

Technology Empowerment for Students,  
Teachers and Low-Income Families

Best Practices in Innovation and  
Sustainability

## School District of Philadelphia FamilyNet

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**Program Name:** School District of Philadelphia's FamilyNet Program

**Current Deployment:** Launched in fall 2005 with a parent web site to allow parents online access their child's test score and broader access to SchoolNet's enrichment tools, this program was expanded to offer a system-wide PC purchase program in May 2006. A parents' ListServ, parent training, technical support and technology fairs were all introduced in 2006.

**Family Technology Manager:** Jay Cohen

**Web site:** [www.sdp.delawarevalley.org](http://www.sdp.delawarevalley.org)

**Mission:** The School District of Philadelphia's (SDP) FamilyNet Program provides families with a wealth of technology and education related resources for students and their families. The goals of the program are broad:

- Increase home ownership of internet-connected PCs for families of SDP children
- Support families with optional training opportunities offered through school and community organizations
- Encourage families to connect directly with each other to collaborate and share information
- Provide families with information they need to make informed choices about technology
- Improve the educational environment in the home through online educational resources offered through the School District

**Approach:** Philadelphia's FamilyNet is a set of programs which together provide families with a range of resources to support their students' education and to increase their own engagement with the school and in the community. Those programs include access to grades and learning resources; opportunities to purchase

computers, software and internet; and access to technical advice and other resources.

- **Access to grades and learning Resources (FamilyNet):** The School District of Philadelphia has implemented an information system that allows parents to easily view their children's attendance, grades and test data so that they can more actively help them improve their performance at school. In addition to allowing parents secure access to detailed information on performance, FamilyNet allows both the student and parent to access online programs and services that are keyed into curricula so students can use these resources to review, deepen and expand the skills and knowledge.
- **Purchasing a Computer:** Program Manager, Jay Cohen, has arranged with three area PC refurbishers and with two providers of new PCs to make PCs more available and affordable for low-income families. Through PC refurbishers Computers for Schools, Nonprofit Technology Resources and Team Children, families can purchase a used PC with Windows 2000 and (Open Source) Microsoft-compatible office software for between \$150.00 and \$175.00. Working with SDP PC vendors, Gateway and Apple, the School District has also made new PCs available to parents at employee pricing with desktop systems available for \$549.00 and \$694.00. The School District markets these programs to parents through flyers, seminars and technology fairs. Families purchase the computers directly from the PC vendors.
- **Internet Access:** Rather than promoting any specific Internet Access option, all material provided by the School District provides parents with simple definitions of available internet offers and furnishes them with the information they need to make an informed service choice.

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- **Access to Technical Advice and Other Resources:** The School District's family technology program integrates access to a range of community and school-based services designed to address training and technical support and to provide enhanced opportunities to communicate and connect. These include:
  - **Technical Advice and Training** are provided through local provider Nonprofit Technology Resources and through a telephone help line supported at Temple University.
  - **A Home and School Email Discussion Group** (Listserv) was initiated to facilitate communication on school and education-related topics.
  - **The Home and School Web Site** is designed to increase parent engagement and share information [www.PhillyHSC.org](http://www.PhillyHSC.org)
  - **Free Computer Courses for Parents** are offered through the Parent Leadership Academy at neighborhood centers.
  - **A Technology Expo and Computer Sale** provided families with the opportunity obtain information or purchase a new or used PC as well as learn more about FamilyNet and other online and community resources
  - **Introductory Seminars** are conducted regularly to provide parents with information on FamilyNet, PC programs, training, technical support, opening an email account and internet safety.

**What Makes This Program Unique?** While the Philadelphia program makes PCs and training available to families, two elements distinguish this program from others. First, the parent portal offered by the School District allows parents access to timely information and tools that directly support their children's education. Additionally, the focus of the program is one of providing families with the tools they need to directly support and extend learning for their children. By making PC and internet access options available, by making student information available,

by creating a ListServ for parents, by providing training for parents, and by offering a family-focused portal, the FamilyNet program seeks to empower families to support their children.

**Scaling and Expanding this Model:** With low program management expenses, families ordering PC directly from vendors, and a strong system-wide commitment to the FamilyNet application, the critical elements needed for scaling are funding and resources for marketing and training. Program enhancements planned for this year will expand marketing and increase the availability of neighborhood training for parents.

Information on the SchoolNet application is available at <http://www.schoolnet.com/>. This site also contains a case study of the School District of Philadelphia implementation at <http://www.schoolnet.com/success/index.aspx?id=3>.

**Required Local Components:** The beauty of the SDP program is the way that the School District has integrated a number of simple components and leveraged the SDP "channel" to reach 90,000 families. A strong program manager with connections in the community is the most important local component. Funding is needed to get marketing (flyers) and to nurture existing community and school-based programs.

**Results:** Given that these programs have been introduced and expanded over the past eighteen months, initial results are significant. In a district with 200,000 students and 90,000 families, 85 % of whom are on National School Lunch Program, over 10,000 families have registered to get their children's grades online via the FamilyNet portal. In just the first 10 months of the PC program over 2,000 refurbished computers and additional new computers have been purchased by area families. Eight hundred families are using the ListServ to get information about the schools.