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Office of Digital Learning

1996 EdTech Update Report

Update for School Leaders

Fall 1996 Volume 1, Edition 1

Dear Educators,

Technology continues to play an ever increasing role in all that we do. First, the personal computer and now the Internet are transforming ours into an information-based economy. Schools are being affected by these changes as much as any other industry. Sometimes these effects are breathtakingly positive. Other times technology can drain school systems' financial and human resources.

I am pleased to announce a series of important new educational technology initiatives. Taken together, these initiatives should give you the tools that you will need to move your district's educational technology efforts to the next level of implementation.

Sincerely,

Robert V. Antonucci
 Commissioner of Education

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NetDay

First, I want to congratulate the more than 400 schools that worked with thousands of volunteers to make the 1st Massachusetts NetDay on October 26 such an overwhelming success. Participating schools benefited with several million dollars worth of volunteer time and discounted goods and services.



The long-term benefits of [NetDay](#) will be even more valuable. Most importantly, what distinguishes Massachusetts NetDay from similar efforts in other states is the emphasis that has been placed on supporting local initiatives, professional development, and forging long term partnerships to benefit schools.

NetDay is sponsored by a new non-profit called the Mass Network Education Partnership Inc. I strongly

recommend that every district participate in the next NetDay on April 5. Full NetDay participation can cut by more than half your internal wiring and networking costs. NetDay also provides you with opportunities to put in place some of the business and community partnerships that you will need in the future.

NetDay also corresponded with two major announcements by the Weld administration:

1. Education Technology Bond Matching Grants

On October 25, Lieutenant Governor Cellucci announced the initial release of the ET Bond Matching Grants to 25 districts. In addition, he reiterated the administration's commitment to fully funding the \$30 per student match for every district with a state approved local technology plan that has been submitted prior to July 1, 1997.

At the announcement, Secretary of Administration and Finance Charles Baker made clear the administration's intent to ensure that the ET Bond money be well spent. Specifically, he indicated that the administration would place a high priority on two areas: 1) networking and administrative systems and 2) professional development and training. My staff has been working closely with the Information Technology Division (ITD) of Administration and Finance to review all state approved plans to ensure that each plan has adequate detail in these two areas.

The initial 25 districts were selected based on geographic diversity and the clarity in which they addressed the priority areas. These school districts have been urged to apply for the new ET Lighthouse Grant program described below.

2. Expansion of the LearnNet

On October 26, Governor Weld announced an expansion of the LearnNet to provide every teacher in the state with a toll-free internet account for a nominal registration fee. While the details of this initiative are still being finalized, I believe that this announcement in concert with NetDay activities will act as a catalyst for a major expansion of internet access for Massachusetts schools.

For the past two years ESE and [MCET](#) (the Massachusetts Corporation for Educational Telecommunication) have worked together to provide dial-up access to all administrators. The Governor's announcement will enable us to expand this access to every teacher. In addition, ESE, MCET, and ITD will work together to provide all schools with high speed (T1 or better) internet access. We plan on accomplishing this incrementally over the next two years and relying on Universal Service Funds (USF) to pay for the ongoing costs.

The USF is an important amendment to the Telecommunications Act passed by Congress last year which will provide discounted telecommunication rates for schools, libraries, and rural health care. On November 8, a joint state-federal sub-committee of the FCC will release a [draft rule-making for the USF](#). Initial indications are that this rule-making could be worth between \$20 million and \$60 million to Massachusetts schools each year. On November 22, I am co-hosting a high level briefing session on the November 8 rule-making to begin to develop a Massachusetts policy. Contact my office if you would like to participate in this briefing. I will send you an update as soon as I know more.

Federal Technology Literacy Challenge Fund Grants

In the final days of the session, Congress approved current year funding for the first \$200 million installment on President Clinton's \$2 billion Technology Literacy Fund. Massachusetts is expected to receive its \$3.5 million share early in 1997. All of these funds will go to school districts through competitive grants. We will send out additional information as soon as it becomes available. Our current plans are to use the funds to support four separate grant programs:

1. Professional development and training in districts with the greatest need.
 2. ET Lighthouse Technology program. This initiative would award small demonstration grants to districts that exhibit the best use of technology in the district, schools, or classrooms.
 3. ET Fellowships. We plan on awarding two grants to provide a sabbatical to one teacher and one administrator who have distinguished themselves in the use of technology to work statewide on educational technology issues for a year.
 4. District-Led Statewide Initiatives. These grants will enable districts to provide leadership on solving statewide problems such as procurement barriers, software evaluation, or recruitment, training, and mentoring.
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ET Professional Development & Training

The final two ET announcements have to do with major new contracts. The first contract will organize all existing ET professional development and training providers into a single coordinated system. This system will provide you with a single point of contact to evaluate and select professional development and training services for your district. In addition, it will ensure that there is an appropriate match between districts needs and provider services in every region of the state. This system will make your districts ET professional development and training dollars go much further.

