V-chip
for Internet

available in poor communities. And we're doing some things with respect to that.

Q So will the President be pushing out -- making a directive or something so that these school districts will be aided by the federal government and searching out these e-rate situations?

MR. MCCURRY: Yes, well, we'll be using all of these programs that we have available to continue to try to help those school districts that need that access. All this that we're doing now we'll continue to press forward on.

Q Mike, I'm still trying to figure out, was yesterday the first time the President endorsed a V-chip for the Internet?

MR. MCCURRY: Did you do any yesterday on the V-chip question? Barry may have handled this up in West Virginia yesterday.

MR. TOIV: Well, I'm not sure I have more than you got yesterday from Ann Lewis. The President has not specifically mentioned the V-chip, but this is work that we've been doing because he's been concerned, obviously, about ways that parents can help -- can protect their kids with regard to stuff that comes through on the Internet.

Apparently, it's our understanding that technology does exist within the industry. It's being developed by the industry. And so I think the President was referring to that yesterday.

Q Is there any procedure that -- I mean, is it something that -- is there any kind of official "endorsement" you expect?

MR. TOIV: Well, right now -- not right at this moment, but it's something we're looking at.

Talking Points on Technology in Poor and Minority Schools

Q: A recent ETS survey indicated that the ratio of students to computers rises substantially as the percentage of low income and minority students increases. Is the Administration concerned about inequity in technology in our nation's schools?

A: Technology is vitally important to helping students reach high standards and get ready for the 21st Century. It's critical that technology not divide us into a nation of haves and have nots. While the biggest gap in access to computers is in the home, the President and the Vice President are deeply committed to working with our nation's schools to make sure that every child, no matter where they live or their economic circumstances, can log on to the Internet and take advantage of its rich possibilities for learning. Here's what we're doing:

- Signed the Telecommunications Act and fought for the E-rate, which will allow Internet access discounts for schools and libraries. Discounts are on a sliding scale based on need, with poorest schools qualifying for a discount of up to 90%---nearly free.
- Are working with private sector partners to connect every single school in an Empowerment Zone to the internet, so they can leap ahead in technology. ATT and America On-Line have committed to providing free Internet access for every school in an EZ, and there are strong public-private partnerships in EZ's including Harlem and Oakland. The President also signed an executive order giving preference to schools in EZ's and EC's for surplus federal computers.
- In order to receive grants under our Technology Literacy Challenge Fund, states must spell out how they will target assistance to communities with the highest rates of poverty and the greatest need for educational technology. 95% of these funds must go to the local level, funding for which will double this year under the President's budget and which is protected under the Balanced Budget Agreement.
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[Anything we can say on computers per se?]

Data shows that students with the most need get the least access--

Title I ratio of students to computers goes up as the percentage of economically disadvantaged students increases.

Minority -- have the highest ratios

less than 25% minority -- 10 computers to one student

more 90% minority -- 17 computers to one student

Ratio of students to

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LORI L. ANDERSON

05/22/97 11:53:03 AM

Record Type: Record

To: William R. Kincaid/OPD/EOP

cc:

Subject: Schools/Computers

This is what Mike said earlier today.. He told me he wants a little bit more if possible. Thank you.

Q Will the President -- talking about education today and also trying to get computers in every school in America -- there was a recent study that said minority and poor schools are having a problem with computers. Is the President going to --

MR. MCCURRY: He was aware of that. In fact, I don't know if it was called to his attention or whether he saw it himself, but he's well aware of that problem. And one of the aspects of our work to make sure every classroom has access to the Internet is work especially with those school districts that are facing economic difficulty. You may want to -- or have someone else -- talk to Dick Riley later today about this. I think we're going to have a way of making him available up in West Virginia. The Department of Education's been doing a fair amount on that issue.

Q -- going -- which goes back to last night's Caucus meeting -- they still seem to be disappointed that they weren't able to get the appropriate money for school construction.

MR. MCCURRY: Well, we're disappointed too. I mean, we would have preferred to have that funding in a balanced budget agreement. But that's one of the things that we're not able to get in the final agreement. And we'll have to figure out other ways that we can address the needs of those school districts that have got some serious infrastructure problems and that need funding. But it couldn't be done in this agreement.

