THE BORDERLINK PROJECT

A Technology Innovation Challenge Grant
1999-2004

A Review of Lessons Learned from Five Years of the BorderLink Project

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Service and Leadership

The BorderLink Project

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Select photos courtesy of James E. Kuhn, Bill Gates & Marvin Wieben

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Our Appreciation to the Graphic Communications Department at the San Diego County Office of Education.

Leveling the Playing Field

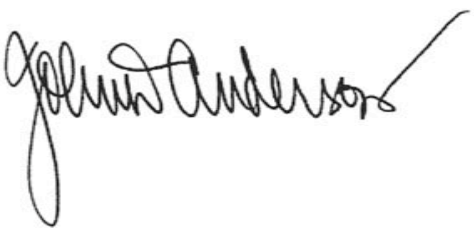
Mr. John D. Anderson
Imperial County Superintendent of Schools
Imperial County Office of Education

The BorderLink Project has offered the high schools in Imperial County the opportunity to level the playing field when it comes to college and careers. Our county consists of agricultural land, desert, and barren mountains. Our population centers are three towns, none larger than 40,000 people. Yet, the county covers an area that is bigger than some states! In other words, our students live and study in isolated areas—and they report that they sometimes feel isolated.

We knew that we needed to use the promise of advanced technology to reduce that sense of isolation. As I think back over the five years of the BorderLink Project, what comes to mind are images of activities and events that did just that: bridged distance and brought our students together with other students and knowledgeable adults.

I think of the national event, Read Across America, when I had the joy of reading a book to second graders in a school across the county without leaving my office. (We used videoconferencing.) And I am reminded of numerous professional development activities that were conducted through videoconferencing or our virtual world. Some of those teachers simply would have missed the training, if it were not for the advanced technologies, because the distances covered by the grant would have meant a 5 hour drive round-trip to attend the workshops. Our Mobile Learning Lab traveled from border to border to bring technology training to our schools. Learning opportunities are now 24/7 because of our websites, online mini-courses, and online modules.

The BorderLink Project has helped our teachers and students in amazing ways to do their jobs of teaching and learning better. It is my hope that this publication will serve to tell our story so that other districts and schools can take advantage of what we have learned over the five years of this wonderful project.



Leveling the Playing Field

Dr. Rudy Castruita
San Diego County Superintendent of Schools
San Diego County Office of Education

The BorderLink Project has used technology in innovative ways to improve learning, train teachers, and provide support to all the comprehensive high schools in neighboring Imperial County and four of the rural high school districts in San Diego County. The innovative uses of technology include videoconferencing, virtual worlds, online modules, and mobile technology vehicles. These technologies have made a difference in our schools that often face extraordinary challenges due to their remoteness and, in some cases, extremely small size. This book will describe the principal innovations that we have introduced into schools with students and teachers during the five years of the BorderLink Project.

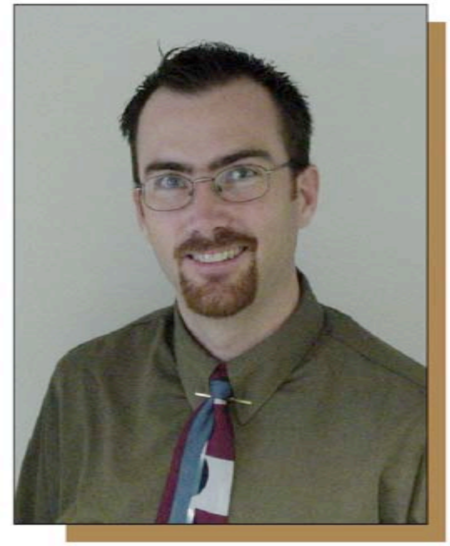
I will address one of the advanced technologies here—videoconferencing—and leave the reader to review this book for information about the other innovative approaches. Before the BorderLink Project started, videoconferencing had already gained a foothold in San Diego County. We had designed the Joe Rindone Regional Technology Center with videoconferencing capability present in every communications lab and learning lab. We had created five videoconferencing centers in suburban districts in the county. Two rural districts had already purchased videoconferencing units.

However, the BorderLink Project gave videoconferencing a real shot in the arm. Both county offices of education acquired or enhanced the capabilities of their videoconferencing bridges that exponentially expanded our ability to provide videoconferencing at great distances and to numerous simultaneous users. Both county offices have hosted frequent videoconferencing events at regional and state levels. The BorderLink Project has taken the lead in California in promoting IP videoconferencing. An astonishing 300 desktop videoconferencing units have been placed in BorderLink schools. As the project comes to an end, we are pleased that videoconferencing has become the way that we do business in San Diego and Imperial Counties.

