



For immediate release
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Growing number of school boards connect to ORION network

TORONTO – Three new Ontario school boards – representing about 140,000 students – are the latest institutions to connect to the Ontario Research and Innovation Optical Network (ORION). As an ultra high-speed fibre optic network, ORION connects students, teachers and staff to their peers and colleagues across Ontario, Canada and around the world.

The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board and the Greater Essex County District School Board join a growing number of boards across Ontario connecting to ORION. More than 950,000 Ontario students in 20 school boards now have access.

“ORION will provide an opportunity to access several educational resources, information services, and content management systems at a higher data rate and lower cost than is practical today,” says Dave Miller, Manager of the Ottawa-Carleton board’s Business and Learning Technologies Department. The OCDSB is the largest public school district in eastern Ontario, with over 70,000 students. “As every computer in the OCDSB is connected to the Internet, our students and staff will all have equitable, reliable access to innovative education sites from member sites on ORION, in addition to those available via the commercial Internet. This will facilitate intra-board digital connectivity in a more robust and cost-effective manner than is currently practical using the existing access methods, which will enhance all member boards’ 21st century learning strategies.”

Virtual communities and resources are connecting students, teachers and schools to each other and to partners across Canada and around the world, creating dynamic and exciting interactive learning and teaching environments.

“More and more school boards are starting to recognize the value proposition in joining ORION, and it’s great to see more sign up,” says Phil Baker, ORION President and CEO. “ORION is an important part of supporting innovation in education and for bringing Ontario classrooms into the 21st century with the latest technological advances.”

“The Greater Essex County District School Board is looking forward to exploring the benefits of being part of the ORION network,” says Mary Guthrie, Chief Information Officer. “One of our important goals is to more effectively engage students in their learning, and we believe that the opportunities afforded to us by ORION will help us meet that goal in a significant way.”

“The Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board looks forward to discovering the wonderful learning opportunities that lie ahead for the education of our children for the future,” says Rose Mousaly, Chief Information Officer. “We know that the full potential of this network is an untapped area for us that will require exploring. By joining ORION we have opened up another dimension for our students where they will engage with others across the world and therefore those possibilities are now limitless.”

Schools find value in connecting to ORION to enjoy lightning-fast connection to online digital libraries and multimedia repositories, and enhanced quality videoconferencing. With enhanced videoconferencing capabilities, schools can participate in special programs such as VROC (Virtual Researcher On Call), which brings scientists into the classroom to engage with students in real time on a range of topics. Several research and cultural institutions offer specialized videoconference programs to K-12 students, including the Canadian Museum of Nature, Environment Canada, Canadian Space Agency, and the Royal Ontario Museum.

Another exclusive learning resource available to all schools connected to ORION is the new ORION-Shaw Project, which offers digitized works by and about playwright George Bernard Shaw, including annotated notes, scholarly essays and grade-specific study guides developed by the Shaw Festival for classroom use.

Schools also use ORION for professional development opportunities. ORION recently teamed up with Advanced Broadband Enabled Learning (ABEL) at York University to present the ORION-ABEL Webcasts, a series of training webcasts for teachers to learn about specific teaching and learning technologies and how to incorporate them into the classroom. Through ORION, these webcasts are now available to anyone with an Internet connection. ABEL offers a suite of professional development tools and opportunities focused on teaching with technology.

ORION also collaborated with ABEL and several Ontario school boards to bring the Interactive Author Session to five Ontario high schools, featuring award-winning Canadian author Lawrence Hill connecting live over videoconference link on his latest novel, *The Book of Negroes*.

About ORION

The Ontario Research and Innovation Optical Network (ORION), a not-for-profit organization, is Ontario's ultra high-speed research and education network which connects all of Ontario's universities, most colleges, several medical and other public research facilities and a growing number of school boards to one another and to the global grid of research and education networks. Stretching 5,800 kilometres over 21 communities throughout Ontario, ORION connects over one million Ontario researchers, scientists, students, teachers and staff to critical infrastructure for research, education and innovation. Visit www.orion.on.ca.

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