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LOCATION:
Washington, DC, US

ORGANIZATION:
Idaho Education Network

YEAR:
2011

ORGANIZATION URL:
<http://www.ien.idaho.gov/aboutIEN.htm>

STATUS:
Laureate

PROJECT NAME:
The Idaho Education Network Implementation Project

CATEGORY:
Emerging Technology

PROJECT OVERVIEW

In the last decade Idaho leaders acknowledged that Idaho did not have a statewide coordinated high-bandwidth education network and that such a network would enable students and teachers in all public high schools to receive both required and advanced courses. In the 2008 and 2009 legislative sessions the Idaho Legislature formalized the effort and established the Idaho Education Network (IEN). Armed with state leadership, private industry, education and foundation support, and funding for the first three years, the IEN promptly assembled policy/procedures and technical advisory councils and defined our goals. The goals of the IEN are to 1) establish a robust, scalable private education network that reaches into EVERY Idaho community, 2) remove obstacles of access to education in every community 3) change the culture of education consumption to meet the needs of every community member, 4) facilitate an open competitive market for education delivery and 5) promote community safety, growth, economic development and personal achievement through education. These goals were best stated by State Superintendent Tom Luna with these three words "Connect-Instruct-Achieve". With a considerable list of goals, the IEN faced the unique challenge of implementing programs to achieve these goals across Idaho's 200 high schools, while bracing for significant budget cuts in Idaho's public education system. Video conferencing technology has been vital to the program's success, allowing schools to offer upper-division classes despite budget challenges and enabling students to continue taking courses locally to minimize travel time and expenses. Idaho schools have gained the capability to send or receive course offerings from other schools, expanding options across the state. Furthermore, video conferencing has allowed Idaho students and schools to share resources to enrich learning while saving money and time. Adoption of videoconferencing was successful because of free comprehensive training sessions for teachers, students, government leaders, business owners and interested parties. These courses were developed and offered by the IEN because they recognized that any investment in world-class connectivity and technologies means nothing without the human capital to put it to work. By using this collaborative, high-



tech strategy across state agencies and professional disciplines, education professionals who serve students with short-term and long-term disabilities benefited from the extraordinary convenience and easy. Alongside these professionals, the taxpaying citizenry also benefitted. By utilizing the network and video teleconferencing to train public employees across the state, the IEN saved Idaho taxpayers over \$50,000 in travel and training costs. Many schools can use a variety of media to deliver content and curriculum in addition to the video feed across the IEN. In addition to the Tandberg video teleconferencing equipment, schools with highly qualified teachers were also given Samsung UF-80ST digital visual presenter to help with sharing physical visual images like models for a health class or specimens for science classes. Some classes like the Calculus II at Eagle High School use a Texas Instrument TI-84 scientific calculator to visually distribute formulas to students at far reaches in the state throughout the lesson.

SOCIETAL BENEFITS

This project benefits entire communities - from schools to state agencies, from hospitals to businesses, from law enforcement to fire fighters by providing training and resources that were previously unavailable to them. Video teleconferencing has had a dramatic effect on the way students learn and schools operate: cheaper, faster and better.

PREVIOUS PROJECT UPDATED/EXPANDED? The project has connected 60 districts or 80 plus schools since our update last year. In many cases the schools' bandwidth will have increased on average approximately 200%. In some cases that bandwidth increase is as much as 1000% for our remote schools. The content that is crossing the network has expanded greatly since last year. When we first began we had just a few dual credit and high school classes. Now we have as much as 25 different subjects being shared. The classes range from Business Marketing to Holocaust Literature. They include many AP and dual credit language classes that cover world languages like Japanese, French, Spanish, and Latin as well as English, Communications, History and Advanced Math. We have earned over 2000 AP or dual credits across the network. We have completed and awarded graduate credits to our initial origination teachers. Those pioneers have conducted seminars and collaborated with experts from Arkansas, Tennessee and South Dakota. We have trained an additional 400 teachers and staff since then as well. Lastly, communities are leveraging the network to serve professional development needs as well. For example, Sugar Salem High School is currently offering two Master's level programs through distance learning. Those two offerings come from outside the state of Idaho and into the high school after hours from Utah State University.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION COMPLETE? No

PROJECT BENEFIT EXAMPLE

With the use of videoconferencing, schools with inadequate staff can offer the same instruction to students as schools in metropolitan areas. Like most states, Idaho has a shortage of math and science teachers, so it is difficult for most school districts to have more than one foreign language teacher or advanced math teacher. This project enables the "have nots" to get the same educational advantages as the "haves," with access to courses such as Calculus II and Latin III. IEN wants students in Idaho who are willing and able to accelerate to do so, and IEN provides that opportunity. Further, students can receive college credits at a lower cost than usual, because a credit costs only \$65 when a course is delivered over IEN. The same credits cost six times as much in a college environment; thus, students are not incurring huge debt that they will have to pay off for years when they take classes over



IEN. As an added benefit to colleges and universities, a higher percentage of high school students will go on to college because they have already earned several credits through IEN – increasing enrollment for higher education institutions. State government is benefitting as well. Idaho recently renovated our Capitol and installed videoconferencing equipment in two committee rooms. Now community representatives can attend subcommittee hearings and give testimony without having to travel. Senators can address constituents hundreds of miles away. We have made a connection from the state government to every community in the state, with 65 videoconferencing systems installed across the state. Businesses and state agencies are benefitting from professional development and workforce training. Firefighters, law enforcement, emergency medical technicians, and emergency room personnel are all receiving the training they need via video. IEN has partnered with the state's Peace Officer Training Academy and we are training reserve police officers in eight rural communities. So this project is contributing to public safety in a unique way. IEN has empowered communities to be global education consumers and given them the freedom to choose the courses they want to take. Schools involved in the IEN are starting to realize the opportunity that comes with that. When asked about it, Superintendent Jim Reed of Weiser said, "When the community members saw what might happen in rural Weiser, Idaho...they suddenly began to think that we might have our own community college because of the IEN." Because the state does not inject obstacles such as access fees and port fees into the use of the network, consumers at each high school can create their own education identity as described by Jim Reed. They have the ability to find content providers that will compete for their business and offer the classes they want, when they want them, at a price they can afford a huge advantage both economically and culturally for these communities.

IS THIS PROJECT AN INNOVATION, BEST PRACTICE? Yes

ADDITIONAL PROJECT INFORMATION

Used effectively, video teleconferencing can have a dramatic effect on the way students learn and schools operate: in both cases, the potential is for cheaper, faster and better. VTC can bring down school walls and erase distance, connecting classrooms around the world, joining remote learners to leading subject area experts, exposing students to other peoples and cultures that traditional field trips can't feasibly reach, and piping in rich supplemental content. For administrators and community members, VTC can expedite meetings, enable information sharing not possible even in a standard face-to-face meeting, cut travel and training costs, and save valuable time—prosaic concerns, perhaps, compared to a seven-year-old, rural Idahoan visiting a Brazilian rainforest for the first time virtually, but quite effective nonetheless. Idaho Governor C.L. "Butch" Otter said, "The IEN, like the teleconferencing technology that we're making a more integral part of our State government operations, is a way of communicating and collaborating more efficiently and effectively. A single video link between Boise and Coeur d'Alene saves taxpayers about \$2,200 in the cost of flying up and back alone – not to mention the savings in staff time and resources that we realize by conducting more meetings via the IEN. Multiply all that throughout State government, and you'll see a significant and growing savings to the people of Idaho."