I invite you to take a close look at this "Lessons Learned" document to get a more detailed picture of how the BorderLink Project has impacted teaching and learning through technologies.

Removing Barriers to Post-secondary Opportunities

Mr. Todd Finnell
Director of Learning Technologies
Imperial County Office of Education



I was on my way into work one morning early, when I saw a recreational vehicle pass by in the dawn light. This RV was not headed for the Colorado River or the famous Imperial sand dunes. Instead, it was headed for the local high school. It was the Mobile Learning Lab, (MLL) a remodeled RV that is filled with modern computers to transport technology to the schools and community. Our MLL has served hundreds of students and community members over the past five years, and it helps to bridge the Digital Divide.

I am pleased when I think about how the BorderLink Project has helped bridge that Divide – with the Mobile Learning Lab and with advanced technologies like videoconferencing. However, as the BorderLink Project comes to an end, one of the issues that I am most interested in is: What is our project's legacy? What has changed during the five years of the project? And what will remain when this project has ended?

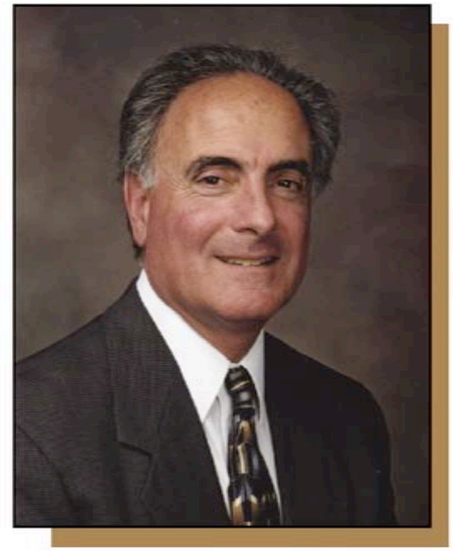
More than 50% of project teachers, administrators, and counselors have now participated in technology training. The project has served as the impetus to pull together valuable partnerships on a community-wide basis. Every school has videoconferencing capability. We have learned how to effectively support students in online courses. We have designed and presented a first-of-its-kind totally online educational technology conference. We created a 3D virtual world and used it to link students with experts and provide collaborative opportunities. We invented a special process to get teachers involved in using innovative technologies. We engaged administrators and counselors in technology use, and trained tech support staff at every school.

We leave behind a library of products for others to use. These products include online mini-courses in test preparation, videos and online modules regarding how to prepare for college, test preparation website, careers website, how to evaluate web-enhanced resources mini-course, Media Library filled with online workshops from grant writing to productivity software, and teacher-produced online lessons.

I invite you to take a look at what the BorderLink Project has accomplished and take advantage of what we have learned. You are also cordially invited to use any of our products that meet your local needs. Please enjoy the "Review of Lessons Learned from Five Years of the BorderLink Project."

Removing Barriers to Post-secondary Opportunities

Dr. Harry Bloom, Senior Director
Joe Rindone Regional Technology Center
San Diego County Office of Education



The Mission statement of the BorderLink Project is "to remove barriers to post-secondary opportunities in remote, small, rural, and isolated schools through the use of innovative technologies." Before the project started, three of the 12 schools that became BorderLink schools offered no advanced placement (AP) courses at all to their students. Another three schools had a severely limited menu of AP courses. This presented a serious "barrier" to post-secondary opportunities! Since the average freshman at many universities in California has a grade point average of over 4.0, students who attend schools that have no classes with weighted grades (where an "A" is worth 5.0 instead of 4.0), like advanced placement classes, are at a serious disadvantage when competing for college acceptance.

In addition, BorderLink schools are all very distant from the nearest large city—San Diego—with all its urban amenities. Amenities like museums. Like large university libraries. Like live theaters. Like research institutions. One BorderLink school is so distant that, for half the year, it is in a different time zone than the other project schools.

So how do you bridge distance and provide opportunities to students in remote, rural, and isolated schools? In order to remove barriers to post-secondary opportunities, we provided academic support, test preparation materials, and career guidance to students, and a unique professional development approach that offered training for administrators, counselors, board of education members, support staff, and community members, as well as classroom teachers.

Welcome to the BorderLink Project's "Lessons Learned." I hope that you will find our story useful to your own situation.

Harry Bloom

"Imperial and San Diego Counties form the entire California border between the United States and Mexico."