

I. Project Purpose

We propose *CyberParents*, a Technology Opportunity Program that will provide direct services to 60 parents from seven Appalachian Kentucky school systems. Forward in the Fifth's *CyberParents* Technology Opportunity Program places network technology and information resources in the homes of parents, builds Forward in the Fifth's capacity for technology, teaches parents how to effectively use technology and assists parents in using technology to organize other parents to advocate for improved schools.

Problem to be Addressed: *Educationally and economically disadvantaged parents from Appalachia are not involved in their children's schools.*

Low-income students in our defined area—the Appalachian Kentucky counties of Estill, Jackson, Lee, Madison, Owsley and Rockcastle—are not meeting state academic standards. Appendix A, Table 4 shows core content subject assessment data from our 38 partnering schools in this region.ⁱ Students who receive free and/or reduced price lunch - the low-income children whose parents our program will serve, disaggregate the data. This data clearly shows that our low-income students are failing to achieve at high levels. Research shows a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and benefits for student, including improved academic achievement.ⁱⁱ

One of the most difficult tasks faced by our schools is developing educational institutions responsive to the needs of Appalachian families. Physical barriers, from a lack of transportation and child care to long daily commutes to school, along with cultural barriers from schools where the curriculum and academic environment are alien to the rural poor, have prevented the rural poor from taking advantage of educational opportunities and have perpetuated a condition of under education and powerlessness in distressed communities.ⁱⁱⁱ

Many of our families live on unpaved roads that are barely passable during inclement weather. Some of their children spend two or more hours per day simply riding school buses to and from school. This geographic isolation is intensified when you consider that many of our parents do not have the capability to communicate via technology. The number of homes in our community that do not have telephones illustrates this.

% of Homes Without Telephones (2000 Census)

Estill County	9.9%
Jackson County	7.4%
Lee County	15.0%
Madison County	4.2%
Owsley County	12.5%
Rockcastle County	10.4%
Kentucky	4.7%
United States	2.4%

It is important to note that the data on homes without telephones is not skewed by the presences of mobile telephones. Due to the mountainous terrain of Appalachia, mobile phones work consistently in only Madison County.

When parents talk to their children about school, expect them to do well, help them plan for college and make sure that out-of-school activities are constructive; their children do better in school.^{iv} Parents from high-poverty Appalachian backgrounds need more assistance and guidance than other parents. They are less likely to seek help or even know what questions to ask. They require a special approach by schools, counselors and teachers. Often

low-income parents do not realize that they have the right to become engaged in their child’s education (see Appendix B for further discussion of these cultural barriers).

Statistics from our defined region confirm significant gaps in schools’ abilities to engage and involve parents—both as supporters of their children’s schooling and in school governance and planning (see Appendix C, Participation of Parents in School Governance). We talked with our school level contacts about the parents who do participate in our school and in their experience, the parents in our community who are involved in the schools are typically middle-class parents who had successful school experiences. Schools indicate that very few low-income parents participate in school activities and it is the children of these parents who need their involvement the most. **We seek to organize these low-income parents through our *CyberParents* program.**

Most of the people who live here are poor. In Owsley County, one community we will serve with this program, more than half of the children live in poverty.

Families Living in Poverty

	Six-County Region	State	United States
% of families living in poverty	17.9%	12.7%	9.6%
% of children living in poverty	26.3%	20.5%	17.1%

Parents here are educationally disadvantaged—low educational attainment goes hand-in-hand with the poverty. Educational attainment figures from the 2000 Census comparing 15 southern states place Kentucky 14th out of 15 in the percentage of people with a high school diploma and 13th of 15 in the percentage of people with four or more years of college.^v

Educational Attainment

	Six-County Region	State	United States
% with less than a high school diploma	34.3%	25.9%	18.4%
% with bachelor’s degree or higher	14.9%	17.1%	25.1%

Additional demographic data, as well as data citations, can be found in Appendix A.

