



Media release

From the Premier of Victoria

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VICSMART BROADBAND ROLLOUT BEGINS FOR SCHOOLS

Work was underway to connect more than 1600 Victorian Government school sites to a revolutionary high speed broadband connection, the Premier, Steve Bracks, said today.

Mr Bracks joined students at Haddon Primary School near Ballarat in a live teleconference with Telstra chief executive Sol Trujillo and students more than 100 kilometres away at North Fitzroy Primary School.

The two schools are among the first in Victoria to have their computer links upgraded under the \$89 million VicSmart initiative funded in this year's State Budget.

"Victorian government schools will soon have the best broadband technology of any Australian State and one of the best in the world," Mr Bracks said.

"This investment will remove the inequality between regional and metropolitan schools.

"Every government school from the smallest and most remote, to the largest city school, will share in this technological revolution."

Students used the high-speed broadband to exchange movies they'd made about their schools and talked to each other via video-conferencing.

"Just a month ago, slow download times would have made it virtually impossible for these students to communicate like this," Mr Bracks said.

"Students will enjoy faster internet, and easy access to a growing range of online learning resources."

Telstra CEO Sol Trujillo said switching on the first two schools was a milestone day for Telstra and Victoria.

"This partnership provides online learning capabilities that were a dream not so long ago," he said.

"Telstra is investing millions of dollars to build a next generation high-speed network for the Victorian Government and its agencies. Ultimately this network will benefit local businesses and other communities when they take up the world-class telecommunications services it offers."

Education Services Minister, Jacinta Allan, said Government schools needed to operate in the same high-tech world that students already lived in.

"Technology is a powerful way to enrich the learning experiences of this techno-savvy generation of students," Ms Allan said.

“This investment will help provide students with 21st Century skills for 21st Century jobs.”

Ms Allan said the upgrade process had been accelerated and would occur in two phases:

- All schools would have a broadband connection of at least 2 megabits per second (Mbps) of high-speed capacity by the end of 2006;
- By the end of 2008, all Victorian schools would be provided with a 4Mbps optical fibre connection.

The VicSmart Broadband initiative forms part of the Bracks Government’s \$1.5 billion ICT investment in Victorian schools in the past five years.

Investment towards technologies in classrooms included:

- A \$1million trial of interactive electronic whiteboards in schools;
- A \$6 million program to provide every government school with a secure wireless network;
- A \$23 million initiative to improve the computer to student ratio and to computer networks in schools;
- \$30 million ICT support program for specialist technicians;
- Notebook computers for teachers and principals valued at \$22.4 million a year;
- \$7 million ICT Grants to schools for computers and IT infrastructure

The Minister for Information and Communication Technology, Marsha Thomson, joined Mr Trujillo at North Fitzroy Primary School for the announcement.

“The Bracks Government has a strong commitment under its Broadband Framework to improving the delivery of government services across Victoria through leading edge broadband use such as this,” Ms Thomson said.

“We are also committed to ensuring that there are broader benefits to the community from the Government’s strategic use of broadband.”

“Earlier this year the Bracks Government aggregated its telecommunications demand and obtained the best overall telecommunications deal in Australia, cutting telecommunications costs to Government by \$200 million over five years,” Ms Thomson said.

“This has enabled Government to increase its broadband use to take advantage of state of the art technologies like we see here today.

“This increased broadband use will see Telstra, as the Government’s broadband supplier, invest more than \$100 million in infrastructure across the state, which will benefit all Victorians.”