GORE’S PROPOSAL FOR THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN SCHOOLS

The presidential campaign this year is unusual in that both Al Gore and George W. Bush are placing so much emphasis on improving education. Proposals from both candidates could significantly change the federal government’s role in education. This is one in a series of issue briefs intended to help people understand how each candidate’s major proposals differ from what the federal government already does in the field of education. To analyze these proposals, the Center on Education Policy drew from information on each candidate’s Web site and from news reports as of August 15, 2000. These briefs are not meant to judge the merit of these proposals.

How does Gore’s proposal for the use of technology in schools differ from current federal actions?

Al Gore would increase funding for existing technology programs for schools and would maintain the Schools and Libraries program (known as the E-Rate program), funded at $2.25 billion by the Federal Communications Commission through fees paid by telecommunications companies. This program provides guaranteed funding for discounted telecommunications services, Internet access, and internal connections to public and private schools and libraries. Gore also supports the technology education programs under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that provide school districts with funds for such activities as computer software and hardware acquisition, and teacher training and teacher professional development in the classroom application of technology. Gore’s ideas differ from what is being done now in these ways:

1. Establish a national goal of computer literacy by the end of eighth grade.

   Currently, there is no national goal for computer literacy.

2. Create a new initiative focusing on cutting-edge technologies to improve education.

   Funds would be available for school districts, universities, community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations and others to develop and expand technology so that it results in improved student achievement. The program would also encourage Web-based instruction in challenging courses such as Advanced Placement (AP) programs. Current appropriations for the Star Schools program and the Technology Innovation Challenge Grants program under Title III of ESEA would be used to fund this initiative.

3. Place a greater focus on improving the use of technology in high-poverty schools.

   Gore proposes several changes to the Technology Literacy Challenge Fund under Title III of ESEA to sharpen its focus on high-poverty school districts; for example, the Gore plan would encourage high-poverty, low-technology schools to form partnerships with mentors such as technology-proficient schools and universities. Funds would also be focused on improving the application of technology in classrooms in high-poverty schools through professional development and through assistance from Regional Technology Education Consortia.

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4. **Require coordination with state academic standards.**

States participating in the Technology Literacy Challenge Fund will be required to coordinate their technology education efforts with their state academic standards to ensure that technology initiatives funded through this program are contributing to improved student achievement.

**What are some questions that can be asked about Gore’s proposal?**

- Are there too many current federal programs aiding schools in the use of technology? Should Gore have proposed simplifying them?

- Is the federally-required fee paid by telecommunications companies the best way to guarantee funding for technology improvement in schools and libraries?

- States have found it difficult to measure computer literacy through tests and are therefore moving to infuse technology skills in academic content areas. Is it simplistic to set computer literacy as a goal when the real objective is the use of technology to increase knowledge and understanding?

- If used correctly, technology helps students to develop problem-solving skills, to communicate in a variety of formats, and to learn collaboratively—skills which most state testing programs do not measure. How will schools be able to show that technology improved academic performance when the skills learned through the best use of technology are not tested?

- The federal government provides approximately 7% of the costs of elementary and secondary education, but under President Clinton, 25% of the funding for the use of technology in schools has come from the federal government. Will Gore continue the federal financial commitment that improves technology in the schools?