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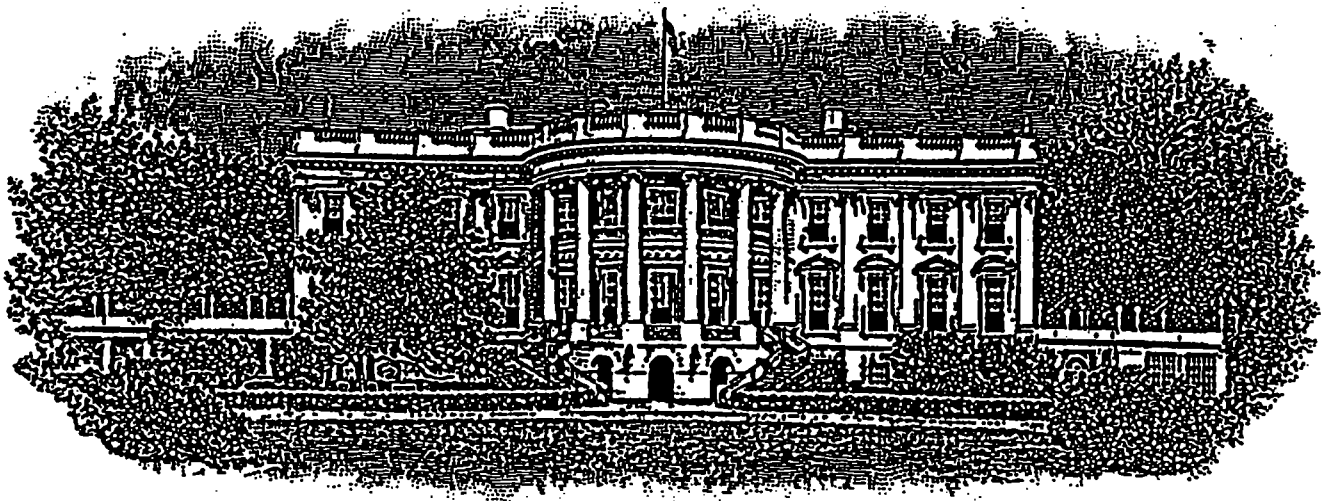
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[Attached are more detailed talking points from the Department of Education.]

The White House



Domestic Policy Council
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TO: Lori Anderson
FAX: 6-6423

FROM: BILL KINCAID

THIS FAX INCLUDES THE COVER SHEET PLUS 3 PAGES.

IF YOU DID NOT RECEIVE THE COMPLETE FAX, PLEASE CALL (202) 456-2857.

MESSAGE:

Talking point — as requested.

Technology/E-rate



Office of Legislative &
Intergovernmental Affairs

FACSIMILE TRANSMITTAL MEMORANDUM

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To: *Mike / Bill Kincaid*

Organization: *DPC*

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This cover sheet is Page 1 of pages.

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Background for National Governors Association speech Monday July 28, 1997

Key points on connecting classrooms and libraries to the Information Highway

1. Why is connecting classrooms and libraries to the Information Highway so important?

Currently, only 14% of American classrooms are connected to the Internet. Universal Service support will help to ensure that all students, regardless of economic status, will have access to the Information Highway. Public support for improving education through technology is very strong and it is one of the Administrations most identifiable initiatives. 89% of Americans agree rural and poor schools should have the same access to technology as wealthy schools and industry is hungry for a well-trained, technology-literate workforce. (National School Board Association)

In the fast-growing community of Henderson, NV, the government is building one new school a month. The school district can not afford to build new schools with full paper libraries. Access to the Internet can vastly expand the educational resources available to the children of Henderson, while reducing costs to the school district.

2. What barriers stand in the way of connecting classrooms and libraries to the Information Highway?

Telecommunications Act of 1996 and FCC rules provide up to \$4 billion each year in federal and state matching funds to connect U.S. classrooms and libraries to the Information Highway. Under the program, school districts apply for discounts on communication services, internal connections, and access to the Internet. The first applications will be filed this year.

The schools and libraries program will work if the states, federal government, school districts, industry, and communities work together to develop technology plans.

