

# Signing cross country

School program links deaf students, teachers for tutoring, mentoring

By ROBIN BROWN / The News Journal

Originally posted on delawareonline.com at:

<http://www.delawareonline.com/newsjournal/local/2004/11/16signingcrosscou.html>



Special to The News Journal/SUCHAT PEDERSON  
Jeff Barnette, a 17-year-old Delaware School for the Deaf student, assisted by instructor Melinda Failing, uses a computer video camera to work with the University of Tulsa.

**11/16/2004**

Seventeen-year-old Jeff Barnette of Middletown looked into the computer video camera, his hands moving fast in sign language.

At school Monday afternoon in Ogletown, Jeff was being tutored by a teacher in Oklahoma. In sign language, she told him to calculate a person's net income based on percentages deducted for Social Security and taxes.

Jeff added percentages, then subtracted the total from 100 percent, writing with a stylus on a white pad in front of him.

The tutor watched her computer screen as Jeff worked on the problem, and then gave his answer.

"Right!" she signed.

Jeff wrote "GREAT!"

Then he turned to the crowd and smiled. He was sitting at a desk onstage at Margaret S. Sterck School, home of the Delaware School for the Deaf, watched by about 50 teachers, administrators, state officials and other guests.

Jeff's smile had the effect of an applause sign on the crowd. Many people clapped, but others used a deaf sign for applause, waving their hands overhead with fingers wiggling.

After a delay getting connected, Jeff's session marked the debut of a new live-video tutoring and mentoring program for about 150 students at the state's only school for the deaf.

The program grew from collaboration of the school, state technology officials, the University of Delaware, Kent State University in Ohio and the University of Tulsa in Oklahoma, said school Director Edward H. Bosso Jr.

Beyond working with the University of Tulsa on mentoring and tutoring, the live-video program will be used for staff development in a national system of teachers for the deaf and hard of hearing, being set up by Kent State.

**Department of Technology and Information Secretary Thomas Jarrett** said the program - which shares Internet-based live-video systems that UD already had - is the forerunner to a project to upgrade the state computer network to make the technology available in all Delaware schools.

**Jarrett** said he can't reveal details yet, but an announcement will be made in about a month and equipping schools may take two years.

Christina School District Superintendent Joseph Wise said the district, honored to host the debut program, would make sure live video was well used to help students, parents and teachers. "Even when you're a great teacher, you need thought-partners," he said. The live-video program will use equipment being installed as a "visual public-address system," paid for nearly three years ago with a one-time state grant of about \$65,000, Bosso said.

Because the school can't use bells to alert deaf students in emergencies, the school got the live-video grant as a safety need. There was no plan then for live-video tutoring or teacher development, Bosso said.

"But that's how it all started," he said.

Live video soon will be used for morning announcements and, someday, student broadcasts, he said.

The tutor demonstrating live video with Jeff, Sharon Baker of the University of Tulsa, already uses the system to observe student teachers. Baker said she used to travel to schools for the deaf nationwide to see them.

She and Bosso, who had been working with the state on future technology that could aid deaf students, talked about the potential of live video over lunch at a conference

this summer at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., the world's only university designed for deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

"I said, 'We need more tutors,' " Bosso said. "We never have enough staff or tutors ... to be superheroes 24 hours a day."

When Baker jumped on the idea as a great opportunity for her university's teaching students, the program was born.

Live-video tutoring and mentoring will bridge physical distances, accommodate students' schedules, match tutors with their needs, and give kids help that's fun, Bosso said.

Harold Johnson of Kent State, speaking by live-video link as Baker did, said the national system he is setting up will let teachers - including those at the Delaware School for the Deaf - watch each other, share techniques and collaborate on problems.