



Computers@Home Project Update October 2004

The Plano Independent School District Board of Trustees launched the Computers@Home project during the fall of 2002, providing selected students and their families with technology and training to broaden the depth and breadth of learning among these students and their family members. Providing families with technology tools at home furthers the district's goal of equipping each student with the skills and knowledge necessary to graduate and to achieve at maximum potential. State legislation passed in 2001 has allowed our school district the opportunity to place computer equipment that has been declared surplus into the homes of our students who are educationally disadvantaged and have no access to this technology outside of schools and the public libraries. Four of the district's STAR elementary schools (designated name for campuses with high percentages of low socio-economic levels) served as the pilot schools for this new district initiative. The schools, and their socio-economic percentages are: Forman - 62.1%; Hickey - 49.6%; Meadows - 81.6% and Mendenhall - 71.6%. (Meadows Elementary includes the Head Start pre-kindergarten program, which is offered to Plano families who fall within federal poverty level income guidelines.)

The Computers@Home program has grown from serving these initial 50 families to currently serving over 1,400 families (many with multiple students), with additional families added each week. Our schools identify students at each campus who would benefit by having computer technology available to them at home. Training sessions are conducted regularly at the home campuses to provide additional support and software applications. Plano ISD's instructional technology specialists team with bilingual teachers and student organizations to equip and train the students and their families who each receive a computer, that has been designated as surplus, and an initial software package. The computers are generally about five years old and have been replaced by newer equipment. They remain the responsibility of Plano ISD, but can be kept in the home as long as the students remain in the school district. Staff time involved has included planning meetings, creating training materials, after-hours training; training by school staff; and planning meetings. School-level staff at the numerous campuses have volunteered their time to coordinate the ongoing local efforts. Student organizations such as STAND, PALS and Student Congress have become active in their support of these evening training sessions as well.

Due to the overwhelming success of the Computers@Home program, additional school districts in Texas and throughout the country have sought Plano ISD's advice for starting similar programs. For instance, neighboring Frisco Independent School District and Garland Independent School District began exploring offering similar programs in 2003, seeking guidance and recommendations from Plano. Noteworthy in terms of the program's success is the fact that most district staff members who assist with training our numerous students and their families do so for free. Principals and their educational teams who decide to offer the program add several extra hours to their already full schedules. They do so in order to support the school district's mission to "provide an excellent education for *all* students." The district's technology division provides assistance to each school for the initial delivery and training event, delivering and setting up the surplus computer equipment and providing licensed software for each computer. Additionally, businesses throughout the community provide support through donations of related equipment such as printers and power strips as well as mentors for students and families. Local service organizations such as PTAs and the League of United Latin American Citizens provide language translators, meals and child care for the school-based evening sessions. High school students, staff and parents volunteer time to serve as mentors during the sessions. "Our community has been very supportive of our efforts to integrate technology into our classrooms," noted Mary Beth King, school board

president. “As board members, we were concerned about the ‘digital divide’ this was creating for our students who did not go home to computers. When we learned that current state law would not allow us to donate classroom computers that were scheduled to be replaced to our students, we had multiple meetings to gain legislative approval for this vital and much-needed program. We felt this initiative helped us to make strides as a district in our goal of closing the achievement gap.”

The impact of the program has been far-reaching. Students have been able to continue work on math, reading and writing skills beyond the school day and have shown an increase in achievement as measured on statewide tests, but just as importantly, these students have been able to gain more experience and comfort in the use of technology resources and display greater participation in their classrooms. Families have improved their skills by using CD-based training materials from their work, completing job applications in a more professional looking manner and learning overall technology skills that assist them in their jobs and enable them to support their children.

The current list of schools participating in the Computers@Home project include:

School	Total	School	Total	School	Total
Aldridge	0	Haggard	10	Rice	1
Andrews	0	Harrington	9	Robinson	0
Armstrong	34	Haun	0	Saigling	7
Barksdale	0	Hedgcoxe	10	Schimelpfenig	7
Barron EC	159	Hendrick	17	Shepard	0
Beaty EC	0	Hickey	49	Shepton	14
Bethany	0	Hightower	9	Sigler	128
Beverly	4	Huffman	16	Skaggs	0
Boggess	63	Hughston	1	Sp Prog K-8	0
Bowman	116	Jackson	13	Sp Prog 9-12	0
Brinker	0	Jasper	6	Stinson	0
Carlisle	0	Mathews	0	Thomas	15
Carpenter	15	Meadows	66	Vines	9
Centennial	9	Memorial	33	Weatherford	60
Christie	21	Mendenhall	99	Wells	0
Clark	35	Miller	0	Williams	23
Daffron	0	Mitchell	1	Wilson	23
Davis	84	Murphy	0	Wyatt	0
Dooley	0	Pearson EC	0	Misc.	2
EvenStart	7	PESH	62	Hope's Door	3
Forman	49	PSHS	19		
Frankford	30	PWSH	4		
Gulledge	2	Rasor	59		
Haggar	0	Renner	22		
				Total	1425

The Computers@Home project has had significant impact on many aspects of the students’ school and home life – particularly as it extends to improving the entire family’s technology awareness and comfort with using these tools. The following page provides one of the many anecdotes that describe the personal impact of this program.

Computers@Home – Parents Benefit as Much as Children



One of our first Computers@Home families was from the Barron Early Childhood School -- Nora and her family.

Nora is a single parent. Her youngest child is in kindergarten in a bilingual class. Her next older child is in 3rd grade. They both use the computer often, but the 3rd grader uses it more than the kindergartener does.

Nora gets up every morning at 4:00 a.m. to go to work so she can be finished with her shift when the children get out of school. Her sister comes in the mornings to be with the children and get them ready for school.

Nora has been working at McDonalds for 7 years and learned most of her English by speaking to customers at work. She wants to do computerized training so she can get a promotion. She had received the training CD's from McDonalds and had been trying to install them but had not been successful and was getting worried about being able to complete the training. We installed the training CD's on the new computer and showed her how to use the program. She promised to send an e-mail to let us know if she passes the test.

Nora wants to start taking classes this summer – English and computer classes. She expressed that she wants to improve her vocabulary and grammar skills. She is currently paying a PESH student to tutor her in English. Even though she is learning to speak and read English, she has never learned to write at all. She hopes to learn to write in both languages.

We also showed Nora how she could use Babelfish to translate Spanish to English and English to Spanish to help her practice English. She said she will use it all the time and when her English has improved, she will try to become an Assistant Manager at McDonalds.



Training sessions at each school in the Computers@Home project involve the participation of everyone in the family