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Date: September 13, 2005

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Alaska State Library provides free homework service

Students use internet to reach professional tutors

Students in Alaska's cities and remote villages have equal access to qualified homework tutors, thanks to an internet service, free to students, funded by the Alaska State Library.

Live Homework Help is available in Alaska from 2 p.m. to 9 p.m. seven days a week through personal computers at home and at public libraries. It serves students from grade four through college introductory classes with help in English, math, social studies and science.

"With a repertoire from fourth-grade math to beginning college-level trigonometry and calculus, the Live Homework Help tutors offer students a much wider range of math assistance than they would probably find at a library reference desk or than many parents could muster," said Sue Sherif, the school library and youth services coordinator at the Alaska State Library.

"This service allows students, even in the smallest communities, to get help from skilled tutors long after the school day has ended," said Roger Sampson, commissioner of the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, which includes the state library. "It's one step toward helping all students meet Alaska's academic standards."

Students and tutors can review homework questions and academic concepts using features such as written chat, an interactive whiteboard, and shared web browsing in the Online Classroom. The interactive whiteboard, for example, allows tutors and students to draw pictures or write out math problems.

"It's a real-time interaction," said Jennifer Kohn, spokeswoman for Tutor.com, the company that provides the service in 600 locations internationally. "So as the tutor draws something, the student can see it in real time."

Students have been giving the service rave reviews, librarians said.

Now in its second school year in Alaska, Live Homework Help garners student comments such as these from two 10th-graders: "I would recommend this program to everyone that I know," and, "It really helps to have somewhere where you can talk to a live person after school, and not just have to look things up."

Students can access Live Homework Help through the Statewide Library Electronic Doorway web site www.sled.alaska.edu or the home pages of some public libraries. Students must use a PC. Although the program doesn't work on Macintosh computers, state librarians have provided a list of free homework sites for Macintosh users on the SLED web site as well.

Members of the media can try out the service by logging on like any other user.

Live Homework Help employs tutors who are certified teachers, university professors, graduate school students, students at accredited colleges, and professionals who are experts in their fields. All tutors have received a criminal background check and a reference check, the company said.

Two years ago Sandra Strandtmann, the youth services librarian at the Juneau Public Libraries, wrote a grant to pilot the service in Alaska. School librarians in Juneau "were very, very impressed" when they sampled the service, she said. "You get a real personal feel for the person that's helping you," Strandtmann said, noting that satisfied students can request the same tutor for future sessions.

Reporters: For more information about Tutor.com, see www.tutor.com or call spokeswoman Jennifer Kohn at 212-528-3101 ext. 228. Note: The company's web site is not the students' internet entrance to the tutoring service.

For more information about the Alaska State Library's involvement in the project, call Aja Razumny at 907-465-2458, or Sue Sherif at 907-269-6569.

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