

Tech giants invest in global education reform

Initiatives focus on communication, collaboration, and technology integration

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Assistant Editor

Looking to produce their next generation of employees (and customers), technology giants such as Cisco Systems, Intel, and Microsoft are setting their sights beyond just the United States and are investing heavily in global education reform initiatives.

Developing nations such as India, Jordan, and Kenya are among the beneficiaries of these efforts, which underscore the need for U.S. schools to prepare their students for an increasingly global, information-based workforce.

Intel Corp., a company with four decades of educational reform initiatives—including the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair, the Intel Computer Clubhouse Network, and the Model School program—has incorporated its Teach program throughout many parts of India.

According to Intel, by 2011 the Teach program will have helped 13 million teachers in more than 40 countries develop new skills to incorporate technology into their curriculum.

Intel introduces the Teach program in communities that are chosen based on the strength of their commitment to the program. The company works with an initial group of teachers to help them learn 21st-century teaching methods, and these teachers then train other educators in these methods.

One teacher, B. Magdalene Premalatha, at Panchayat Union Middle School in the village of Karakottai, India, became involved with the Teach program to expand opportunities for her students. In this rural community in southern India, more than 90 percent of the population works in the agricultural industry, and a majority of families cannot afford permanent housing.

Using the project-based approach to learning emphasized by the Teach program, Premalatha's students quickly learned 21st-century skills and even gave up play time to work in the school's computer lab. The students completed a social research project on child labor, conducting research on the internet, says Premalatha.

As part of this project, students created public presentations, plays, and songs using online software, and they conducted public rallies to reach their goal of a child labor-free village. As the community began noticing these actions, major reforms took place, and "seven children regained their childhood enjoyment, their rights, and their education," says Premalatha. "Thanks to the Intel Teach program, our children are marching toward the technological era with confidence."

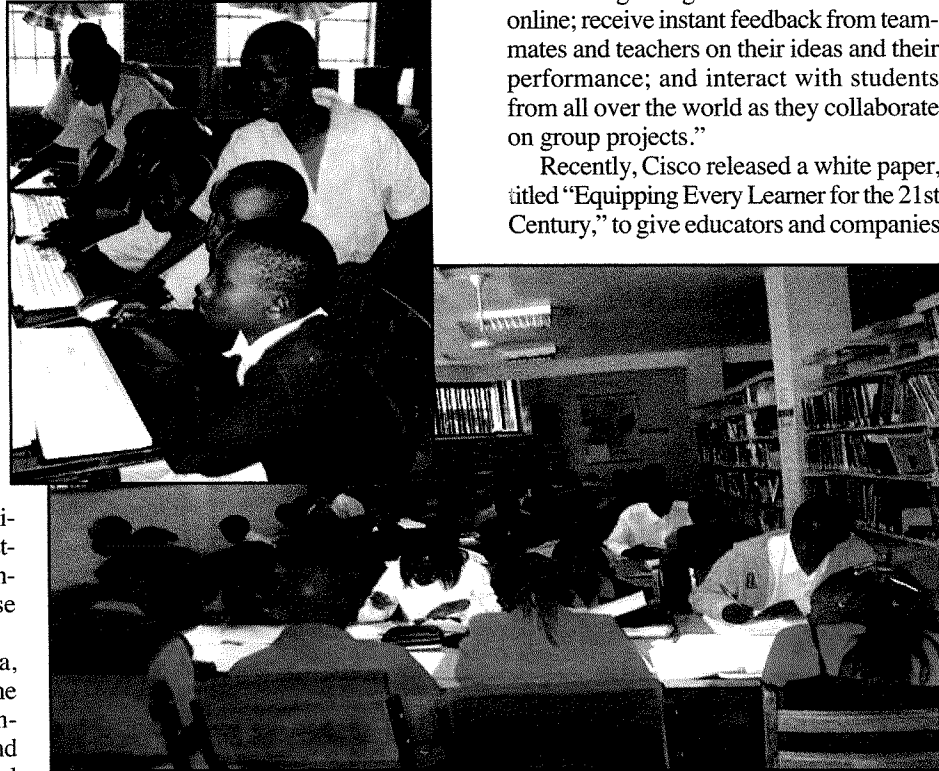
Another organization with ties in India is Curriki, a free online community for creating and sharing open K-12 curriculum resources. Through a recent partnership with Education Development Center Inc. (EDC), Curriki now offers EDC's standards-based algebra course for the middle grades, allowing teachers not only to access the curriculum free of charge, but also adapt it for use in their own classrooms.

Thanks to this partnership, Curriki has been working with Indian education officials to create a content development platform for a national education portal. India is now the second most active country in Curriki, with more than 40,000 unique visitors per month.

Soon, Curriki will work with the Ministries of Education in Mali, Senegal, Yemen, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia.

"I think [Curriki] is being so well received around the world because sharing knowledge is usually why educators go into teaching in the first place," says Peter Levy, director of strategic development for the project.

