

### Technology Goes Home: Connecting Families, Communities, and Schools

Kelly Faughnan from HFRP describes a program that connects families and schools in the Boston area through the mechanism of technology.

**T**echnology Goes Home (TGH) is a technology education initiative based in Boston. Sponsored by the Boston Digital Bridge Foundation and the Office of the Mayor, TGH has offered, since 1999, a 10-week, 40-hour computer training course to children and parents in low-income neighborhoods. The program has an ambitious set of goals:

- Bridging the digital divide
- Bringing family members closer together
- Strengthening low-income communities
- Improving students' academic achievement
- Increasing adults' employment skills
- Connecting parents to their children's schools

TGH helps adults prepare for employment opportunities by improving computer skills, and helps children take advantage of home computing to improve schoolwork. Through Neighborhood Technology Collaboratives, which are coalitions of community-based organizations, the program is offered in six low-income neighborhoods throughout the city. The coalitions are responsible for recruiting families, hosting the course, providing computer laboratory space, and ensuring ongoing support to families after the program ends.<sup>1</sup>

The course is available only to families that do not have a computer at home. Parents and their children must participate as teams and must attend every class together. The program's

#### MyBPS Home Connection

MyBPS, the new intranet portal for the Boston Public School District (BPS), improves communication across the entire BPS community: teachers, administrators, students, and families. The portal serves as a tool to provide and document professional development for staff, retrieve and analyze data to assess student learning, facilitate the identification of best practices in instruction, support the sharing and alignment of resources, and connect families and communities to student learning. The Home Connection, an emerging feature of MyBPS, is currently being piloted by teachers and families in the TGH@school program. By logging in to their child's classroom from home, parents can view a calendar of homework assignments, access students' work and test scores, and communicate with teachers. Teachers can also post announcements and provide parents with resources related to homework assignments.

curriculum covers a broad range of topics, including computer assembly and setup, basic operations, word processing, Internet and email use, and troubleshooting. The curriculum also features a review of career opportunities in technology.

Low-cost computers have been especially produced for course participants, in part through donations of software and hardware from major technology producers such as Microsoft, Lexmark, and Intel. After completing the course, graduating families can purchase from TGH their own home computers, software, printers, and Internet service, with the help of a special loan program sponsored by Bank of America. Of the 1,400 families that have graduated from the program to date, 35% of the adults report acquiring a new or better job and 90% say their child's schoolwork has improved.

The success of TGH led to the development of TGH@school, a school-based program for the families of fourth graders, initially piloted in 2003. Now in its third year, TGH@school has expanded to serve 20 Boston elementary and middle schools during the out-of-school time hours.

TGH@school is similar to its parent program, with the exception that the course is taught by the child's fourth grade classroom teacher and the curriculum is aligned with students' schoolwork. Parents of those enrolled in TGH@school also learn how to use the Boston Public School's Web portal, MyBPS, to stay in contact with their child's teacher. Through MyBPS parents can access their children's classroom assignments and announcements, and resources posted by the teacher. Thus far TGH@school has helped enhance family involvement in children's education, with over 80% of parents reporting that they have developed a stronger relationship both with their child's teacher and with the school in general.

The Center for Social Policy at the McCormack Graduate School, at the University of Massachusetts, conducted a multiyear evaluation of both the community- and the school-based version of TGH. Evaluation methods included site observations, focus groups with providers, and pre and postprogram participant skills assessments and feedback questionnaires. Findings<sup>2</sup> show positive outcomes in both skill development and family and community strengthening. Participants say that relationships—within their own families and with other families, as well as their connections to the community—improved after participating in the program.

For more information about Technology Goes Home and the Boston Digital Bridge Foundation go to [www.digitalbridgefoundation.org](http://www.digitalbridgefoundation.org).

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<sup>1</sup> Across the six neighborhoods, 65 community-based organizations belong to a Neighborhood Technology Collaborative.

<sup>2</sup> University of Massachusetts Center for Social Policy. (2003). Technology Goes Home evaluation: Executive summary. Boston: Author. Available at [www.mccormack.umb.edu/csp/csp\\_evalprojects.jsp](http://www.mccormack.umb.edu/csp/csp_evalprojects.jsp).