Credible Solution: *Network technology and information resources provide a realistic and effective mechanism for addressing the lack of parental engagement by economically and educationally disadvantaged parents.*

Effective programs to engage families and community embrace a philosophy of partnership. The responsibility for children’s educational development is a collaborative enterprise among parents, school staff, and community members.^{vi}

Recognizing this, Forward in the Fifth developed its Improving Schools from the Grassroots Leadership Development Program for parents. Our leadership program is designed for low-income parents with limited formal education and prepares these parents for leadership roles in educational improvement efforts (see Appendix D for a program overview). There are 185 parents from our region who have completed, or are currently completing, this intensive program. The parents engaged in this program are the type of parents we want engaged in our schools. Among our participants we have several nonreaders, many parents who dropped out of school before 9th grade and several more who have never worked outside the home. Our leadership program provides them with a nonthreatening way to learn about their child’s school and to become involved in a school system that may have been unkind to them.

As they complete our leadership program, parents are asking for ways to continue their involvement. Specifically they are seeking additional training from Forward in the Fifth staff, continued communication with other participants in their and in other communities. They also stress the importance of the program and refer other parents to us.

The proposed *CyberParents* Technology Opportunity Program provides an opportunity for 60 of these parents to become more involved in their community and their schools and enables them to empower and train other parents. Each *CyberParent* will be provided with a computer, printer, Internet access (with basic phone service if necessary), email accounts and technology training. The technology associate will work with each parent to develop a technology training plan and timeline that meets the individual parent's learning goals. Our communications associate will work with the parents and assist them in developing a communication plan. The communication plan will outline how the *CyberParents* will reach other low-income parents, how they are going to disseminate important information about the school and the education system and how they are going to convey parent's concerns to teachers and school personnel. The technology plan and the communication plan will be mutually supportive.

Through *CyberParents* we will have 60 skilled communicators in our communities who have a strong desire to see that low-income parents have the opportunity to become involved in our schools and that the voice of all parents is heard. *CyberParents* will enable us to offer our leaders expanded learning opportunities and will increase the number of parents that we can empower as advocates for better education for their children.

Realistic, Measurable Outcomes Expected

The following outcomes are expected from the *CyberParents* program.

Short-Term Outcomes

- 60 low-income parents who have completed the Improving Schools from the Grassroots Leadership Development program will become *CyberParents*.
- 100% of the *CyberParents* will establish individual technology and communication plans and timelines along with technology learning goals.
- 80% of the *CyberParents* (48 parents) will achieve their individual technology learning goals within the time period.
- An advisory committee, with at least two end-users among its membership, will advise and continually refine and evaluate the *CyberParents* program to ensure the program is working in coordination with other parent involvement initiatives and is responsive to the needs of the end-users and the larger community of parents.

Medium-Term Outcomes

- The number of parents who participate in school governance at the schools where *CyberParents* are active will increase by 25%.
- The number of low-income parents who participate in parent-teacher conferences will increase by 25% at schools where *CyberParents* are active.

Long-Term Outcomes

- Academic achievement of low-income students at schools where *CyberParents* are active will show a 10% decrease in the novice and a 10% increase in the proficient category.

See Appendix E for more information on this project's measurable objectives as they are linked to community needs and project activities.

II. Innovation/Untested Strategy

The design team did extensive research before designing this project. Our team understood the causal relationship between lack of parent involvement and low student achievement and made the decision early on to focus on the problem of lack of parent involvement. Computers and Internet access have been placed in the homes of low-income persons to offer adult learning and to improve student achievement, however, **we have located no projects that place computers in the homes of parents with the express purpose of increasing parent involvement.**^{vii}

The lessons learned by the Middle Schools Online project that placed computers and technology into homes influenced our program design.^{viii} The following recommendations from Middle Schools Online have been incorporated into our project design:

- Assess the effect that computers have on parents (e.g., increased attendance at PTA meeting, enhanced communication between parents and teachers).
- Have separate staff perform the training and technical support functions.
- Prepare formal agreements with participating families.
- Anticipate the need to provide training in basic computer skills.
- Develop a schedule of parent meetings, partner meetings, home visits and key milestones at the beginning of the project.

