

New York Daily News - <http://www.nydailynews.com>**15K tech grant for immigrants**

By NICOLE BODE

DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Wednesday, January 21st, 2004

LaGuardia Community College's new-immigrant training program has received a \$15,000 grant from Verizon to upgrade education technology.

The Center for Immigrant Training and Education, a free adult education program at the Long Island City college, will use the funds to buy new laptop computers and English-as-a-second-language software for its more than 500 students.

"This allows us to buy equipment, which is essential to our programming," said Suma Kurien, director of the center. "There's such an enormous need for these classes."

The center has seen a 2,000% increase in enrollment since it started with 25 students two years ago, yet there are still 2,000 names on the waiting list, Kurien said.

The free classes - which are geared toward low-income new immigrants - teach everything from English to career counseling to negotiating public schools.

Kurien said the center plans to purchase voice-recognition software to help students with their pronunciation skills.

"That is a major barrier to people getting jobs," Kurien said. "People can learn to read and write, but what is more important is getting a pronunciation that a native speaker can understand."

Kurien accepted the award during an official ceremony at the school yesterday. Council members Eric Gioia (D-Sunnyside) and Hiram Monserrate (D-Corona), LaGuardia President Gail Mellow and Verizon Community Affairs Director Bill Martin were also present.

On hand as well was student Minerva Fernandez, 39, of Sunnyside, who described the progress she has made since coming to the center six weeks ago.

Fernandez, who left Mexico with her family two years ago, has learned enough English that she recently wrote a letter to her son's teacher about how she could remedy his poor academic performance. In addition, she can now access the Department of Education Web site for her children's grades, among other data.

"If a parent can't speak English, they don't understand how to communicate with the school. The children suffer," said Fernandez, a home-care attendant.

"This is a wonderful program, because it shows you how you can help your children."