We will work with the selected consortium to develop the Department's winter and spring integrated professional development conferences. The winter conferences will focus on integrating technology with curriculum and will be held regionally on the following dates 1/14, 1/16, and 1/23. The spring conferences will focus on the integration of assessment and technology and will be held regionally on the following dates 5/8, 5/15, and 5/21. Conferences are open to all educators.

Information Management System (IMS)

Finally, I am pleased to announce the award of a five year, \$17 million contract to a partnership of Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC) and Communica Inc. to design, develop, install and support a [comprehensive information management system](#) (CIMS) for early childhood, primary, middle, secondary, vocational, and adult basic education (ESE IMS) I have attached an Executive Summary, Draft Schedule of Contract Milestones, and application for district pilot participation.

This contract will have a dramatic impact on all Department programs and initiatives. It will replace virtually all existing paper-based forms with a World Wide Web transactional system and distributed databases. By the end of next school year, for example, you will no longer receive a paper form to fill out requesting your district's share of school food service commodities. Instead, you or your staff will log on to the Department's Web site through the internet, download a form customized with your district's information, fill in on the screen your requested amount, and press a button to transmit it back to the Department.

If you have not already registered yourself and your staff for your free MassEdOnline LearnNet (MEOL-LN) accounts and viewed the Department's web site, I strongly recommend that you do so immediately by calling MCET's toll-free support line 1-800-556-4376. For several years I have urged you all to make internet access a high priority. This new IMS initiative will make it a necessity. NetDay, the ET Bond, and the new federal Telecommunication's Act will all facilitate your long-term networking strategy, but it is important that every district begin this process immediately by registering and using all of its MEOL-LN accounts.

I fully understand the difficulties that you face preparing your district for the challenges posed by the these and other information technology initiatives. I want to assure you that we will work closely with every district to assist you in implementing these initiatives. In fact, the major reason why I selected DEC/Communica for this contract over other highly competitive technology companies is their unique understanding of districts' technical support requirements.

Members of the DEC/Communica team will contact you and members of your staff over the next few weeks to introduce themselves, go over the results of prior information technology surveys of your district, and develop a detailed profile of your current status.

I invite you all to participate in the design and initial implementation of the ESE IMS. My staff will be providing regular updates on the project at monthly meetings of the ET Advisory Committee (see below) and will convene a working group to focus specifically on student confidentiality issues. In addition, I will be selecting 6-12 districts to work closely with DEC/Communica through the initial phases of the contract to pilot components of the new system. Pilot districts will be selected based on technical, demographic, and geographic diversity to explore a variety of challenges that districts may face in implementing the ESE IMS. Although DEC/Communica can only efficiently work intensely with a handful of districts during the pilot phase, all districts that put in an application for pilot status will receive early drafts of design documents and have opportunities to critique the proposed approach. If you would like to participate as a pilot district, call our ESE IMS hotline at (781) 338-3000.

ET Advisory Committee

As you can see from the description of the above initiatives, there is a tremendous amount happening in educational technology. I have reorganized Department resources to focus more effectively on these issues. Greg Nadeau is serving as CIO and Director of Strategic Planning and Technology to lead these efforts. Please contact educational technology specialist Connie Louie if you have questions or suggestions. She can be reached by e-mail at [✉clouie@doe.mass.edu](mailto:clouie@doe.mass.edu) or call the new the MEOL hotline (781) 338-3000.

Greg and Connie will be co-chairing a monthly ET Advisory Committee meeting for me to update stakeholders about the state's ET initiatives and to solicit input on future policies. The meetings will be held at one of the two principals' associations building off Rte. 495 from 4:00pm to 7:00pm near the end of each month. Contact Connie or Greg for an up-to-date meeting schedule if you would like to attend.

Thank you all for your participation in these exciting initiatives. I hope you share my enthusiasm for the opportunity that they present and commitment to ensuring they are successful.

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