



# Great Western Network Newsletter

Fall 2009

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**ITV Turns 20** - ITV (Interactive Television) has been around in North Dakota for a long time. It was 1989 when Ted Renner and Ed Lethert put together the first four ITV studios in high schools at Hazen, Center, Beulah and Stanton. Working with West River Telephone fiber optic cable and some FM analog transmission equipment, they were able to connect each of the locations with the purpose of sharing high school classes. Teachers like Doug Olson, Beulah and Walter Wolf, Center and Bob Marthaller, Hazen were the first brave educators to give it a try in this pilot project. Superintendents Dale Gilje, Beulah, Mike Ness, Center, Ray Frank, Hazen and Kasper Greff, Stanton were on hand on November 8th, 1989 with a dedication ceremony that included Governor George Sinner and Wayne Sanstead, DPI. It was known as the WRITC. (West River Interactive Television Cooperative)

The success of this endeavor prompted neighboring schools to join the consortium and soon after the name was changed to Great Western Network. (GWN) Throughout the State, several clusters of schools were working out agreements with telecom providers to bring distance learning into their schools to enhance their curriculum. By about 1999 it was becoming apparent that North Dakota Schools that weren't already a part of an ITV consortium were not going to be able to do so without some assistance.

In 2001 with the help of legislative funding, ITD rolled out ATM T1 lines to all North Dakota high schools that were not a part of a video consortium. Using an IP (Internet Protocol) based digital technology called h.323, schools were now able to connect to not only their neighboring schools, but also others outside of their consortium network and to the internet.

For GWN, the T1 rollout by the State was not an option. A T1 line was less bandwidth than they were already receiving for internet through Midcontinent Cable and the h.323 video was of lower quality than what they currently had with their analog equipment. Instead, ITD's Glen Rutherford came up with a solution, that is still in place today, that provides gigabit ethernet (1,000 T1 lines) over fiber to all of the GWN schools while still utilizing the proven FM analog technology for video.

So, here we are 20 years later. There are 40 schools and over 90 video classrooms and/or polycom h.323 units in service throughout GWN. 50 teachers provide instruction to over 700 students each school year. Here is to another 20 great years (or more) to Great Western Network.

[For more history go to:](http://www.greatwesternnetwork.com/pdfs/EvolutionofGWN.pdf)  
<http://www.greatwesternnetwork.com/pdfs/EvolutionofGWN.pdf>

## GWN Member Schools

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Ashley  
Belfield  
Berthold (Lewis & Clark)  
Beulah  
Bismark Century  
Bismarck State College  
Bowman County  
Center-Stanton  
Dickinson Trinity  
Flasher  
Garrison  
Glen Ullin  
Glenburn  
Grant County (Elgin)  
Halliday  
Hazelton-Moffit-Braddock  
Hazen  
Hebron  
Hettinger  
Kenmare  
Kidder County (Steele)  
Linton  
Mandan  
Max  
Minot High  
Mott-Regent  
Napoleon  
New England  
New Salem  
North Shore-Makoti (L&C)  
Parshall  
Scranton  
Solen  
Standing Rock  
Turtle Lake-Mercer  
Underwood  
Washburn  
Wilton  
Wing  
Wishek

**MVP - Site Facilitator** - Ask any ITV teacher who the most valuable person (MVP) is and they are more than likely to tell you that it is the site facilitator. What are some of the many duties that the site facilitator are called on to do ? Here are a few:

1. Learn how to operate the ITV system.
2. Teach the students how to operate the ITV system.
3. Distribute and collect/mail worksheets and tests.
4. Communicate with the teacher all items that relate to classes.
5. Make sure that books, supplies, etc. are in the room when needed.
6. Communicate with the GWN director any technical issues.
7. Help the teacher to make the class a good experience for students.

In the perfect world, there would be a dedicated site facilitator for any of the distance learning classes that are coming into your school. (online or ITV) Fact is, only a handful of schools are able to do that. In most of the schools, it is the school secretary, an aide, tech coordinator or even their Principal or Superintendent, delegated to be the site facilitator. Each of these people have plenty of other responsibilities in the schools without adding the time and patience needed to be a site facilitator. But, it is a job that someone needs to do or classes will not function as they should.

What can go wrong with a site facilitator that has too many irons in the fire ? Example - A teacher has requested that a test be handed out right at the start of 2nd period so that after 20 minutes they can be collected and the last half hour of class will be devoted to discussing the next chapter. School X doesn't have their test yet. Teacher waits a while....teacher asks student to leave the room to go find the site facilitator....student comes back saying "our facilitator is in a meeting and nobody in the office knows where the test is".....site facilitators in the other 2 rooms wait along with the students and teacher until?...?...? Get the picture ? This happens much more often than we like to admit. Same thing happens when students aren't shown how to set up the equipment. 5, 10, 15 minutes or more of classroom time can be wasted until someone finally comes in to help get things adjusted properly.

If we were to poll our teachers as to which sites they prefer to teach to and which sites they would just as soon not teach to, we would find that the overwhelming choice would weigh heavily on wanting those schools who had a dependable and capable site facilitator. That person is the mvp of the class. Does your school do its part to provide an MVP to the ITV classroom ?

## I've got a question

1. We would like to set up a teleconference meeting with our polycom. They need our polycom units name and IP number. Where can I find that ? **All of the GWN ip names and numbers are located on our web site at this link:** <http://www.greatwesternnetwork.com/pdfs/videoinfo.pdf>
2. Why is it necessary for each itv studio to have the name of the school and studio # (if more than one studio in their school) displayed in the back of the room ? **Having the school name in easy view helps site facilitators and teachers to easily identify whether or not they have tuned in to the right classroom. The name may also give students a source of pride and to want their school to be represented in a positive way.**
3. When should the supervisory monitor in the office area of our school be turned on ? **It should be on at all times. It's purpose is to have another set of eyes and ears into the ITV classroom. If the students in your building are not on camera, texting, or misbehaving, (and the teacher, for whatever reason, is not reacting) you should feel free to intervene at the appropriate time.**
4. I need a refresher on how to set volumes and change channels. Where is this information? **Go to the GWN web site at <http://www.greatwesternnetwork> and on the right side you will see a link for "Frequently Asked Questions". There are video clips and "how to" printouts that will help you.**

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## Consortium Teachers

When the GWN consortium was in its early years, the hope was that all schools would be able to provide at least one teacher from their school that would teach on the ITV system. Scheduling problems, No child left behind issues and a host of other scenarios made this very difficult to accomplish. Two curricular areas were in such demand that it warranted the consortium hiring of teachers in Spanish and Art. GWN currently employees Jodi Davis (Center School) and Lynn Dewitz (Kidder County School) as Art teachers and Nicole Neumiller (Washburn School) and Sandy Meidinger (Linton School) as Spanish instructors.

Even though each of these teachers work in a different school, their teacher contracts come from the Turtle Lake-Mercer School district as they are the LEA for the Great Western Network consortium. They follow the GWN common calendar rather than the school that they teach from. (which is normally very close to the same as the GWN common calendar)

You can imagine the organizational skills that these teachers must have in order to work with as many as 18 different schools. PowerSchool / PowerGrade does not yet have a method of allowing these teachers to log in one time for all of their students and doing so individually is cumbersome and time consuming.

Kudos to our consortium hired teachers as well as the other ITV teachers on our system. Thanks for your committment to education.

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**Snow Days** - With winter just around the corner, a reminder that if/when your school needs to call off school for snow (or any other unforeseen circumstance), please notify the GWN office and/or the ITV teachers so that everyone knows not to expect your students in class that day.