

NEW JERSEY LAUNCHES INNOVATIVE AND PIONEERING HINDI LANGUAGE PROGRAM IN PARTNERSHIP WITH iEARN, FUNDED BY THE US DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Partnering with iEARN in the USA and India, initiative creates unique opportunity for New Jersey students to learn the language spoken by over 400 million people in the world

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New York—The Edison School District in New Jersey announced today a partnership with the International Education and Resource Network (iEARN) to enhance its existing language programs to include Hindi as an option for students in the district. The partnership enables NJ students and teachers to utilize the iEARN Internet-based network's 20 years of experience in online education to create collaborative spaces and methodologies for language learning and cross-cultural interchange with native Hindi speakers in India.

“The community of Edison has a large Asian Indian population, making it a unique district to run a pilot standards-based program that other districts can emulate,” states Dr. Rose Trafficante, Assistant Superintendent for curriculum and instruction. The three-year project will initially create a Level I Hindi curriculum for implementation in September 2008. As part of the initiative, educators, and school administrators from Edison and New Delhi (India) will have a chance to participate in exchange visits and examine first-hand how languages are taught in the two countries.

“We will select the initial students early in 2008,” points out Martin Smith, who supervises language instruction and assessment in the Edison School District.

“In order to be successful in the 21st century global arena, our students need to be able to function effectively across borders and cultures,” pointed out Dr. Edwin H. Gragert, Executive Director of iEARN-USA. “The ‘Partnership for 21st Century Skills’ has noted that technology, cross-cultural awareness, language arts and ability to work collaboratively are all part of the skills our students require. By engaging in Hindi collaborative discussion projects online with students in India, our students will gain these skills.”

The pilot project is made possible through a three-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education's “Foreign Language Assistance Program” to support the teaching of world languages. The 400 million speakers of Hindi exceed the entire population of the United States, yet prior to the Edison, initiative, there has been only one high school in the United States offering instruction in the language.

The project will link New Jersey students with those in India through iEARN-India's network of over 400 schools throughout India. The secure iEARN platform for student interaction is designed to handle all non-Western written scripts, including Hindi, Chinese and Arabic. As part of the preparation for this project, iEARN staff in both the US and India will work with the Hindi curriculum developers to integrate authentic collaborative online work into it. “Through the Internet, students and teachers have the opportunity to go

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beyond language simulations and engage directly with native speakers in other countries,” added Dr. Gragert. “Students have the opportunity to both learn and teach through direct interaction, enabling them to acquire language skills in a broader cultural exchange. The project-based interaction will also fit well into the civics and justice curriculum of the participating Edison school.”

“We see the Hindi initiative as a powerful example of how language classes can be internationalized using connective technologies and have student performance evaluated in meeting state educational standards. It is a model which can be replicated elsewhere in the United States,” Gragert added.

About iEARN

iEARN was launched in 1988 as a pilot project between the US and former USSR to demonstrate that students could use emerging new technologies to work together on meaningful educational projects that enhance the quality of life on the planet. It is iEARN’s vision that if students start working together globally from the earliest ages (5-19), they will learn better through experiential interaction with peers in other countries and learn that the world’s issues can be resolved by collaborative solutions. iEARN has grown to become the world’s largest educational network for project-based learning, with programs in more than 118 countries.

iEARN-USA was awarded the 2003 Goldman Sachs Foundation Prize for Excellence in International Education and is a 2004 Tech Museum Laureate winner for “technology benefiting humanity.” Please visit www.iearn.org and www.us.iearn.org or e-mail: iearn@us.iearn.org. iEARN-USA is based in New York City.

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