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## To Help Children, Computer Lessons for Parents

By LYNETTE HOLLOWAY

Andrene Francis, 38, had never turned on a computer, let alone used a mouse before. She fumbled. She shook. She was embarrassed in front of other parents who appeared to know the difference between left and right clicking.

But Ms. Francis, a home health care aide who runs a day care center from her home in Kensington, a working-class immigrant neighborhood in Brooklyn, forced herself to go through a three-hour training session at Intermediate School 62 so that her son, Ravi, 12, could receive a free desktop computer for their home.

"It was a little intimidating," she said. "It was my first time being that close to a computer. My son was standing beside me. It was a little awkward at first because he was showing me how to do something. I'm used to giving kids instructions."

Ravi, his fellow seventh graders and eventually all of the middle school's 1,300 students will receive a Gateway computer as part of a \$2 million program sponsored by Chase Manhattan Bank and the Chase Manhattan Foundation. Officials at the Board of Education and Chase Manhattan say it is one of the largest programs in the city to distribute desktop computers to public school students.

The goal is to improve student achievement by getting students to spend less time at home watching television and more time writing. Last year, just 22 percent of the school's eighth graders performed at grade level on the state's standardized reading test. Many families live below the poverty level, meaning a family of three can be forced to live on \$25,000 or less, and spending \$800 on a computer can be a stretch.

New computers will be distributed to incoming sixth graders for the next several years. About 150 laptops have been distributed to teachers and administrators. The student package comes with a three-year parts and labor warranty that includes 24-hour service provided by Gateway. About 1,500 Chase employees, who are volunteering their time, will install the computers and provide ongoing technical support in more than 30 languages.

Schools Chancellor Harold O. Levy and William B. Harrison Jr., chairman and chief executive of Chase Manhattan Bank, are scheduled to unveil the program today.

Corporate-sponsored computer programs are not new. In 1996, School District 6 in Washington Heights in Manhattan offered leases on laptops to students at the Mott Hall School in a pilot program subsidized by Microsoft and Toshiba U.S.A.

Chase has already helped finance charter schools in the New York metropolitan region and Texas, and small experimental schools in New York City, said Mark A. Willis, executive vice president of Chase Manhattan Bank Community Development Group. I.S. 62, also known as Ditmas Education Complex, was selected because of the bank's relationship with the principal, Nancy T. Brogan, who applied for

grant money six years ago to start a conflict resolution program.

Ditmas, which includes four small schools, is a squat four-story, beige-brick building that takes up a whole block in a leafy residential community of single-family wood-frame and brick houses. The neighborhood is a mix of cultures, and inside the school students speak 30 languages, including Bengali, Russian and Urdu. About 17 percent of the students arrived in the city within the last three years. Many of the immigrants leave to return to their homelands or attend other schools.

The free computer program essentially forces parents to become involved in their children's schooling. Students whose parents do not complete the three-hour training sessions will not receive computers. As of yesterday, more than 700 parents had come for training. By September 2001, the school will have its own intranet system, said Laura A. Winter, project director. E-mail accounts will help parents keep in touch with teachers, and parents will be able to review homework assignments and keep track of school events on a school Web site.

Marie Alexis, 40, a registered nurse whose 13-year-old daughter, Lorraine, attends I.S. 62, was pleased with what she called "a crash course." "I can't stay ancient forever," she said. "Now, I realize it's a wonderful thing. The fact that we can e-mail teachers, and they can e-mail us back. Teachers can send notes home, and they never reach us. Children are so devious."