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Calling it "a tremendous step forward in addressing the needs of technologically needy students on remote Indian reservations," Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt announced today that Microsoft Corporation has contributed over $350,000 in software, computers and cash to Four Directions, a project of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) that will electronically link Indian schools using the Internet and provide new technology opportunities to Native American students in eight states.

"Microsoft's donation will bring the power of the Internet to tribal communities that have been geographically and economically isolated," Secretary Babbitt said. "This program will supply rich new resources to the children in these communities, powerful new tools to the teachers in these formerly isolated schools, and new communications opportunities for adults throughout their communities. Yesterday, these eight communities were among the most technologically deprived in America; tomorrow, these communities will have the tools and skills to participate more fully in the information age." Four Directions is a Bureau of Indian Affairs project designed to bring technology to Indian schools. It seeks to expand student access to technology, improve communication among BIA schools, share learning resources and expose the wider community to new technologies, including the Internet.

"We view this as an opportunity to share the latest technology with students who otherwise might have little or no access," said Bill Neukom, Microsoft's Senior Vice President for Law and Corporate Affairs. He added: "Four Directions will help students, teachers, and the broader communities in which they live. At Microsoft, we understand the potential of the personal computer and the Internet - but we also understand that some communities do not have access to these technologies. This partnership with the Bureau of Indian Affairs is an important part of our efforts to help bridge the gap between 'haves' and 'have-nots' in the information age."

"Every school should have access to the intellectual and cultural resources of the Internet. This technology can help to connect schools with their communities, encourage communication among parents, teachers and students, and assist teachers in sharing resources and best practices," Neukom continued. "Today, students, teachers, librarians and community members can collaborate in new and productive ways. Four Directions is a marvelous example of making those important connections with PC technology." Microsoft will provide software, computers and cash to fund teacher training in eight pilot schools. Project goals include connecting teachers in the pilot schools around the country with one another to share learning resources, lesson plans and advice. Incorporation of Native American themes into curriculum and expanded access and use of technology by Indian students will also be part of the project.

"The Four Directions Project has the potential to transform teaching and learning in schools funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and those public schools educating American Indian children," Gilbert Sanchez, from the Pueblo of Laguna, lead Local Education Agency for the project, said. "Significant learning will occur when technology, Indian culture, language and subject matter is integrated holistically."

The Four Directions pilot schools are:

- Dilcon Boarding School; Winslow, Arizona
- Ahfachkee Day School; Clewiston, Florida
- Indian Island School; Old Town, Maine
- Hannahville Indian School; Wilson, Michigan
- Fond du Lac Education Division; Cloquet, Minnesota
- Laguna Middle School; Laguna, New Mexico
- Takini School; Howes, South Dakota ·
- Quileute Tribal School; La Push, Washington

Software titles donated to the pilot schools include: Microsoft NT Server, BackOffice Server 1.5, Microsoft Windows95 Upgrade, Microsoft Office Professional, Microsoft Project, Creative Writer, Fine Artist, Encarta96 Encyclopedia, 500 Nations, Art Gallery, Magic School Bus-Oceans, Magic School Bus-Solar System, Magic School Bus-Human Body, Ancient Lands, Dangerous Creatures, Explorapedia: World of Nature, Art Gallery, Automap Road Atlas, Bookshelf, Dinosaurs, Flight Simulator, World of Flight, Composer Collection, Cinemania and Microsoft Money."

As a former educator with a deep attachment to Indian students everywhere, I am very pleased to see Microsoft providing this hardware, software and training for teachers in these eight remote Indian schools," Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Ada Deer said. "These young people deserve the tools to be able to compete in the 21st century, and I look forward to hearing of their progress working with the Internet and being able to enrich their lives through