

Category: Public Private Partnership

Nomination: Pennsylvania – Microsoft Strategic Technology Partnership

Executive Summary

When Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge took office in 1995, he realized that Information Technology would play a key role in shaping Pennsylvania's future. He envisioned technology as not an end in itself, but, rather as a tool to develop more effective government services, foster economic development and, above all, to benefit the lives of individual citizens across the Commonwealth.

As a major step toward realizing this vision, in 1998 the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania entered into an unprecedented agreement to standardize all state agencies on Microsoft software products for primary desktop use. As part of this agreement, Microsoft committed \$12 million in services and products to Pennsylvania's educational institutions.

This partnership created two unique training initiatives – the PA-Microsoft Authorized Academic Training Program (AATP) and the PA Microsoft Office User Specialist 2000 Training and Certification Initiative (MOUS 2000).

It is estimated that with current job openings and projected hires combined, the U.S. will require 647,000 new IT professionals in the next 12 months. Currently, the Microsoft Certified Solutions Provider Channel has 37,500 open positions in North America and 80,000 worldwide. Finding qualified individuals with the necessary skill-sets to meet demand is becoming a serious problem. Many companies have integrated certification requirements into their hiring decisions as a qualitative assessment of employee skills. For businesses, certification provides an objective, reliable benchmark to aid in hiring, promoting, and planning employee career paths, or outsourcing services and development.

a) Description of the program and relative significance to the improvement and/or efficiency of state government

Microsoft’s AATP initiative prepares students for various information technology certifications, making them more attractive for employment with local companies. AATP provides opportunities for students who otherwise might not have access to Microsoft technology training. It also prepares students for Microsoft Certified Professional exams and job opportunities as Information Technology professionals.

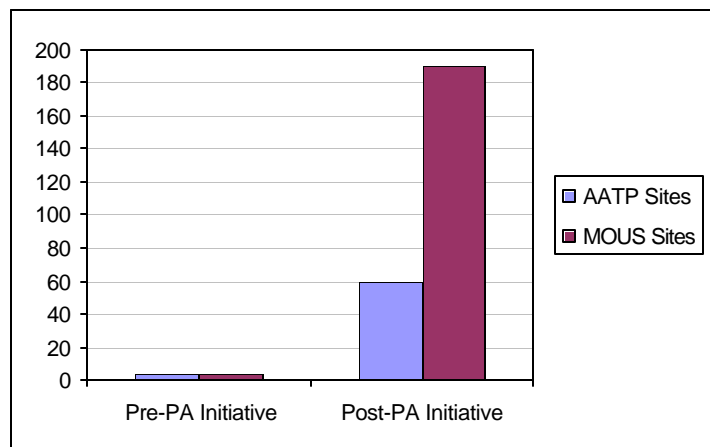
The AATP initiative is available to all secondary and post-secondary educational institutions. At these AATP sites, students receive high-level, advanced technology training and may become certified as a Microsoft Certified Professional or Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer – two highly coveted certifications in today’s marketplace. For students and prospective employees, status as a certified professional translates into enhanced job opportunities in today’s burgeoning high-tech marketplace.

PA Department of Education takes leading role

The Pennsylvania Department of Education’s goal is to have a Microsoft Authorized Academic Training Provider (AATP) site located in every corner and county of Pennsylvania. It strongly encourages institutions to set rigorous standards students must meet in order to enroll in the Microsoft Training Program. Also, it strongly encourages completion of the certification test as part of the course's final exam, and requires that in addition to coursework, students gain practical, hands-on experience either in K-12 schools or the business community as part of their coursework. In addition to a list of site requirements, an AATP must have at least one person, preferably two, trained and certified as a Microsoft Certified Professional (MCP). Certification tests are strongly encouraged in order to receive free training.

Microsoft’s AATP program began by providing free training to 300 educators in Pennsylvania and \$1.3 million in donated software to encourage their schools to become Microsoft Authorized Academic Training Providers (AATPs). This marked Microsoft's first statewide AATP partnership, and to date, there are more than 60 Pennsylvania educational institutions participating in this program in 67 counties across the state.

The PA Microsoft Office User Specialist (MOUS) 2000 program is the latest extension of the Pennsylvania-Microsoft partnership. Because most companies use Microsoft Office Suite programs, it is important that Pennsylvania’s students are trained to enter the workforce with skills to use these programs – including word processing, spreadsheets, databases, and presentations – and that



Pennsylvania's teachers are prepared to provide the necessary instruction.

This initiative is a partnership between the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the Microsoft Corporation, and their MOUS partner, Nivo International. Microsoft provided free training and over \$1.5 million in free software and licenses. Nivo International provided free testing vouchers to allow students to take the MS Office 2000 certification exams.

