



United States Department
of Agriculture

5975 Lakeside Boulevard
Indianapolis, Indiana 46278

Phone: 317.290.3100
TDD: 317.290.3343
Fax: 317.290.3095
www.rurdev.usda.gov/in/index.html

News Release

Contact: Kelly M. Barmann

USDA SUPPORTS WILSON EDUCATION CENTER DISTANCE LEARNING PROJECT

Madison (#04-02; 10-15-2003): USDA Rural Development announced recently that the Wilson Education Center in Charlestown has been awarded a \$500,000 grant to expand its innovative distance learning efforts. The Center will use the funding to purchase a mobile videoconferencing unit for each of 22 junior high middle schools and a desktop unit for 15 elementary schools served by the Wilson Education Center.

Gregg Delp, USDA Rural Development Community Programs Director for Indiana, presented a check today for the Distance Learning Technology grant to Larry Risk, Executive Director of the Wilson Education Center, at the Madison Consolidated Schools facility. Joining Risk to celebrate receipt of this funding were school superintendents from across southeastern Indiana whose students will now enjoy enhanced access to distance learning opportunities. The Wilson Education Center was one of only 57 educational projects nationwide selected by USDA in this latest round of distance learning technology funding.

Delp said, "Distance learning brings the world to the smallest, most isolated school. The possibilities for learning using this technology are limited only by our own imagination. Congratulations to Mr. Risk and the school superintendents for their foresight in using this amazing technology to further their commitment to academic excellence."

The project will build upon the success of the Distance Learning Lab and Conference Center that is already operational at the Wilson Education Center. The project also represents a groundbreaking

accomplishment in Indiana in that it will be the first time that one of the state's education service centers will share distance learning capability with all of its members.

Risk added, "We are excited about receiving this grant because it builds on the modeling we've been doing in distance learning and gives our member junior high and elementary schools the ability to share two way interactive video capabilities with each other throughout the 12 county area and beyond. Further, it builds on the 58 sites where we installed equipment two years ago with the first USDA grant including all the high schools and the 27 elementary schools in the 12 county region."

The Center's distance learning project will especially help rural schools in southeastern Indiana by providing them a unique opportunity, for example, to visit museums, tour companies, or go to historical sites without ever having to leave their school room using this real time, interactive video conferencing. Teachers will benefit directly too through professional development activities provided by videoconferencing between the schools and the Center giving them access to national or international educators.

Dr. Mike Bushong, Superintendent of Jennings County Schools and the Chairman of the Wilson Education Center Governing Board, said, "This grant adds a new dimension to the Wilson Education Center's services and brings additional value added benefits to our member school corporations."

The Wilson Education Center is one of nine statewide education service centers providing leadership and support to schools. The Center serves 162 schools, 27 public school corporations, 14 private/parochial schools, and 75,000 students in 12 counties in southeastern Indiana.

Single family home loans, rural rental housing, water and waste water facility funding, business and industry loans, and community facility loans and grants are financial resources available from USDA Rural Development.