Last month, however, several isolated telecommunications companies filed suit to stop the schools and libraries program from taking effect. These companies, which include Southwestern Bell and GTE Corp., argue that the federal rules establishing the program are unlawful and ought to be struck down. Other telecommunications companies, including Bell Atlantic and US West, Inc., have declined to join the suit and in fact have shown a willingness to contribute to the effective and efficient operation of this program. The lawsuit threatens to delay or kill this program, which would dramatically improve education for millions of children in Nevada and the other states served by these companies.

3. What's the call to action?

Governors should work with their school districts, industry, communities, and the federal government to develop workable technology plans in order to maximize the benefits of the connecting classrooms program. Governors need to lead the call for bringing schools into the Information Age and for making sure kids have the chance to develop the skills they need to compete for good jobs in the new economy.

The connecting classrooms program is a great example of the federal government and the states working in partnership to improve education.



Education & Library Networks Coalition

Alliance for Community Media
 American Association for Adult and Continuing Education
 American Association of Educational Service Agencies
 American Association of School Administrators
 American Library Association
 American Psychological Association
 Association for Education Communications and Technology
 Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
 Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education
 Center for Media Education
 Consortium for School Networking
 Council for American Private Education
 Council for Educational Development and Research
 Council of Chief State School Officers
 Education Legislative Services, Inc.
 Educational Testing Service
 Federation of Behavioral Psychological and Cognitive Sciences
 Global Village Schools Institute
 International Society for Telecommunications in Education
 Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
 International Telecomputing Consortium
 National Association of Counties
 National Association of Elementary School Principals
 National Association of Independent Schools
 National Association of Secondary School Principals
 National Association of State Boards of Education
 National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators
 National Catholic Educational Association
 National Education Association
 National Grange
 National Rural Education Association
 National Rural Electric Cooperative Association
 National School Boards Association
 Organizations Concerned about Rural Education
 People for the American Way Action Fund
 United States Catholic Conference
 United States Distance Learning Association

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SBC SUIT TARGETS CHILDREN AND EDUCATION

Washington, D.C. — National school and library leaders expressed outrage today at an "anti-children, anti-education" lawsuit filed last week challenging key elements of the Federal Communication Commission's recent order regarding discounted telecommunications rates for schools and libraries. The lawsuit filed by SBC Communications Inc., a regional Bell operating company, was filed June 18 in the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis, Missouri.

Spokespersons for EdLiNC, the Education and Library Networks Coalition, said that its members will be watching closely and will work to discourage other telecommunications providers from joining the lawsuit. Bell Atlantic, NYNEX, and US West have already indicated to EdLiNC members that they will not join the lawsuit.

The FCC rules, adopted unanimously May 7, will ensure that schools and libraries can afford telecommunications services for students and library users. The rules, which implement the Snowe-Rockefeller-Exon-Kerrey amendment to the Telecommunications Act of 1996, mandate discounts ranging from 20 percent to 90 percent. The discounts are expected to provide up to \$2.25 billion annually beginning January 1, 1998. Educators and librarians across the country have been rapidly gearing up to have the appropriate resources in place for this program to be running at the first of the year.

SBC Communications Inc. owns Southwestern Bell and Pacific Telesis. Southwestern Bell serves Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas; Pacific Bell serves California and Nevada. Discussions are underway for SBC to purchase or merge with AT&T, a potential merger that FCC Chairman Reed Hundt has already publicly questioned. It's also been reported that SBC earned a 31 percent return on equity as of October 1, 1996, and had had a 136 percent total return between the end of 1989 and April of this year.

EdLiNC will continue to monitor this legal action and intervene as appropriate.

WIRED**III**

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*** Telcos Attack FCC's School-Wiring Order**by Laurie Becklund

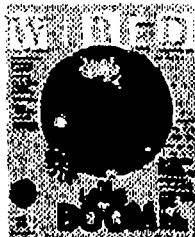
9:04am 27 Jun 97 PDT After months of threats, SBC Communications Inc. has filed a lawsuit that aims to kill an FCC-mandated program that requires the nation's phone companies to contribute to a US\$2.25 billion annual fund to help schools and libraries pay for telecom services.

SBC quietly filed its challenge in the Eighth US Circuit Court of Appeals last week. Additional legal challenges are anticipated from other regional telcos, possibly including Ameritech and Bell South.

