

FCC Permits Schools and Libraries to Make Wi-Fi Available to Public

March 25, 2020

The FCC released a [public notice](#) announcing that schools and libraries that purchase discounted internet access service under the federal Schools and Libraries Universal Service program can make their Wi-Fi networks available to the general public even when they are closed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The notice determines public use of Wi-Fi that may be available on school campuses or library property (e.g., in parking lots or on sidewalks outside buildings) will not violate the obligations of schools and libraries to use universal service subsidies only to advance their missions. In the case of libraries, it notes that “the mission to serve the public is ongoing” despite library closures; as to schools, it concludes that allowing community usage is permitted so long as there is no charge for use of the service.

The notice does not set any limits on when or how the services may be used or on what uses a school or library can permit. However, this public notice does not affect the obligations of schools and libraries that receive universal service funding under the Children’s Internet Protection Act to block or filter internet access to pictures that are obscene, child pornography or harmful to minors. The notice also does not affect any obligations or limitations under state law, including any state universal service programs.

Although the public notice was issued to address requests prompted by closures associated with the response to COVID-19, it is a general analysis of what is permitted under the universal service rules. Consequently, the guidance in the public notice will remain in effect after schools and libraries reopen.

What does this mean for schools and libraries that want to make Wi-Fi available to the general public?

The FCC public notice clarifies that schools and libraries that receive universal service funding may make Wi-Fi available to the general public on school campuses and library property, so long as they do not charge for the service.

The public notice does not affect any other obligations that schools and libraries may have, including their obligation to block certain objectionable content.

[Coronavirus resource hub](#)

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