Our project is innovative in that we are placing the technology in the homes of individuals who have shown commitment to the issue of parent involvement and who have a working relationship with our organization and our partners. According to our research, prior grantees were placing the computers in the homes of individuals that they had not worked with previously. By working with parents that have successfully completed our leadership program, which requires an extensive time commitment from participants, we will avoid some of the communication and accountability problems prior grantees have experienced. Our participants know that we have very high expectations and that we demand a high level of accountability. In return, our participants have the same high standards for our organization and partners.

Lessons to be Learned: Technology as a Tool for Social Change

The best practices of community building see residents as active change agents rather than passive beneficiaries or clients. The best practices of community technology see residents as active producers of community content rather than passive consumers.^{ix}

CyberParents recognizes the power of technology and how once mastered this technology will lead to important community change. We have an eager group of grassroots community members who are ready to master the tool of technology and use it to improve their schools and their communities. Our project will serve as a model for using technology to organize from the grassroots. The lessons we learn can be applied to organizing community members around parent involvement as well as other social justice issues.

Community Involvement/Effective Partnerships

Our primary partners in this program are the seven schools systems that serve the children of Estill, Jackson, Lee, Madison, Owsley and Rockcastle Counties and the parents of these children. Forward in the Fifth has worked with these school systems and parents since 1986. We have an organized local affiliate in each community that provides parents and other community members an avenue for working collaboratively with schools for school improvement. Research has shown that community organizing around education issues contributes to these positive changes in schools.^x

Since 1986, Forward in the Fifth has worked with community members and parents to advocate for stronger and better schools. We have been able to do this work effectively and maintain a positive working relationship with the schools. Our schools recognize the importance of parent involvement and have joined us as we seek to empower and engage parents. This program complements and greatly expands the work we have been doing with our parents. Our partners fully support the *CyberParents* project as evidenced by their willingness to financially support the project.

Recent Collaborations

Our most recent collaboration with our seven partner schools is the comprehensive Forward in the Fifth Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC) program. This federally funded program is targeted to reach 6,000 low-income parents each year from this six-county area. Key components are described in Appendix F.

The PIRC work complements our *CyberParents* program and will provide a strong foundation for our *CyberParents* project. Parents who participate in PIRC activities will be encouraged to continue their involvement through the *CyberParents* program and *CyberParents* will use PIRC activities to reach more parents.

The Forward in the Fifth Technology Opportunity Program is supported by a diverse group of partners who are individually and collectively committed to the program's success. The letters of support in Appendix G illustrate each partner's individual commitment to the program. Each partner is a member of the Forward in the Fifth PIRC Advisory Committee. At a PIRC Advisory Committee meeting, the Committee agreed unanimously to provide this detailed individual and collaborative support of the TOP *CyberParents* Program.

Maintaining Partnerships

The Project Director will work with the founding partners to establish an Advisory Committee. A primary role of the Committee will be to ensure that the Technology Opportunity Program works collaboratively with other agencies and organizations that are serving our region. An active advisory council will ensure that the TOP does not duplicate or supplant existing services to members of our community.

The Committee will also provide an avenue for diverse perspectives to be heard and to influence the operation of the program. Community members from the following groups have committed to serve on the Committee: social service agencies, post-secondary institutions, parents, the faith community, private nonprofit organizations, school personnel and the business community. Once the program is running, the program's end users will select two representatives for the Committee. The Committee will meet quarterly, set policy, refine and evaluate programs, recruit participants and provide guidance to the project staff.

Community Involvement

Our community has been involved in project design and planning. Our school partners are very supportive of the project and have committed assistance in implementation including the use of their computer laboratories for training. They have been engaged via e-mail and phone communications as we have refined the project design.

End Users' Demand for the Project

It was requests from our end users that led us to design the *CyberParents* program. Our primary end users are the parents who have completed our Improving Schools from the Grassroots Leadership Development program. They are the same parents that came to us after the conclusion of their leadership training and asked for additional learning and communication opportunities. They were particularly interested in ways that they could

continue networking with the parents that were in their class and with other parents from the larger region.

