LB&FC Report on The Status of Project Link-to-Learn and Other Educational Technology Initiatives

Report Highlights

LEGISLATIVE BUDGET AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

Background: In 1996, the Governor proposed and the General Assembly approved funding for a comprehensive educational technology initiative known as "Project Link-to-Learn (L2L)." This initiative provided targeted state funding to expand and improve the technology infrastructure of Pennsylvania schools and to train teachers to use these technologies in the classroom. Link-to-Learn funding is administered by the Department of Education's Office of Educational Technology.

Findings: (See pages S-1 through S-8)

➢ *1. Total State Funding*. Between FY 1996-97 and FY 2002-03, the Department of Education awarded a total of $231.0 million in state General Fund monies to PA schools for five separate, but related, components of the L2L Initiative:

	Total	% of Total
Basic Education........	$155.9M	67.5%
Higher Education......	29.9	12.9
Nonpublic Schools....	29.8	12.9
Digital Schools..........	12.8	5.5
Tech. Leadership Academies..............	2.6	1.2
Total	$231.0M	100.0%

➢ *2. Funding Status*. L2L funding, in all but one of its forms, appears to have ended with the FY 2002-03 appropriations. With the exception of Technology Leadership Academies, no other component of L2L was included in the Governor's FY 2003-04 budget. New technology initiatives may be forthcoming under the Governor's "Plan for a New Pennsylvania."

➢ *3. Implementation Measures*. During the 4-year basic education entitlement grant phase of the project, L2L grant monies were used to purchase more than 22,000 computers and connect nearly 45,000 classrooms to the Internet. In FY 1998-99, for example, an estimated 800,000 students benefited from technology acquisition, and teachers received 835,408 hours of computer training. L2L also funded computer acquisition and training in nonpublic schools, supported competitive "Students Achieving Standards" grants, established 6 separate technology initiatives at higher education institutions, funded the creation of 3 "Digital School Districts," and sponsored "Technology Leadership Academies" for school principals, superintendents, and school board directors.

➢ *4. Evaluation of Impact*. The Office of Educational Technology does not have a formal evaluation unit and, to date, relatively little formal research has been conducted on the actual results of L2L and other initiatives, especially in terms of their impacts on student achievement. However, as the primary educational technology initiative available to PA schools, L2L has played an important role in fostering the development and expansion of the state's educational technology infrastructure and improving institutional resources and methods for both students and teachers.

➢ *5. PA Compared to National Measures*. PA ranks slightly better than the national average on computer intensity and several other benchmarks that are used to judge the progress of technology use in the nation's public schools. "Computer intensity" is the ratio of the number of students per instructional use computer. PA improved its computer intensity index from 11.7 students per computer in FY 1996-97 to 3.5 students per computer in FY 2001-02. The national average index in FY 2001-02 was 3.8 students per computer.

➢ *6. New Federal Funding*. Funding for educational technology provided under the No Child Left Behind Act will, at least partially, offset the elimination of state L2L funding. In FY 2001-02, the first year of this funding, 558 Pennsylvania schools received a total of $11.0 million in federal formula grants and 87 "high need" schools received $10.8 million in competitive grants.

Recommendations: (See page S9.)

The Department of Education should:

1. Revise the State Education Technology Plan as necessary, to reflect the phase-out of the L2L Initiative, the initiation of new federal funding, and any new technology initiatives that may result from the Governor's "Plan for a New Pennsylvania."

2. (a) Ensure that all technology grant programs contain an evaluation component; and (b) employ research-based practices to evaluate the effectiveness of educational technology initiatives in terms of their impact on student achievement.