



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Ontario students hook up to hyper-fast digital network – “vital tool for future quality education”

TORONTO - As students begin the new school year, several thousands will be joining the nearly 750,000 Ontario students with ultra high-speed access to ORION, one of the world's fastest and most advanced optical networks, bringing next-generation teaching and learning to classrooms across Ontario.

Three new boards are joining the Ontario Research and Innovation Optical Network (ORION), an Ontario success story that allows Ontario schools to connect to a world-leading advanced network that can support the new digital and multimedia-based curriculum being introduced in schools here at home and throughout the world.

The Waterloo Region District School Board, one of Ontario's largest boards with over 56,000 students, is the latest to join ORION. The Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board and the Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Catholic District School Board, representing nearly 50,000 students combined, are joining the network in a few weeks.

“Technology has forever transformed education and the way we teach and learn. We need to prepare our students for the new global economy, and ORION is a vital tool to ensure Ontario has the means to deliver high quality education so necessary for our future,” says ORION President/CEO Phil Baker.

ORION provides connection speeds that are 100 to 1,000 times faster than standard Internet. Thanks to ORION, students and teachers have access to programs and resources that would not be readily available to them, such as live high-quality interactive videoconferences with experts and mentors, and access to multimedia learning objects and resources.

“ORION helps address a critical need for school boards that require a high-speed infrastructure in order to prepare students with the necessary skills for the digital world that we live in today,” says Ron Plaizier, Chief Information Officer of the Kawartha Pine Ridge board. “Interactive, multimedia content is being introduced to the Ontario curriculum at a rapid rate, requiring stable and reliable access to new standard tools and resources, such as advanced videoconferencing, that provide students with access to distant resources and expertise,” says Plaizier.

“We are very excited at the prospect of connecting our students to the ORION network,” said Sean Heuchert, Manager of Information Technology at Peterborough's Catholic school board. “This resource will put our students at the cutting edge and give them access to learning opportunities never before possible.”

“We are enjoying the improved access to Internet resources,” said Mark Carbone, Assistant Manager, IT Services, at the Waterloo Region board. “The bandwidth increase has been a significant improvement for the staff and students in our Board.”

A total of 16 boards now connect to ORION, which is moving closer to its goal of providing all of Ontario's 1.9 million K to 12 students with access to the network and the special resources and capabilities that it enables, including innovative learning programs from the Canadian Space Agency, the Royal Ontario Museum, the Royal Conservatory of Music and more.

Technology and next-generation network tools and resources are changing profoundly the world of learning. One classroom in Dryden recently used ORION to participate in a live, remote knee surgery conducted at Mount Carmel West Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. The Royal Conservatory of Music relies on ORION and advanced networks to provide real-time music lessons.

Several ORION-connected schools participate in the annual global Megaconference Jr., linking schools and students from all over the world. Boards can access unconstrained bandwidth to participate fully in such innovative programs as the Virtual Researchers on Call (VROC) and Advanced Broadband Enabled Learning (ABEL) programs. School boards gain the ability to share a high-bandwidth platform with other boards to collaborate and share resources and achieve savings and efficiencies.

ORION made it easier for more school boards to connect to the network by adjusting its access fees to encourage more of Ontario's 72 school boards to connect. "We responded to the education community, who asked that we look at our fees to make sure they are not a barrier to connecting to ORION," says Baker.

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 connecting all of Ontario's universities, most colleges, several teaching hospitals 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. Learn more at www.orion.on.ca.

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