Support for End Users

Our end users are educationally and economically disadvantaged parents from Appalachian Kentucky. We expect our end users to have no computer or technology skills and will begin our program with user-friendly basic skills courses. As our users' comfort and skill levels increase we will provide more advanced technology training opportunities. The technology associate will work with each end user to develop an individualized technology training plan and timeline. We also expect many of our end users to have no basic phone service. We will work with local providers to provide basic phone service to these users.

Our program technician will provide technical support. The technician will be responsible for installing equipment for the end users and troubleshooting any technical problems with end users. The program technician will also be responsible for establishing and maintaining the Forward in the Fifth server, website and network.

III. Evaluation and Dissemination/Evaluation Methods

Appendix H provides detailed information about our evaluation plans as they apply to our individual goals and objectives. Our evaluation methods will include:

- Surveys to gather pre- and post-activity data from participants of the activities that take place over an extended period of time (such as the technology and communications training);
- data gathering on student academic achievement, parent involvement figures and socio-economic information
- personal interviews to gather anecdotal data from participants in all activities;
- our advisory committee will review evaluation activities and data collected to find areas for program refinements; and
- information from school personnel about their informal observations of the students whose parents access the services of our program.

Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Our evaluation plans call for gathering the following quantitative data:

- Student achievement data from assessment, including data on low-income students;
- Numbers of parents served by program services and activities;
- Numbers of parents who access the resources on our website;
- Numbers of participants at all trainings;
- Number of parents who participate in the *CyberParents* program;
- Number of parents who vote in site-based decision-making councils;
- Number of parents who participate in parent-teacher conferences; and
- Data from survey instruments about effectiveness of program services and activities.

We plan to gather the following qualitative data through personal contact and interviews with participants: information from parents to determine if they view themselves as more equipped to support their children's education, know more about organizing other parents, participate more in school governance and planning, if the resources used were helpful and, if so, in what way. We will also gather qualitative information from classroom teachers and other school staff on the children of parents who receive our services and activities, including ability to do homework, behavior, academic achievement, attitude toward school, etc.

Independent Evaluator

Forward in the Fifth will contract with a team of independent evaluators to ensure effective evaluation of the project. The evaluation team, composed of the independent evaluators, two partner representatives, and the project director, will be created upon notice of funding and begin work immediately to develop a thorough evaluation plan and timeline. We have several independent evaluators that we have worked with in the past. All are college professors with extensive background in teaching applied sociology and hands-on experience designing and implementing program evaluations in Appalachian communities.

Dissemination Plan

Forward in the Fifth will share best practices and lessons learned regionally and nationally. The following are planned channels of dissemination:

- Information on Forward in the Fifth website including project history, description, curriculum and contact information for project staff and partners;
- Presentations at state, regional and national conferences (PIRC and GEAR UP national conference and the annual meeting of the Public Education Network)
- Regular articles and program updates in *Fast Forward*, Forward in the Fifth's bi-monthly newsletter that goes to over 5,000 teachers and parents in eastern Kentucky.

Upon notice of funding, the communication associate will develop a three-year communication plan that will assure efficient and effective dissemination of information.

IV. Project Feasibility/Technical Approach

Each CyberParent will receive a new personal computer configured with at least an Intel Pentium 4 Processor with 2.66 GHz, 256 meg of RAM, 60 Gig hard drive, DVD-Rom Drive, Video and Sound Card, Microsoft Windows XP Professional operating system and Microsoft Office XP Professional bundled software. Parents will also receive a compatible printer. Parents will be provided Internet service (DSL lines where available). These choices of hardware and software respond to the needs of the families and to recommendation from past TOP grantees. Forward in the Fifth will receive a server, DSL access and network software that will enable the organization to support the remote users and to transform their website into an interactive website. A program technician will work with the families to install and maintain the computers.

