

A DIGITAL BRIDGE FOR CONNECTING CANADA'S NORTH

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Collaboration tools aren't just meant for the office – they can help in schools and hospitals as well. For Cisco, they hold the potential to transform the way education and healthcare are delivered in the North.

Cisco officially launched its Connected North program yesterday, with the Government of Nunavut and a host of public and private partners. It represents a \$1.6 million investment by Cisco in Canada's North.

Connected North involves using high-definition video communication and collaboration technology to connect students who are thousands of kilometers apart. It uses two-way video calling to connect students from remote and northern Aboriginal and Inuit communities with the rest of Canada.

"By leveraging our technology expertise and uniting key private and public sector partners, we are aiming to make Connected North a vital and productive component of northern communities that will bring new levels of opportunities to inhabitants," said Nitin Kawale, president, Cisco Canada. "And what you see here today is only the beginning. The program's results in Iqaluit will be studied and used to develop longer term strategies for sustainability throughout Canada."

Through the initiative, students can speak with kids their age and teachers throughout Canada, as well as get lessons from experts across the country. The new learning initiative aims to get students to attend class regularly.

"Working together, we can utilize new technology in all our schools to make the classroom experience more exciting and engaging," said Paul Quassa, Minister of Education, Nunavut, who was present at the announcement.

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Using prioritized satellite bandwidth donated by SSi Micro, grade six, seven, and eight classes in Iqaluit are getting a fresh approach to learning. Following yesterday's announcement, two additional schools – one in Fort Providence, Northwest Territories, and a high school in Arviat, Nunavut, will be joining the program in September of this year.

The virtual education program uses Cisco's TelePresence, and Partners in Research's Virtual Research on Call (VROC) platform.

Cisco's Connected North program will also focus on bringing psychiatric and youth mental health services to the North, using Cisco's Telepresence high-definition video links. For this initiative, the RBC Foundation and Cisco have joined with the Tele-Link Mental Health Program developed by Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children.

Tele-Link uses videoconferencing and other technologies to give timely access to specialist services. With funding from the RBC and technology from Cisco, Tele-Link will launch in select Nunavut health centres in September 2014.

"We believe this partnership will help build local capacity, supporting local health systems to respond, care and plan for the mental health needs of their communities," said David Willis, clinical manager, TeleLink Mental Health Program, SickKids. "Our goal is to help improve the mental health and well-being of children and youth living in Northern Canada by providing them with barrier-free access to child and adolescent psychiatry, regardless of their location."

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Author: Daniela Fisher **Email:** daniela.fisher@iticonline.ca

Daniela Fisher is a staff writer at *IT in Canada* and *Biotechnology Focus*. She is also a contributing writer to *OnlyIT*. As a science and technology journalist, Daniela covers the latest developments in both science and IT, as well as industry news.

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