

## EDUCATION TODAY

# Adding an info highway lane for urban kids

By Tamara Henry  
USA TODAY

The 50 largest urban school systems, ignoring negative predictions, are heading for the on-ramp of the nationwide information superhighway.

Urban educators say poor students, like wealthy ones, should have the classroom tools to correspond electronically with their peers and to retrieve data and other treasures from libraries and museums.

The school leaders are buoyed by an alliance recently formed between the Council of the Great City Schools, MCI and the California video technology firm Total Multimedia, Inc., known as TMM.

This alliance starts the process that creates the National Urban Learning Network, giving the schools access to the developing superhighway.

"For inner-city America and for our kids, they are too often the last to be served by any new emerging technology or service," says council head Michael Casserly. "We have a hard enough time getting textbooks."

Of the nation's 15,000 school systems, the 50 urban districts making up the council enroll some 40% of the country's black children, 32% of its Hispanic children and 22% of its Asian-American youth. Also at the schools are 30% of the nation's poor and 37% of its bilingual children.

With the alliance, the MCI Foundation is contributing \$100,000, while the corporation itself makes available the resources it has as the nation's second-largest international telecommunications carrier. TMM has agreed to provide technology and other high-tech assistance. The council will start the network with one high school in the cities of Nashville, St. Louis, Portland, Ore., Detroit, San Diego, Baltimore and Boston.

Although the goal is to eventually connect all 50 urban school districts with their 5.5 million children, Casserly admits "it will obviously take us some years to do that."

Casserly is working to rebut



By Bob Laird, USA TODAY

theories by consumer and civil rights groups that the regional telephone companies are planning to build the first of their advanced communications networks mainly for the affluent, while bypassing poorer areas and minorities.

The new urban network seeks \$291,374 from the Department of Commerce, along with \$739,125 from corporate and project participants. Casserly pledges to seek at least an additional \$500,000 in contribu-

tions, mainly from firms near the schools involved in the network.

Congress is debating whether to approve a rate structure that would allow schools free access to cable and telephone lines. Sen. Ernest F. Hollings, D-S.C., chairman of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, which has held a series of hearings, admits he, too, is worried about the disadvantaged not having access to the new technology.

The Clinton administration has made a telecommunications wish list for every classroom: two-way voice, data and video communication by the year 2000. Education Secretary Richard Riley insists that any roadblock to the information superhighway would make it "absolutely impossible to educate the coming generation of young people to high standards of excellence."

Casserly notes some school districts already have on-line

## Schools, private sector building road together

A variety of public-private partnerships are in the works to bring schools into an information superhighway network. Here are two:

► 345 Santa Clara (Calif.) County schools will be linked under a \$2 million commitment by 3Com Corp., headquartered nearby. Initially, the network focuses on Lynbrook, Overfelt, Pioneer and Del Mar high schools with a hub-and-spoke system for handling network traffic such as electronic mail. For example, a French language class uses the Internet for "chat" sessions with other students in the United States, France and in other countries. The 3Com commitment includes \$100,000 in cash, full-time expertise in data network consultation and special training sessions. Santa Clara County has more than 60,000 students at 51 high schools. The 33 county school districts span 854,189 acres, potentially the largest single network in Northern California.

► Heard of the one-room schoolhouse? Well, BreadNet is the "one-world schoolhouse" set up specifically for rural classrooms. The decade-old electronic network is an extension of the Bread Loaf School, a 75-year-old institution in Middlebury, Vt., designed to reinvigorate the teaching of English in American Schools. With a \$2.77 million grant from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, the network now offers fellowships to up to 60 rural teachers each summer from the targeted states of Alaska, Arizona, Mississippi, New Mexico, South Carolina and Vermont. The teachers spend six weeks at Bread Loaf and use BreadNet to maintain contact during the school year.

networks and have made significant investments in particular systems or technologies. However, he says those systems tend to be divergent, not interconnected.

TMM — cofounded by rockers Randy Jackson of the Jackson 5 and Taylor Kramer of Iron Butterfly — already has established a track record in its use of an array of high-tech equipment in schools. Headquartered in Thousand Oaks, Calif., TMM teamed up with the nearby Hueneme Elementary School District about nine years ago to equip all of the 11 schools with high-tech equipment.

Students at Blackstock and E.O. Green junior high schools make broadest use of the equipment, interacting with computers in the subject areas of history, literature, English as a second language, mathematics and science.

Ronald Rescigno, Hueneme

district superintendent, says a computerized curriculum is being developed not only for his schools but to be sold to school districts nationwide. Revenue from the sales will be plowed back into the schools. Rescigno boasts that the 7,800 mainly minority students in the district typically score in the top 1% of the country in writing skills, and equally well in higher thinking skills. He adds the district's cost is typically \$4,060 per student, less than half New York City's budget and two-thirds the national average.

"The major advantage for technology in urban schools is that we have such a diversity of children and diversity of learning styles that you need a more individualized approach that technology can deliver to make sure that every child is getting precisely what he or she needs in exactly the way he or she needs it," says Casserly.

## Teachers demand safety reforms

By Tamara Henry  
USA TODAY

The American Federation of Teachers called Tuesday for tough policies to make schools havens for learning.

Wrapping up a five-day convention in Anaheim, Calif., delegates of the 852,000-member union denounced the growing levels of disruptive and sometimes violent student behavior in U.S. schools. They adopted policy resolutions that call for:

► "Zero tolerance" in all school districts for drugs, weapons, crime and violence.

► A national standardized system of reporting incidents of violence in U.S. schools.

► Alternative schools for disruptive students who cannot function in regular classrooms.

"Education reform has become a national issue. None of these reform efforts will succeed if we don't restore discipline in our schools, and that means setting clear codes of conduct for student behavior and giving school staff the authority to enforce those codes," says Albert Shanker, 65, who has headed the AFT for 20 years and was re-elected Tuesday to another two-year term.

Shanker, who is battling cancer, says the personal, educational and social costs of violence are great. Each day, he says 135,000 juveniles carry guns and fear keeps 160,000 students away from school.

In other action, delegates called for a moratorium on public school contracts with the private management firm Education Alternatives Inc. The AFT says the nine Baltimore public schools managed by EAI are doing worse academically, yet EAI receives \$2 million in profit. EAI says major school changes typically won't show improvements for years.