If successful, the suit would undermine the FCC's recently unveiled universal service order designed to secure discount service for schools and libraries to help them connect to the Internet and secure other new telecommunications services. School districts are already preparing applications for the program, which launches 1 January 1998. Discounts range from 20 percent to 90 percent, based on poverty indexes in the school neighborhoods.

EdLinc, a coalition of 37 education advocates that fought for the measure, has denounced the lawsuits as "anti-children, anti-education."

"This is like taking candy out of the mouths of children -- and not because they care about the kids' dental work," said Carolyn Breedlove, the National Education Association's point person for telecom issues. "These children are their future customers, and we fully intend to tell our 2.3 million members what is

Make Room**POLITICS****Toddy's Headlines**Cyberspace Braces for Day of PICSHong Kong Transition: The CoverageFarewell to .hk? Not So FastOklahoma-am-Rhein: Police Seize Oscar WinnerTelcos Attack FCC's School-Wiring OrderThe CDA PlaintiffsCDA Victory Rally Cheers Free SpeechCDA Victors Celebrate with an Eye on Act IIReaction: Block, Don't MuzzleTimeline: The Act from Cradle to GraveCDA Struck DownReversal of Fortune

tell our 2.3 million members what is going on."

SBC, apparently anticipating a backlash, released an announcement saying it had contributed \$440 million in education supports in 1996 alone. SBC spokesman Selim Bingol said the sum, equal to more than 20 percent of the company's 1996 net profits, includes grants, Internet access discounts, retiree-volunteer programs, property taxes, and other programs.



Bingol said the company isn't motivated by bottom-line concerns. "We have no financial stake at all," he said. Instead, the suit is a matter of getting the FCC to adhere to Congress' intent.

"We're not trying to stop anything related to education," Bingol said. "Education's becoming the backdrop, and that's regrettable. The problem is that the FCC isn't following what Congress intended when it wrote the law."

But stopping the education-related program is exactly what SBC asked the St. Louis appeals court to do when it filed its 11-line lawsuit 18 June.

"Relief from the commission's order is sought on the grounds that it is arbitrary, capricious, and otherwise contrary to law," the SBC suit says. "Petitioner requests that this court hold unlawful, vacate, enjoin, and set aside the commission's order."

Still, SBC didn't go so far as to ask for an immediate stay of the order. And Bingol is right on the money when he says that education is merely the backdrop against which a host of other issues are being played out. Just last week, FCC chairman Reed Hundt denounced the very notion of a merger between SBC, which controls most local phone service from Texas to California,

and long-distance giant AT&T as "unthinkable" and just the sort of deal "anti-trust law frowns upon."

The FCC has yet to respond formally to SBC's attack on its schools and libraries program. However, an FCC source who asked not to be identified said that the \$2.25 billion program is "exactly what Congress intended." He added that companies "don't see this as in their economic interests, because they don't think they'll get back, dollar for dollar, what they put into the universal service fund."

The source acknowledged a certain "asymmetry" in the program that allows electrical contractors and Internet service providers to be reimbursed from the universal fund, even though, unlike telcos, they aren't required to pay into it. But, he said, the plan has been closely examined by the FCC and found to be lawful.

Universal service originated in the 1930s, when a complex system of subsidies was set up to ensure affordable telephone service for people in rural and high-cost areas. An agency is now being set up to administer the new universal-service program and is scheduled to start distributing funds beginning in January. The \$2.25 billion pool will be funded primarily through a series of alterations in existing ratepayer fees SBC refers to as "hidden taxes."

SBC is not alone in challenging the new FCC plan.

On Wednesday, GTE followed SBC into the Eighth Circuit and filed a challenge to the entire FCC universal-service order, claiming it is "not competitively neutral" and underestimates the true costs GTE and other companies will

costs GTE and other companies will incur serving high-cost areas.

A GTE spokesman stressed that GTE is not specifically opposing the portion of the order that applies to schools and libraries. He said details of the company's challenge will be filed in court in upcoming months.

What's puzzling about the intensity of the legal challenges is that the new fund could, in fact, constitute a significant new market for the telcos. Acting on that premise and collaborating with education advocates, Nynex, Bell Atlantic, and US West have announced they will abide by the FCC's plan and are now being held up by education advocates as ideal partners.

"Sometimes I think these [telcos] are just scared, and maybe when the revenue actually starts flowing, they'll wonder why they ever opposed it in the first place," the FCC official said.

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