

Technology Empowerment for Students,  
Teachers and Low-Income Families

Best Practices in Innovation and  
Sustainability

## Fairfax County Public Schools K12nects II

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**Program Name:** K12nects II

**Current Deployment:** Launched in January, 2005 in the Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS), Fairfax, VA, K12nects II currently supports eight schools in the Stuart Pyramid of Schools – schools with participation of 50% or greater in the National School Lunch Program.

**Program Director:** Cecelia Krill

**Web site:** <http://www.fcps.edu/DIT/k12nectsII/index.html>

**Mission:** K12nects II is a framework for teaching and learning in the digital age that integrates technology into curriculum and pedagogy to deepen learning, extend the learning environment, increase individualized learning, and engage parents more effectively in the schools. With the K12nects II program, Fairfax County Public Schools have developed a K-12 prototype for diverse, high poverty, and very mobile students in which technology is used to support educational best practices across a high-demand curriculum.

**Approach:** Leveraging a strong system-wide digital information and educational support system (FCPS 24/7) and teacher and student training, K12nects II builds a bridge to parents and families by providing no-interest loans and bundled PC offerings to low-income parents of children in the Stuart Pyramid schools in Fairfax County.

The key elements of the program are: a targeted PC purchase program for low-income buyers, no-interest loans for PCs, internet access, computer skills training, community resource directories, and integration with the Fairfax County Public Schools 24/7 web-based application for student learning and communication.

- **FCPS 24/7:** The Fairfax County Public School System uses the FCPS 24/7 system to complete student assessments, manage grades, communicate across the system, interact with parents, and provide extended learning through discussion groups and enrichment resources. The highly secure FCPS 24/7 system allows parents to monitor their children's work and students to directly access curriculum and enrichment tools 24/7 – any time of the day or night. To help families better understand these tools and support their children's education, schools offer FCPS 24/7 Night programs throughout the year. In these programs students and educators introduce parents to the FCPS application so that they are able to participate more directly in the extended learning and student-support activities.
- **PC Purchase Program:** The K12nects II manager invited existing vendors supporting the school district to provide computer offers that met the affordability of this low-income population. Three configurations are offered for students and parents and one additional model is offered for staff and teachers. Configurations were designed to provide an opening price point of \$25/month. Each comes with an excellent two-year support program. A software bundle from Microsoft is provided as an option and that bundle leverages existing agreements between Microsoft and the School District.
- **No-Interest Loans for PCs:** A foundational element of this program is a progressive financing offer from Apple Federal Credit Union, a local credit union with deep roots in the community and schools. Apple Federal Credit Union created a special loan program offering customers, staff, students and parents the opportunity to open a checking account (with a minimum of \$5.00) and apply for a zero-interest, 24-month loan for a new PC. Apple manages all processes and works with new clients to establish credit.

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- **Internet Access:** Through partnership with AOL, an active member of the Fairfax Education Foundation, qualified families receive free Internet access.
- **Community Resource Directory:** K12nects II fully leverages existing school and community resources to support the program. In that spirit, K12nects II provides new computer owners with a listing of training offered throughout the community. This listing includes adult education programs offered through the schools, training provided through the public libraries and a special six-week program offered through K12nects II that uses the latest techniques in teaching non-native-speaking students. With a pictorial curriculum, this program is accessible to residents who immigrate to Fairfax County from nearly one hundred different countries.

**What Makes K12nects II Unique?** The K12nects II model comprehensively addresses a range of issues and opportunities for schools serving low-income and diverse populations. The model encourages the creation and extension of community and business partnerships to directly tackle the issue of digital inclusion from all fronts—Parents, Teachers and Schools, Students, Community and Business. Easily replicable and adaptable to local needs, the K12nects II project serves as a low-cost model for connecting low income families.

**Scaling and Expanding this Model:** This program has been scaling up almost since its inception. Community resource directories and maps developed for the Stuart Pyramid Schools have been extended across the County and made available through the Technology at Home Web site. <http://www.fcps.edu/DIT/techathome/index.html>. The computer purchase program in partnership with the Apple Federal Credit Union is being expanded to additional areas of the County, with the goal of a County-wide program in the future.

In considering porting this program to other communities, initial program manager, Laura Reasoner Jones, recommends that

communities first assess what they already have in place and leverage those assets in their own programs. Look for a partnership with local banks or credit unions to create financing programs; invite existing computer vendors to design a program specifically for this segment of the population; publicize existing free access programs; offer parents information on training; make school applications and programs available on line and invite parents to participate more fully in the school programs and systems.

FCPS 24/7 is based on the Black Board Academic Suite® which “enables institutions to embrace the full power of the Internet with access from any learning resource at any time in any place.” <http://www.blackboard.com/us/index.aspx>

**Required Local Components:** Many of the elements of the FCPS could be replicated in other districts; all require local implementation and local leadership. While the electronic blackboard function, provided by the 24x7 systems is not fundamental to the parent training program, that framework does expand the virtual learning community in the Fairfax System.

**Results:** In the first eighteen months of program implementation, Fairfax County has seen the following results:

- Significant increase in use of FCPS 24/7 by participating schools both in instruction and in home use.
- An unintended but fortuitous outcome was that Spanish-speaking parents used the Spanish-language math program to learn mathematics themselves.
- More than 100 families and staff have purchased home computers through the interest-free loan program, and at least that many purchased home computers through the direct-buy program without the loan.
- Over 500 families participated in the evening classes and technology nights.