



## BRITISH COLUMBIA PROVIDED INTERNET ACCESS TO SCHOOLS AND INSTITUTIONS

### PROVINCIAL LEARNING NETWORK (PLNET)

/// CASE STUDY



Before the introduction of the Provincial Learning Network, Internet access was only intermittently available to British Columbia's schools and institutions. EDS partnered with the province to create the largest centrally managed education network in North America.

#### CLIENT PROFILE

[www.bced.gov.bc.ca/plnet/](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/plnet/)

The Provincial Learning Network, completed in 2000, was created to connect schools, libraries and non-profit cultural and scientific organizations together in a vast network.

**Industry:** Government

**Founded:** 1998

**Business Needs Addressed:**

Productivity

*PLNet earned a special award from the 2001 Public Sector Technology Awards in Vancouver, as well as the 2001 Gold Partnership Award at the Second Annual British Columbia Public Services Awards.*

#### Provincewide Internet access needed to help equalize education

British Columbia's geography is vast - much of it mountainous - with a significant portion of the population living in the lower mainland where the major cities of Vancouver and Victoria are located. However, more than 1.6 million people live in smaller communities scattered across the province. Under the British Columbia Ministry of Education's leadership, British Columbia has achieved a reputation as an education leader and has promoted the use of technology to help equalize the educational experiences of children, regardless of where they live. In 1998, the education ministry decided the time had come to implement a robust, integrated, provincewide infrastructure that eventually became PLNet.

This common telecommunications network connects more than 1,800 schools in 60 school districts to each other and to the Internet. The connections also extend to 125 campuses belonging to 22 colleges, institutes and agencies. In addition, the network is available to independent schools, public libraries, museums, science and cultural organizations, and 20 community skills centres. The British Columbia Ministry of Education chose EDS to offer both technological and consultative input to individual school districts and PLNet's assorted telecommunications providers during PLNet's implementation and ongoing operation.

#### EDS provided integrated management and support services for PLNet

EDS shares delivery responsibility for PLNet with the Ministry of Labour and Citizens' Services, Workplace Technology Services (WTS) Branch. WTS maintains its own 4,000-site network, a privately shared infrastructure whose primary purpose is to provide a robust government intranet with access to the Internet. EDS handles support through comprehensive help-desk and network-monitoring services, and also provides ongoing technical, business-planning and customer-service support.

## MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT SERVICES

PLNet's backbone relies on asynchronous transfer mode (ATM) technology and is supported by some 90 regional network centres throughout British Columbia. School sites and major switching centres use Cisco routers. The project involved the integration of existing contracted carrier services and wireless systems, as well as cable, DSL, ISDN, fiber-based and other more traditional telecommunications carrier services.

### Services featured

- EDS Service Desk Services
- EDS Site Support Services
- Network Management Services

## PLNet achieved dramatic improvements in education equity

Since October 2000, all schools and community colleges in British Columbia - more than 2,000 educational sites in all - are connected through PLNet. The project's success earned PLNet the IT Project of the Year Award from the British Columbia chapter of the Canadian Information Processing Society.

PLNet enhances learning, communication and collaboration opportunities for students from kindergarten through college by expanding student access to the world. Just a few of the network's advantages include the possibility for collaboration among geographically dispersed students and teachers, curriculum enrichment, and powerful online research and distributed-education options. PLNet is also leading to an increased number of learning and training opportunities for adult students and professional development for teachers.

Perhaps most importantly, PLNet allows for equity of access to educational opportunities and information resources on the Internet by increasing telecommunications connectivity and reducing the high cost of telecommunications services faced by small communities and remote and rural areas. The infrastructure achieves dramatic improvements in education equity by making network access affordable for schools throughout the province. Previously, network access costs dramatically escalated as distances increased between schools and urban areas in the southern part of the province. A 56 kbps connection that cost \$150 a month in Vancouver shot up to \$4,500 a month in remote Toad River. Similarly, not every post-secondary institution had the funding to pay for advanced telecommunications capabilities. Now, regardless of whether students and faculty are in Vancouver or Toad River, their network access is the same.

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