Applicant Qualifications

Since 1986, Forward in the Fifth has worked with schools, parents and communities in Appalachian Kentucky, providing opportunities that foster positive, interactive school-community-home relationships. We empower parents to be better supporters of their children's education and provide them with opportunities to be involved with schools. We are an advocate for parents' role in education and build bridges between schools and homes. We are qualified to implement and evaluate the *CyberParents* program. We have experience with both private foundation and federal funding. In 1994 we received a Department of Commerce TIIAP grant for our Eastern Kentucky Access to Technology program and are currently in the first year of a U.S. Department of Education Parent Information and Resource Center grant (see Appendices I and J for additional organizational information and position descriptions for project staff).

Project Implementation and Completion

We will complete our project within 36 months and within our budget guidelines (see Timeline in Appendix K). The first six months of our project will be used to hire staff, purchase technology, recruit parents and develop the evaluation plan. During the course of

the project we will provide 60 parents with home-based technology, as well as technology and communications training. Our first cohort of 30 parents will receive the technology at month six and our second cohort of 30 parents will receive the technology at month 18. Providing the technology in two cohorts will enable our advisory committee to refine our program at the mid-point and allow our program technician to troubleshoot any technical problems encountered. It will also enable us to use our first cohort of parents as peer-teachers with the second cohort. The final six months of our program will be used to finalize our evaluation and to ensure that end users have the training, expertise and resources needed to continue their valuable work organizing parents.

Privacy and Security

Each end user will receive training on Internet security and receive information on how to secure their personal data. All users will establish a confidential password that they will use to access our interactive website. All data collected for evaluation purposes will be collected with the consent of the end user and will be treated as confidential material.

Sustainability

The TOP funding will enable Forward in the Fifth to develop their technical capacity. All Forward in the Fifth staff will receive technology training and will be able translate this to their work in the region. All parents who receive technology and training will continue their organizing work long after the grant period. Forward in the Fifth has a long history of working with parents in the region and will continue to provide support to the *CyberParents* after the end of TOP funding. Forward in the Fifth's Board of Directors is committed to this project and will seek private funding to continue the project after the TOP grant period. The detailed evaluation we will do of our *CyberParents* program will provide us with the data needed to secure private funding to continue our work.

i. The Kentucky Education Reform Law of 1990 set forth academic expectations for all students (called Core Content) and developed the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) from those standards as a way to measure student achievement. The data from these tests is used to determine how schools are doing, in terms of the achievement levels of the students enrolled.

Students are assessed in seven areas: reading, math, science, social studies, arts/humanities and practical living/vocational. Writing skills are assessed through writing portfolios and writing prompts. Different grade levels take different portions of the tests in different subjects each year. Students are scored novice, apprentice, proficient or distinguished. Kentucky's goal is for ALL students to score at the proficient level by the year 2014.

ii A New Wave of Evidence: the Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement Annual Synthesis 2002. Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp p. 24

iii. Ronald D. Eller, *Kentucky's Distressed Communities: A Report on Poverty in Appalachian Kentucky*, University of Kentucky, April 1994, p. 29.

^{iv} A New Wave of Evidence: the Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement Annual Synthesis 2002. Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp p. 8

v. John Stamper and Barbara Isaacs, "Kentuckians slowly learning the value of better education," *Lexington Herald-Leader*, May 30, 2002, Lexington, Kentucky.

^{vi} A New Wave of Evidence: the Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement Annual Synthesis 2002. Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp p. 51

^{vii} See TOP FY 2000 Grant #25-60-00011 Digital Bridge Foundation; TOP FY 1997 Grant #27-60-97025 Independent School District #196; TOP FY 1996 Grant 96043 Middle Schools Online. Also see The Next Steps a research-based family literacy program developed in Kentucky by the Bullitt County Adult and Community Education Program – 502-955-7721.

^{viii} Case Study Report Middle Schools Online, 96043, prepared by Gary Silverstein and Nicole Bartfai, March 26, 1999.

^{ix} Randal D. Pinkett, Bridging the Digital Divide: The Role of Technology for the Purpose of Community-Building. <http://web.mit.edu/crcp/ccp.html>

^x A New Wave of Evidence: the Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement Annual Synthesis 2002. Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp p. 8.