



The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

Final Copy of Case Study

Status:

Winner

Year:

2013

Organization Name:

School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida

Organization URL:

<http://www.dadeschools.net/>

Project Name:

Learn Ideas, Navigate Knowledge (LINK)

Please select the category in which you are submitting your entry:

Philanthropy

Please provide an overview of the nominated project. Describe the problem it was intended to solve, the technology or approach used, how it was innovative and any technical or other challenges that had to be overcome for successful implementation and adoption. (In 300 words or less.)

The Learn Ideas, Navigate Knowledge (LINK) program provides digital literacy training, computers, and Broadband Internet service for low-income students and their families. First launched in some of the highest-need schools, LINK is opening up new opportunities and broadening horizons. In an effort to bridge the digital divide, LINK works with economically distressed populations in elementary, middle, and high schools across the District. To be eligible to participate students must be enrolled in the Free and Reduced Priced Lunch Program. As of January 2013, LINK has provided low-cost computers to more than 7,400 students and offered discounted Internet service to more than 3,000 households. LINK works with non- and for-profit organizations to provide

computers, Internet service, and multilingual digital literacy training (in English, Spanish, and Haitian-Creole). Participating families who complete the training receive a computer loaded with software at a cost of \$25 to take home (Appendix 1, Appendix 2, and Appendix 3). A trilingual tutorial video is pre-loaded onto each computer along with anti-virus and word-processing software. That helps extend student learning beyond the school day and improves communication between parents and schools. In the training workshop, participants learn computer basics, how to use the Internet, and how to use the District's Parent and Student Portals, which are valuable online educational resources. Parents can monitor their children's academic progress (view students' grades and assignments) and communicate more easily with their teachers and schools. The Student Portal provides free individualized tutorials that promote learning in subjects such as math and reading. Further, a countywide PSA campaign reached 300,000 residents and built awareness of the educational benefits of being connected to broadband. LINK was funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), as part of the federal economic stimulus package.

When was this project implemented or last updated? (Please specify month and year.) Has it incorporated new technologies and/or other innovations since its initial deployment? (In 300 words or less.)

The program began implementation in August 2010, at the start of the 2010-2011 school year. Due to the ever-changing nature of technology, the program technologies have evolved since the program's initial deployment. Most notably, the hardware provided as part of the LINK program was updated as technology evolved. During the first year, program participants in elementary and middle school received refurbished desktop computers while high school students received refurbished netbooks. By Year 2 of the program, as desktops became less prevalent, all students received refurbished netbooks. As technology continued to evolve and the widespread availability of netbooks made them more cost effective, by the third year of the program, all students participating in the program receive brand new HP netbooks. Although today's schools were not originally designed for the 21st century student, by steadily integrating some of these tools into the classroom, schools can better meet the needs of today's students. In addition to the hardware, when the program first began, LINK provided students with computers at a cost of \$25 and one year of Broadband Internet service with AT&T. However, during program implementation it became apparent that many households already had Internet access. Instead of Internet access itself, the District realized that the device (hardware) was the limiting factor to accessing the Internet. The operating assumption that most households lacked Internet service was quickly becoming outdated. The larger challenge was to find the hardware to access the Internet. Responding to this change, the program focused on providing additional computers as a tool to get student online and less on providing Internet access, which many households already

had. By maintaining fluidity, the program was able to provide a dynamic response and adapt to the realities of the technology needs for M-DCPS students.

Is implementation of the project complete? If no, please describe the project's phases and which phase the project is now in. (In 300 words or less.)

Program implementation is currently ongoing and is expected to be completed by June 2013, at the end of the 2012-2013 school year. The program involves three phases, each coinciding with the corresponding school year. The first two phases of the program (during the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years, respectively) targeted the 38 highest need schools in the District, overseen by the Education Transformation Office (ETO) Office, typically those high-poverty schools that have been identified as persistently lowest-achieving by the Florida Department of Education. To be eligible to participate in LINK students need to attend a qualifying school and be enrolled in the Free and Reduced Priced Lunch Program. Phase 3 of the program (the 2012-2013 school year) was open to 9th grade students at high schools across the county. The program shifted to align with the District's new Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) initiative, first implemented during the 2012-2013 school year. BYOD is designed to strategically incorporate technology into academics and is intended to provide students with an opportunity for 21st century interactive learning. M-DCPS has begun equipping all high schools with wireless Internet connections. Students must first agree to the District's acceptable use policy agreeing to only use the device for educational purposes or specific projects. Although many students already have hardware/devices, many students do not. Through LINK, the District seeks to bridge the digital divide and afford all students with the opportunity to learn through technology. The majority of computers distributed as part of the LINK program are Wi-Fi enabled netbooks which allow students to be part of the digital age and experience online resources at their own pace. These portable devices allow students to access the Internet at home, school, or any Wi-Fi hotspot.


