

William Norris Institute Transforms Traditional Classroom Methods into Personal, Computer-Based Instruction

Personalized, computer-based learning. That is the basis for a novel K-12 program being developed at the William C. Norris Institute in Minneapolis.

Established in 1988, the Norris Institute is a non-profit organization whose mission, according to President Bill Norris, is to "catalyze public/private cooperation to address major unmet or poorly met societal needs, which will only be adequately met through cooperation because of scarce resources."

The K-12 program is geared at achieving improvement in academic performance through a significant departure from traditional modes of instruction. "At its foundation," noted Norris at a recent Defense Manufacturing Board meeting in Binghamton, NY, "is the full implementation of an individualized computer technology-based approach."

The program, says Norris, is planned and implemented by bringing together educators, school board members, parents, teachers and other professional organizations and businesses into the K-12 Transformed Schools Consortium, or TSC.

Participating school districts are committed to working cooperatively to plan and operate a transformed school, implement the personalized, computer-based learning environment that is required, and seek external funding cooperatively to support the consortium activities.

Norris explained that the K-12 program is accomplished in a series of steps. First, new schools are established. These can be new schools within existing schools, or they can be freestanding. As a starting point, each school's program has students in three consecutive grade levels between the fourth and ninth grades, with the total number of students determined by local conditions. At least one grade level is to be added each year so that learners in the third level are provided with an ongoing program with the same

Components of the Transformed School

- *A Personalized Education Plan for each student in which*
 - parents, students and teachers all are involved in the plan's development, and
 - technology-based functions provide data and processes for the plan.
- *A Personalized Education Environment with*
 - defined learner outcomes and objectives
 - varied learning resources and activities
 - mastery learning and accountability
 - continuous progress monitoring
 - frequent progress reporting
 - use of technology as the teacher's tool to manage the processes.
- *An Evaluation Plan which gauges*
 - the learning achievement
 - effectiveness of learning resources and activities
 - validity of each personalized education plan
 - overall cost effectiveness
 - and uses technology as the primary evaluation tool.

format. Eventually, says Norris, it is anticipated that the full K-12 continuum will be in place.

"A primary feature," noted Norris, "is the multifunctional technology core, consisting of the computer hardware, software and courseware. It will essentially be the same for all participating schools in order to achieve the best learning

outcomes at the lowest costs."

Norris explained that the format of the program is built around a basic transformation from the traditional group-learning concept to individualized education. "In the new format," he said, "each student is assessed and diagnosed by a local team of teachers and the youngster's parent or parents to ascertain his or her strengths, weaknesses, needs and capabilities."

Norris noted that the program is an ongoing process, where learners follow a specialized learning plan at a pace appropriate to their capabilities. Their progress is monitored, and the plan is adjusted whenever necessary to enhance performance.

So far, the program has been focused in Minnesota because of staff limitations. Thirteen school districts are now participating, and another school is scheduled to open in September. Norris says other states have expressed interest in the concept, including Louisiana, California, Vermont and Massachusetts.



Dr. William C. Norris