

# 1) Introduction

## What is the BorderLink Project?

Between 1995 and 2000, the United States Department of Education offered a grant competition for school districts called the Technology Innovation Challenge Grant. Ultimately, 100 districts across the nation were funded to seek innovative solutions through advanced technologies for some of our nation's toughest educational challenges.

In 1999, the BorderLink Project was funded at \$9.6 million over five years. The BorderLink Project worked with 12 high schools in 11 school districts located in Imperial and San Diego Counties. The Imperial County Office of Education served as the local educational agency, and management of the project was shared between the Imperial and San Diego County Offices of Education.



## Demographics

Imperial and San Diego Counties form the entire California border between the United States and Mexico. In 1999, Imperial County had the highest unemployment rate in California (33%) and, seasonally, the highest in the nation. Median income was \$14,000, 71% of students qualified for Free/Reduced Price Meals, and nearly 40% of minority children lived below poverty level. Almost 1/3 of families received welfare. Fifty percent of students scored in the bottom quartile (below 25%) on standardized test scores. Clearly, something needed to be done that reached beyond the schools and into the community. The decision was made to write a Technology Innovation Challenge Grant to include all the comprehensive high schools in Imperial County and four rural, isolated high schools in San Diego County.



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## Mission

The Mission of the BorderLink Project was to “remove barriers to post-secondary opportunities for students in remote, small, rural, and isolated schools through the use of innovative technologies.” The project goals were to provide:

- ✿ **Direct Services to Students in Academics, College Readiness, and Test Preparation.** The project provided support for students in advanced placement online courses, test preparation materials, career guidance, “college culture” materials about how to get ready for college, courses and modules through videoconferencing, educational activities in the virtual world, and special educational units created by teachers and counselors.
- ✿ **Professional Development in How to Use Advanced Technologies to Increase Student Learning Outcomes.** Technology training was provided through year-long programs, summer institutes, individual workshops, and a unique in-school training program that involved the talents and commitment of students working with teachers.
- ✿ **Infrastructure and Resources in the Schools to Support the Use of Advanced Technologies.** The infrastructure in schools includes fiber optic and microwave connections, computers to serve project goals, videoconferencing equipment in every school, desktop videoconferencing for superintendents, principals, counselors, and teachers, and access to a unique virtual world. Infrastructure can also mean people. The project has trained tech support people in every school, and provided a broad foundation of educators who use technology to support learning outcomes.

## Technology Tools

Between 1999 and 2004, the BorderLink staff provided professional development and student services through videoconferencing, three-dimensional websites (virtual worlds), on-line modules, and unique mobile labs (which literally delivered technology training to classroom doorsteps throughout both counties).



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✿ **Videoconferencing.** The BorderLink Project placed large videoconferencing units in all twelve high schools. With the “room” videoconferencing units in place, these schools could hold large group events, such as courses offered by colleges and virtual field trips. The BorderLink Project took the lead in the state of California in “IP videoconferencing.” IP videoconferencing means that the videoconferencing runs over the Internet. IP videoconferencing requires that the school have fast connections to the

Internet. The major advantage of this type of videoconferencing is cost. IP videoconferencing costs no more than the price of Internet access, once the equipment is in place! To expand access to videoconferencing, the BorderLink Project has placed about 300 desktop videoconferencing units onto the desks of teachers, administrators, tech support personnel, and counselors.

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✿ **LinkWorld.** The BorderLink Project created a three-dimensional website, a “virtual world” on the Internet. Called LinkWorld, the website combines a 3D metaphor with chat function. The LinkWorld environment was designed to replicate the geographical areas of the BorderLink Project—from the white sand dunes of Star Wars fame to the pine-covered mountains of Julian, an 1860s mining town. LinkWorld allows students and teachers to collaborate on projects at a distance, links students with experts, and provides valuable resources about academics, colleges, and careers.

✿ **Online Modules.** A wealth of online modules has emerged from the BorderLink Project. They range from online mini-courses to help students do well on college entrance exams to a series of training modules to help teachers of English Learners. In addition, online modules include the archived workshops from the project’s distinctive “Online Educational Technology Conference,” a full technology conference that was offered totally online.

✿ **Mobile Labs.** In both counties, unique motor vehicles roam the back roads and city streets, bringing technology-on-wheels to schools. These re-purposed recreational vehicles contain computers and literally “take the show on the road.” The drivers are teachers or professional developers. They provide technology activities for students and training sessions for teachers and parents at school and community sites.



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## Four Areas of Focus

The BorderLink Project has four “links” or areas of particular focus, which will be described in more detail in Section 3, *Direct Student Services*, and Section 4, *Professional Development*.

- 1) **College Readiness.** The project has trained counselors in how to use technology to help students get ready for college, created a series of “College Culture” videotapes, linked students with panels of college recruiters in LinkWorld, and produced a series of online workshops featuring recruiters from various colleges.
- 2) **Career Awareness.** To meet the needs of high school students and adults in the community, the project has produced the “Get to Work” website that presents a detailed step-by-step system for finding a satisfying job. In addition, online modules reinforce the information found in the website. The virtual world also contains career resources.
- 3) **Teaching Quality.** Sustainability was the theme when choosing the final approach to professional development. The GenYes student leadership program places students in a helping position with teachers in using technology and fixing computers. In addition, the project has produced an online conference, web-enhanced lessons, and English Learner Mentoring modules.
- 4) **Testing Preparation.** The BorderLink Project has produced a website with information about tests and a series of mini-courses to help students get ready for high school exit exams and college entrance tests. These mini-courses, as well as all websites and videos, are available for other educators to access and use free-of-charge.

## What You Will Find in This Document

All videos, websites, and mini-courses are available on the BorderLink Project’s website at [www.borderlink.org](http://www.borderlink.org).

The “College Culture” video series is also available on DVD, and the BorderLink Project’s end-of-project video is available, while supplies last. For additional information or assistance, please contact:

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