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Minnesota — Rural Utilities Service

# Regional Collaboration

## IASC in Northern Minn. uses grants funds to boost distance learning

### Outline Of Need:

The Itasca Area Schools Collaborative was looking to expand and improve its network of distance learning technology in 21 school districts throughout North Central Minnesota.

### How Rural Development Helped:

Through its Distance Learning & Telemedicine grant program, Rural Development provided two grants totaling \$1 million.

### The Results:

It's a normal day in Maureen Morrow's Spanish class at Deer River High School in Northern Minnesota. Ms. Morrow is teaching students new words. Students are repeating each word, trying their best to pronounce each one correctly and eventually use it in a phrase.

It seems like your typical high school Spanish class, except for the three large, high-definition television screens at the front of the classroom. Students in classrooms at schools in Remer and Nashwauk-Keewatin are on the screen. They're getting the same lesson from Ms. Morrow as the students in Deer River. They're responding to Ms. Morrow's questions and interacting with students at each of the three locations, all in real time.

It's called a telepresence classroom, and it allows rural schools to offer educational opportunities that otherwise might not be available.



Students at Deer River High School use distance learning technology financed by USDA.

USDA Rural Development State Director Colleen Landkamer visited Deer River High School and Ms. Morrow's class on March 28 to award the [Itasca Area Schools Collaborative](#) (IASC) two grants totaling \$1 million to expand its telepresence network. IASC will use the grants to install distance learning technology in 21 schools in North Central Minnesota. The technology will result in additional courses, more educational opportunities, a video repository, more ability to share resources, and training and collaboration opportunities for staff.

"This type of technology prepares kids for a 21st century world," IASC chair Matt Grosse said. "It helps them contribute to what is becoming a global society."

There's only one student from Nashwauk-Keewatin participating in Ms. Morrow's Spanish class. Without the distance learning technology, that student would not be able to enroll in a Spanish class because it would have been cancelled due to lack of interest.

"That's a good illustration of the power of this type of program," Grosse said. "This student had no other options for a Spanish class without this. We need to find ways to ensure these opportunities for kids."

There are over 300 Native American students enrolled in Deer River High School. The technology also will be used to teach Native American language and cultural courses throughout the region. IASC hopes to add about 17 more courses overall.

Distance learning technology allows rural schools to provide many of the same opportunities found in urban schools. It also helps schools mitigate the impact of budget reductions on students and classrooms.

"We're strongest as individual districts when we're stronger together," Grosse said.

## Fast Facts

**Program:** Distance Learning & Telemedicine Grant

**Investment:** \$1 million DLT grant

**Partners:** IASC, 21 school districts, Blandin Foundation

**Congressional District:** MN—7 & 8

### Demographics:

- North Central Minnesota

### Impact:

- Increase educational opportunities
- Mitigate negative impact of budget reductions
- Improve staff collaboration and access to course material

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April 2012