

## Office of the Governor

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### NEWS RELEASE

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### **Whitman and Prudential Announce \$7.4 Million in Technology Grants to Close the "Digital Divide" (Embargoed until 2:00 p.m. Thursday September 30, 1999)**

NJ Gov. Christie Whitman and Art Ryan, Chief Executive Officer of Prudential announced today a new program that will provide approximately \$7.4 million in grants to be awarded to economically disadvantaged school districts.

The program, called ACE (Access--Collaboration-Equity), is aimed at closing the so-called "digital divide," which is the technology gap that exists between those who have sufficient resources to access computers at homes and in their communities and those who do not. The awards will range from \$85,000 to \$200,000 for the approximately 50 grant recipients.

"The state has made great progress in making technology available to all students during the school day," said Whitman. "We are concerned however that students from families that do not have sufficient financial resources, especially in economically disadvantaged areas, will fall behind their counterparts who are able to use computers and related technology that is available in their homes and communities.

"The lack of access in the homes and communities of disadvantaged students will place these children at a distinct disadvantage as schools, businesses and industry further embrace technology. Not having access to technology outside of the classroom translates into an inability to complete assignments or continue many learning activities on evenings and weekends," said the Governor.

Economically disadvantaged school districts will collaborate with community partners, businesses, municipalities and statewide organizations in ACE related activities. Access to technology will be supported with staff available after school and on weekends at publicly accessible locations such as libraries, housing complexes, schools and community centers. The grants will be available in the 2000-2001 school year.

The business community, through Tech Corps New Jersey and the Business Coalition for Educational Excellence, will work with these centers to help them build plans for sustainability. In addition, Prudential will fund a development person, who will work with the selected schools to help them develop a broader resource base, including helping them identify funding and in-kind donation sources, helping them identify and share best practices and helping them plan and develop high quality volunteer programs.

"We must prepare all young people to succeed in our information society. Access to technology is an integral part of their development," said Ryan. Technology centers that are open to students and their families after school hours will improve education opportunities for all students. I'm pleased our New Jersey business colleagues have come together to support this important initiative."

According to the U.S. Commerce Department, 36 percent of inner city, low-income minorities have no telephone service, 92 percent of poor households do not own personal computers and 98 percent of poor households do not have online access. The ACE program is designed to decrease these disparities and increase student achievement of the state's rigorous academic standards. The ACE program will also increase family involvement in their children's education and encourage broader community participation in educational activities.