Any registered member can post content to Curriki in any language. Users are required to tag their material with metadata, such as subject, education level, language,



Students at Eming School in Nakuru, Kenya, receive 21st-century resources.

and copyright license type. Curriki also focuses on generating content that is relevant to local users by encouraging members to create highly focused groups based on their community practice or interest.

"Our vision is that every student and educator will have access to high-quality curricula aligned to frameworks to support learning," said Barbara Kurshan, executive director of Curriki. "In India, UNESCO came to us and asked us to build 150 lesson plans in science so that on any day, if a teacher is absent, his substitute can teach the subject."

Jordan Education Initiative

In Jordan, national leaders have partnered with Cisco Systems on an eLearning project called the Jordan Education Initiative (JEI). The project's mission is to create a model for effective, internet-enabled learning that can be replicated and implemented in other countries in the region—and eventually worldwide.

Cisco and its partners are helping to prepare Jordanian students for a broad range of networking and IT-related jobs in the public and private sectors, as well as for continuing their education in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines. Working with Jordanian officials, Cisco has built an internet network linking hundreds of schools to a multimedia e-mathematics curriculum, as well as Cisco Networking Academy resources.

Building on its experience with systemic school reform in Jordan, Cisco plans on joining Harvard's School of Education in engaging ministries of education, policy mak-

ers, and thought leaders worldwide in a discourse on transforming global education.

"Our vision is to transform education so that it is relevant to the needs of the 21st century," the company says. "Technology is at the right point in development and poised for broader access across developed and emerging markets. In this new environment, young people could amass a wealth of education resources in rich multimedia format; gain access to world experts in multiple disciplines; enjoy authentic learning using real-world data found online; receive instant feedback from teammates and teachers on their ideas and their performance; and interact with students from all over the world as they collaborate on group projects."

Recently, Cisco released a white paper, titled "Equipping Every Learner for the 21st Century," to give educators and companies

some basic information on global education reform.

But Michael Stevenson, vice president of global education for Cisco, says the white paper is just the beginning. In the next few months, Stevenson says, Cisco will be launching a new grassroots web site for global education reform.

Cisco isn't the only company that has invested in Jordan's education system. In August, as part of its Learning Gateway Initiative, Microsoft launched an eLearning project in Jordan called EduWave Live.

Built on Microsoft technologies, EduWave Live includes a learning management system, a content management system, an instructional management system, and a student information system.

According to Jordan's minister of education, Tayseer Alnoaimi, Jordan "has always strived to be a leader in education and IT, and His Majesty King Abdullah continually stresses his vision for Jordan to prosper into an ICT [information and communications technology] and education hub in the region."

EduWave Live is just one of several global education initiatives from Microsoft. Others include the Innovative Teacher's Forum and Microsoft's Partners in Learning program. Microsoft also recently launched two new services: Live@edu and Learning Village.

Live@edu is a free suite of online, hosted services for educational institutions that, according to Microsoft, allows for increased digital communication and collaboration between students, teachers, and staff.

Learning Village—a collaborative venture from Microsoft and Houghton Mifflin

Harcourt—is a teaching and learning portal with a single sign-on where parents, educators, and students can access and organize their schools' instructional content and learning resources.

"At Microsoft, we take a holistic and long-term approach to global education reform and are working closely with governments, educators, parents, and students around the world to develop software-and-services solutions that will increase access to high-quality education and improve learning outcomes," said Anoop Gupta, corporate vice president of Microsoft's education products group.

Kenya connects

In Kenya, more than 100 schools now have access to ePals—a free, web-based, language-translation solution that connects classrooms around the world for global projects and communication. Soon, Nakuru, in Kenya's Rift Valley Province, will be connected to include another 30,000 schools.


"Kenya [education officials] wanted their students to be connected globally, wanted them to learn tech literacy for economic development and enhance their 21st-century skills," said Tim DiScipio, co-founder of ePals.

One school, Eming Primary School in Nakuru, uses ePals to connect to classrooms in the U.S. and Germany.

Using ePals, the students exchange general information about their culture, tell stories, and ask questions.

In 1995, Eming opened in a rural part of Nakuru with no electricity. With the availability of electricity in 1997, Dan Njiriri, chief executive officer of the Tracom Group of Colleges and a member of the Kenyan ICT Trust Fund's Executive Committee, helped arrange donations of computers. Soon, the school had internet access, and students are now learning tech literacy and collaboration through programs like ePals.

"The school had dirt floors, but a computer room with [interactive] whiteboards, funded by the government," said Njiriri. "The student performance improved because of this technology—and the who's-who in town wanted their children to attend. People started coming to the town, and they built modern buildings around the school along with paved roads."

He added: "Companies like ePals are really making the world smaller. They are making the idea of a global village into a reality. It's so important to have this collaboration and communication, because if you do not know what's happening in the world, all you can do is guess, which leads to misunderstanding. If countries could just understand one another today, many of the world's problems could be solved. Children need these types of programs to help make the world a better place." 

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