

Massachusetts NetDay

Massachusetts businesses and educators, inspired by the California effort, came together to help schools in their Commonwealth. Many of these people, long committed to education technology, saw an opportunity for higher visibility and success. They wanted to provide help not only in wiring but also with PCs, network hardware, and support for teachers.

Such help is urgently needed, because the full promise of the Internet is far from being realized in Massachusetts classrooms (and indeed in schools throughout the country). According to a GAO report, two-thirds of the state's elementary and secondary schools lack computers to meet current instructional needs. Existing computers are often slow and obsolete, and only 20 percent of the computers in Massachusetts schools have hard disks. Teacher training and development have also fallen behind technological advances.

Education, labor, and business groups have come together to form MassNetworks, which is a campaign to help Massachusetts schools. MassNetworks provides the foundation for a statewide partnership—consisting of a broad coalition of business, education, labor, nonprofit institutions, and government organizations—to use technology to support school reform.

The goals of MassNetworks are: to coordinate Massachusetts NetDays by acting as a clearinghouse for donations and volunteer work; to support teachers, principals, and students at all schools, and to help them use this technology effectively; to create public support for long-term school reform; and to form an alliance of business, labor, government, and education groups to accomplish these goals.



Marilyn Strasser (cq), a Pacific Bell Pioneer of America volunteer, lays wiring down before it can be fed into the classrooms for link-up to the Internet. Strasser was one of approximately 66 people from the Sacramento community and businesses to volunteer for NetDay '96 on March 9, 1996.

This ambitious effort, the largest of its kind to date, will require large private-sector contributions to succeed. Over the next year and a half, thousands of volunteers will be mobilized at hundreds of schools. These volunteers will install wiring and computers to give students and teachers access to computers, the Internet, and the World Wide Web. Teachers will begin to receive the support and training they need.

The first event of MassNetworks is a NetDay on Saturday, October 26, 1996. On that day, Massachusetts pilot schools will have wiring infrastructure installed. Many more schools will receive other types of help as needed, such as teacher support, computer and network hardware, and technical advice.

The many tasks associated with MassNetworks are divided among working groups coordinated by members of the schools and business communities. These groups are responsible for tasks such as Web site administration, local site preparation and wiring plans, volunteer mobilization and training, outside wiring and connections, and teacher training and professional development.

To fulfill these goals, MassNetworks needs a budget of \$3 million, including in-kind equipment, tools, and services. The organizers, who regard this effort as the beginning of a long-term school improvement initiative, are also working for passage of an education technology bond bill to provide the required support.