The MOUS initiative is a worldwide certification program designed by Microsoft to test a student's ability to use the programs in the Microsoft Office Suite, including Word (word processing), Excel (spreadsheets), Access (databases), PowerPoint (presentations) and Outlook. Currently, MOUS certifications are used by over 90% of the world's companies. It creates a reliable data exchange for intra-company or company-to-company standards. Having a certification in any or all of these Office programs demonstrates to potential employers that the prospective employee not only has been trained on that application, but has also proven their skills on an independent exam. For many employers, it takes the guessing-game out of hiring someone based upon what they have listed on a resume – it provides proof that the person has the necessary skills for the job. At the same time, MOUS helps to satisfy an organization's need for a qualitative assessment of employee skills.

Pennsylvania was the first of four states selected by Microsoft and Nivo International to pilot a statewide rollout of the MOUS Certification program. Every academic institution that participated in this initiative was required to become a Microsoft Authorized Testing Center (ATC). Once ATC status was met, the academic institution received free testing vouchers, Office 2000 training, and Office 2000 software. Since the PA MOUS program was launched in 1999, over 190 educational institutions have participated in this program and as many more expected to enroll by next year.

b) Calculation of actual savings in the short and/or long term

This partnership is not viewed primarily as a money saving proposition, though a cost-avoidance of \$12 million is significant. Rather, it viewed as an opportunity to develop a "home-grown" information technology workforce with close ties to Pennsylvania communities, and can facilitate high retention of these valuable resources. Many rural and struggling urban school districts have very few resources – funding or trained instructors – to allow for advanced IT training. As a result, their job prospects are often limited to lower-paying jobs.

c) Qualitative benefits realized by service recipients, taxpayers, agencies and/or the state

If Pennsylvania is to be successful in transforming itself from a traditional industrial state to a high-tech center, it must not only create technology jobs in Pennsylvania, but also develop a highly skilled workforce to fill those positions. While Pennsylvania has an extensive system of post-secondary educational institutions and several world-class research universities, a college education lies beyond the grasp of many Pennsylvania high school students. This puts them at a disadvantage in today's job market, which increasingly requires at least basic computer skills. Those who do not have these skills are forced to accept less-skilled and lower-paying jobs.

This is especially true for students in many rural and inter-city regions – where Pennsylvania is concentrating economic development efforts, especially in the technology fields.

The PA-Microsoft Strategic Technology Partnership provides one way to bridge this opportunity gap. The initial three-year, \$12 million grant to Pennsylvania's education community helped jump start the AATP and MOUS initiatives in Pennsylvania. Prior to the Microsoft partnership, there were only 4 AATP and MOUS sites statewide. Now, there are 60 Authorized Testing Providers (AATPs) across the state, which is very close to our goal of having at least one Testing Provider in each of Pennsylvania's 67 counties. In addition, there currently are more than 190 educational entities across the state offering MOUS certification programs, with many more planning to participate in the coming year.

d) Relevancy of use by other state, local and federal governments

Rural Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania has historically suffered some of the highest unemployment rates in the state. Its school districts had no means of providing technology training for its faculty or student body. Even when training for select faculty members was provided, it was largely wasted because its schools could not afford the software licenses. Through a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Microsoft Strategic Technology Partnership, the South Huntingdon School District was able to install Microsoft Office on over 100 computers district-wide. Now teachers are capitalizing on their training and introducing technology into the classrooms and their curriculum. The District is now preparing to participate in the PA-MOUS program to offer advanced training and certification in the basic Microsoft Office suite programs to better prepare their students for enhanced job opportunities.

Upper Darby High School, located in the greater Philadelphia metropolitan area, has established an Authorized Testing Center and participates in the MOUS program. It started small, but soon had to expand because of overwhelming student demand. Its Authorized Testing Center was established in January 2001 and 14 students have become certified in one or more Microsoft Office products. Word processing, spreadsheet and presentation software products are made available for student and faculty use in class instruction and assignments. The Upper Darby High School currently has 400-450 students learning and using these Microsoft Office components. School officials expect this number of users and certificate holders to greatly increase across the entire school district for the 2001-2002 school year.

Reporting the number of schools participating in training and certification programs is easy. Tracking the number of students receiving software training, MOUS certificates and students receiving professional certification is also well within our grasp. Fully quantifying the overall benefits of the Strategic Technology Partnership is more tenuous. School districts across the state – rural and urban, affluent and economically-depressed – are now able to offer their students opportunities to not only become proficient in using the Microsoft Office suite, making them better prepared for jobs across all sectors, but also to certify as them as Microsoft Certified Professionals or Microsoft Certified Systems Engineers. Students with professional certificates are qualified for high-tech jobs right out of high school. This means that students who previously had very limited employment prospects now can be qualified for a whole new job-set, one which is in very high demand and pays well.

This partnership between Microsoft and the Pennsylvania education community is helping to achieve Governor Ridge's vision of using technology to help make Pennsylvania a world leader. The Strategic Technology Partnership is providing Pennsylvania students with the training and tools necessary to harness the potential of information technology to provide better government services at all levels, promote economic development, and above all, improve the prospects of the Commonwealth's citizens. These benefits are priceless.