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## NJDOE News

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### ACE Grants Aimed at Bridging 'Digital Divide'

A new grant program designed to give disadvantaged students and their families greater access to educational technology was introduced today to the State Board of Education.

Commissioner of Education David Hespe led a presentation by Department of Education staff describing the program known as Access - Collaboration - Equity (ACE). The department is awarding more than \$7.4 million in grants to approximately 50 economically disadvantaged school districts so that students and their families can use computers, access the internet and use other forms of technology at specially equipped community centers.

"We know that most students who come from low-income households are unable to access and use a computer at home," Commissioner Hespe said. "Through the ACE grants, school districts will be able to operate community centers for disadvantaged students and their families to use when school is not in session.

"We believe that ACE will help to close the so-called 'digital divide' and create opportunities for all students to have the same learning advantages," the Commissioner said.

"Educational technology has fostered an era of incredible opportunity for student learning and for citizens to be connected to vital knowledge they need for school, work, or for personal fulfillment," said Governor Christie Whitman. "We can't allow any child to be left behind in this learning revolution.

"I hope that ACE centers will one day serve as important and exciting places in disadvantaged communities," the Governor said.

ACE grants will be awarded in two rounds. The first round of awards began October 1 for 26 grant recipients, ranging from \$96,000 to \$200,000 for \$4.8 million in total funding. Applications for the second round have been distributed and are due on October 24, 2000.

ACE is funded through two federal grants - Goals 2000 and the Technology Literacy Challenge Fund, at up to \$200,000 per grant. Economically disadvantaged school districts serve as lead agencies for these grants and collaborate with community partners, businesses, municipalities and statewide organizations such as Tech Corps New Jersey to develop, staff and plan activities at the ACE centers.

Each center will be staffed by qualified professionals after school and on weekends at public locations sites such as schools, libraries, community centers or housing complexes.

At the ACE centers, students will be able to extend their learning by:

- Completing their homework assignments
- Creating a classroom presentation program (show and tell)
- Completing a research-based activity on the internet
- Communicating with mentors (ex. e-mailing questions to a scientist)
- Teaching family members how to use technology
- Participating in group projects linked to the Core Curriculum Content Standards

Families will be able to:

- Send e-mail to their children's teachers
- Check their school and district websites
- See firsthand how children are using technology to improve their skills
- Learn to expand their technology fluency and skills
- Participate in adult training for technology-based skills.

Some examples of Round 1 ACE activities include: adapting the school technology program at Essex County Vocational Schools for family participation and operating a loaner program to make desktop computers and printers available for home use; establishing wireless networks for using laptop computers at three different ACE centers in Keansburg; and establish ACE centers at the senior citizen complex, the town recreation center and the

school's media center in North Wildwood for student and family enrichment.