The Fourth Basic Literacy: Technology

(NAPSA)—Many education experts feel it's time to transform the way we use technology in our schools. For example, ETS is working to build a "new basic literacy" strategy for the 21st century. The organization has created a global partnership among leading business, education and public policy leaders to promote universal Information & Communication Technologies (ICT) literacy.

Teaching children today about technology is as fundamental as teaching reading, writing and arithmetic. Connected to the Future, a new study from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, shows that more and more students are being exposed to the latest electronic innovations. Almost all of our schools are wired for the Internet, and access to technology is widely available. Yet all too often school computers sit idle.

The study, conducted by Grunwald Associates, reveals that our schools are in danger of falling behind as a center for electronic education. This is especially true for schools serving low-income and minority populations. And it is kids in lower income communities who must rely most heavily upon schools for access to technology—to the tools they need to participate, compete and succeed in this digital age. Consider the following:

• 49 percent of Caucasian children use the Internet at home, compared to only 29 percent of African-American children and 33 percent of Hispanic children;

• Children from high-income families are more than twice as likely to have home Internet access (66 percent) than children from low-income households (29 percent); and

"We are working to build a 'new basic literacy' strategy," says Kurt Landgraf, president and CEO of ETS.

• Despite strong growth in school access from 2000 to 2002 for low-income children (20 to 32 percent), their current school use still significantly lags behind high-income children (47 percent).

Between 2000 and 2002, the number of high-income families with high-speed Internet access almost quadrupled. The study shows school age children in these families watch less TV, spend more time online and get better grades. So we have an emerging gap between "connected" and "well-connected" kids. On one side we have kids with high-speed Internet access at home and plenty of computers in classrooms, and on the other, kids who must share a handful of computers in the school lab.

Placing computers in classrooms is essential, but it is just the first step. Technology must become an integral part of teaching and learning in all our schools. We have no choice but to transform today's classrooms in order to build vital technological skills and knowledge for tomorrow's workforce.