Please provide at least one example of how the technology project has benefited a specific individual or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work. (In 300 words or less.)

Many parents have expressed appreciation for their child receiving a LINK computer. For example, two parents contacted the LINK program via email: "Wow. I just want to thank each and every one of [you] for making this happen. I'm just overwhelmed at this opportunity to own a computer. All I can say is thank you." Mr. Christian Reyes, Barbara Goleman Senior High parent, 11/9/12. "Thank you so much for the computer! It will be put to great use with all the projects and

homework coming up! Great program!" Ms. Michelle Rebozo, Miami Killian Senior High parent, 12/5/12. South Miami Senior High School parent Ms. Myriam Orta contacted LINK program partner The Parent Academy to express her gratitude. Prior to receiving a computer, her son Miguel experienced many challenges. Ms. Orta would ride the bus with Miguel and spend countless hours in the local library. Due to high volume, the library has a two-hour maximum use time per computer and many of Miguel's assignments required longer. Often it would get late and her son would not be able to complete his work. However, now Miguel is very happy with his new computer and is able to download programs to complete his assignments, particularly with Language Arts and Math. Motivated and stimulated by the computer, Miguel is now active on the M-DCPS Student Portal, a free resource for students to engage in customized educational software. Miguel no longer needs to go to the library to get online access to research his homework and complete school assignments. Computer assisted learning is reducing his frustration level and is providing Miguel a patient, non-critical, motivating teacher and tutor. Ms. Orta also regularly logs onto her Parent Portal account to check Miguel's grades, assignments, and attendance.

Would this project be considered an innovation, a best practice or other notable advancement that could be adopted by or tailored for other organizations and uses? If yes, please describe that here. (In 300 words or less.)

The best practices and innovations of LINK are replicable to other organizations. One of the first challenges LINK faced was how to best engage parents. Miami-Dade County is a large urban community with many newly arrived immigrants. For various reasons, many parents are not as involved with their children's education as they would like to be. Due to language issues, students often have to do their parents' jobs of navigating the school system. To overcome this, LINK partnered with The Parent Academy (TPA), a M-DCPS initiative that builds partnerships between home, school, and the District so that all students can be successful. TPA has tailored its approach to serve a large non-English-speaking community. All LINK materials are trilingual (English, Spanish, and Haitian-Creole) as are TPA-led trainings. Like many school Districts nationwide, M-DCPS continually seeks to provide innovative technologies while making the most of limited budget dollars. LINK provides a small, less expensive, and durable netbook for use at home and school. The parents are required to pay a nominal one-time charge (\$25) to receive the computer. Through this contribution parents help to maximize program dollars and become an invested program partner. The \$25 empowers parents and students with an inherent pride of ownership in their new computer. Further, it helps to reduce the stigma associated with another government handout or free giveaway. The combined impact over the life of the program has allowed more than 600 additional students to participate in the



program that wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity due to limited funding. By making the basic hardware available to low-income students, LINK seeks to bridge the digital divide and afford all students the benefits of educational technology.

If there are any other details that the judges should know about this project, please note them here. (In 300 words or less.)

Education is one of the most important issues to address for positive social change. As technology advances at rapid pace, so does the digital divide between those who have access to technology and those who do not. LINK places technology within the reach of those who would ordinarily not be able to afford it or benefit from it a group that includes a disproportionate number of low-income Americans and members of minority groups and teaches them basic computer skills. Although many may take these skills for granted, for those stuck on the wrong side of the digital divide, not having basic digital literacy can be a serious impediment. Access to broadband has become a necessity of modern life. Americans who don't have access to the Internet are increasingly cut off from job opportunities, educational resources, healthcare information, social networks, even government services. Broadband is critical to improving our educational system. It makes it easier for students and parents to communicate with teachers and helps engage parents in their children's schoolwork sometimes providing the primary link between families and schools. As the gateway to Latin America and the Caribbean, Miami truly is a global city. Many M-DCPS students may have ties to family abroad. Technology is a great tool for sharing information and keeping families connected. The District's goal is to promote educational excellence not only during school hours, but also at home by facilitating resource sharing, innovation, and unlimited communication. It is essential that students have a basic knowledge of computers, software and the Internet, building technology skills that America needs to compete in the global marketplace of the 21st century. Preparing young people for the future is more than just outfitting the classroom with the latest technology; it's about evolved ways of learning.