

Bahamas

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Narrowing the gap between the information rich and the information poor - new technologies and the future of school

The 21st Century with its abundance of new technologies has presented us with a range of challenges and opportunities specifically in the area of educational reform.

We, in The Bahamas – an archipelagic nation of some 22 inhabited islands and a population of almost 300 thousand – (2000 census) are cognizant of the need to ensure that all students are prepared for this technological era.

Over the past decade, the Government of The Bahamas, having allocated the lion's share of the annual budget to Education has undertaken a number of initiatives which include, curriculum and examination reform, introduction of compensatory programs for at risk students, promotion of early childhood education, and computerization of primary schools.

The Bahamas Education School Technology Project (BEST) is The Bahamas' response to CARICOM's goal of maximizing the use of Information and Communication Technology in the instruction and management of education.

This project began in June 2000 with the signing of the Contractual Agreement with Fujitsu-ICL Caribbean (Bahamas) Limited at a cost of just under 10 million dollars and will be implemented over a three year period in all 110 primary schools located throughout The Bahamas.

Phase one of the three phases of the BEST project is currently underway: In seven schools, the educational environment has been revitalized. Teachers and students at the upper primary level are experiencing first hand the power of instructional software in English and Math and are accessing resources on the Internet and links to other classes and experts around the globe. Administrators are also benefiting as they can more efficiently construct and access students' records and reports, maintain attendance, health and conduct records and evaluate school performance.

By December 2001, twenty additional schools will have computer technology available in selected classrooms.

Our goal is to offer a wide range of opportunities to enable students and teachers to develop their individual potential through technology. Realizing that technology is only a means to an end rather than an end in itself, we have introduced staff training programs designed to help teachers use and integrate technology into their classrooms effectively.

The availability of high and challenging resources, relevant and vigorous curriculum and highly trained dedicated and talented teachers are key components to the success of the BEST project.

We see technology as making it possible for more of our students to achieve high academic standards and acquire life-long skills and knowledge. We believe that Technology should provide "equity in quality education" especially for students and teachers of our remote islands and cays. We hope to take advantage of its enormous benefits specifically for underachievers, under-motivated students, those with special learning needs and who may need more broad-based learning opportunities.

We see technology not only bridging the gap between the information rich and the information poor but also bringing us closer as a region and as a world.

As stated in the Education for All in the Caribbean – Plan of Action 2000-2015, the BEST project will enable us to partner with other Caribbean countries:

Establishing and sustaining Caribbean-wide EMS network,

Identifying and disseminating BEST practices

Strengthening Information and Communication Technology learning throughout the Caribbean.

We in The Bahamas welcome the opportunity to participate in training seminars, teacher exchanges, case studies and dialogue as we make good use of and exploit technology to the fullest. 