

## Press Room

Pittsburgh, PA, November 25, 2002

### 3 Rivers Connect Receives \$1 Million Grant from Vira I. Heinz Endowment to Launch Waterford Early Reading Program™

3RC INITIATIVE WILL HELP 5,000 REGIONAL STUDENTS IMPROVE READING SKILLS

3 Rivers Connect (3rc) [www.3rc.org](http://www.3rc.org) announces that it has received a \$1 Million grant from the Vira I. Heinz Endowment to fund the Waterford Early Reading Program (WERP). WERP is a scientific, research-based literacy curriculum used in more than 4,200 elementary schools nationwide to improve the reading skills of students in pre-kindergarten through second grade. Three initial school districts that will benefit from the 3rc Waterford Project are Clairton School District, Sto-Rox School District, and the Boys & Girls Club of Lawrenceville. Five additional school districts will be announced in the coming weeks.

Eventually, more than 70 pre-kindergarten through second-grade classrooms will incorporate WERP into their curriculum; and more than 150 teachers, administrators and technicians will receive training through this initiative. Nearly 5,000 students over three years will be positively impacted by the literacy program.

“The Waterford Project is a pivotal part of 3rc’s mission to promote innovative technology initiatives to advance educational development within the Pittsburgh region,” said Ronald Gdovic, PhD, executive director of 3rc. “Schools with limited resources will now have the capacity to implement and utilize technology-based curriculum to significantly improve reading skills for children.”

3rc will contract with Pearson Digital Learning (PDL) to issue software licenses to participating schools at preferred pricing for the Waterford product. The cost to each school of the license and first year materials will be discounted by the percentage of low-income students within the school, ranging between 48.5% and 98% .

“The WERP program advances reading skills in three consecutive levels,” explained Mary Ann Bogosta, area sales director for Pearson Digital Learning. “For kindergarten students, the program focuses on developing emergent reading skills; for first-grade students, the program focuses on skills that advance them to the status of beginner readers; for second-grade students, the program builds on fluency and enables students to advance their comprehension skills. At the end of the three-year program, students are actually reading to learn, rather than learning to read.”



Coupled with the program's proven literacy effectiveness, the 3rc Waterford Project greatly reduces startup costs to priority schools for licensing and materials, bridging the gap between program fees and the schools' ability to pay for the reading program. To guarantee that every classroom is properly equipped and supported, partner schools will be required to purchase tested certified computer hardware with pre-installed software as a condition of participation. Establishing a common platform and source of technology assures compatibility and full technical support to every classroom.

In addition to assisting with administration and technical implementation, 3rc will monitor implementation of WERP over the three-year period. The Allegheny Intermediate Unit Development Services will evaluate program implementation and outcomes, ensuring that comprehensive data on student achievement in critical literacy areas is collected and reported.

"The agreement between 3rc and each district will commit schools to participate in this program of formal evaluation," said Gdovic. "Reporting program outcomes provides an invaluable resource for aligning classroom implementation to meet state standards and program objectives. This collaborative effort will fuel the continual expansion of the 3rc Waterford Project and provide a comprehensive foundation for success. The collective expertise of 3rc, its organizational partners, invested school districts, Pearson Digital Learning, and the Allegheny Intermediate Unit will provide the educational tools and resources for children to become confident and capable learners."

#### ABOUT 3 RIVERS CONNECT

3 Rivers Connect is a Section 501(c)(3) non-profit organization working in cooperation with local, state, and federal agencies and public and private institutions to accelerate economic, social, and educational development through applications of advanced technology. 3rc is accomplishing this mission by initiating and supporting information technology projects that are nationally recognized for their innovation and effectiveness. 3rc was recently honored as one of 10 entrepreneurial firms whose products or services offer unique or promising technologies as a future economic driver of the 13-county southwestern Pennsylvania region. To learn more, visit [www.3rc.org](http://www.3rc.org) or contact Ronald Gdovic, PhD, executive director, at (412) 392-1006.

#### ABOUT THE HEINZ ENDOWMENTS

The Heinz Endowments supports efforts to make southwestern Pennsylvania a premier place to live and work, a center of learning and educational excellence, and home to diversity and inclusion. Committed to helping its region thrive as a whole community — economically, ecologically, educationally and culturally — the foundation works within Pennsylvania and elsewhere in the nation to develop



solutions to challenges that are national and even international in scope. One of the largest and most innovative independent philanthropic foundations in the country, the Endowments awarded over \$55 million in grants in 2001.

#### ABOUT PEARSON DIGITAL LEARNING

Pearson Digital Learning (PDL), a division of the world's largest K-12 publisher, Pearson Education, Inc., was formed in 1996 with a mission to enrich the learning experience for all students with innovative and effective research-based programs that will prepare them for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Working hand-in-hand with educators throughout the learning process, PDL offers turnkey solutions that are both accessible to students and easy to integrate into the classroom. To learn more visit [www.pearson-el.com](http://www.pearson-el.com) or contact Mary Ann Bogosta, Area Sales Director, at (724) 449-7230.

