



# SUCCESS STORY

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*“Technology levels the playing field, it has no face, no color—it’s all about knowledge.”*

Mae Diaby, CCNA  
Math Teacher  
Bok Technical High School



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## High Number of CCNA Certifications Earned in the School District of Philadelphia

### 14 Teachers and 2 Students Hold the Industry-recognized Certification

The School District of Philadelphia is the seventh largest in the nation. It serves an ethnically and racially diverse population that numbers over 200,000 students, many of whom come from economically depressed areas of Philadelphia. Home to over 30 local Cisco Networking Academies, the School District of Philadelphia distinguishes itself as one of the most successful urban districts to implement the Cisco Networking Academy Program. In the school district, over 2400 students have participated in the Networking Academy program and that number continues to spiral upward.

### The CCNA Curriculum

Philly’s first Cisco Networking Academy Program was launched in 1999. With a curriculum that combines both pedagogy and hands-on, skills-based training, Philly’s Networking Academies prepare students for the industry-recognized Cisco Certified Networking Associate (CCNA) certification exam. The CCNA is the first step to a career in networking or IT. The 280-hour online curriculum provides training in networking basics such as topologies, IP addressing, Frame Relay and LAN and WAN technologies. Cisco Networking Academy instructors will be the first to admit that the program is rigorous and challenging, and yet highly achievable. Students such as Jesus Perez and Shamira Ellis can attest to that. Perez from George Washington Carver High School of Engineering and Science, and Ellis from Simon Gratz High School are the first students in the Philly school district to earn the CCNA. What contributes to this success? Sure, Cisco Systems provides the networking equipment—but it’s the teachers who make this happen, bringing curriculum to life, and effecting positive change for students from some of Philadelphia’s poorest neighborhoods.

### Bridging Issues of Age, Gender, and Culture

While the academic and learning outcomes of the Philly’s Networking Academies are impressive, equally impressive is the way in which this program bridges issues of age, gender, and culture. Currently, the Philly school district boasts of the fact that 14 of their teachers have CCNA certification. Nine of these teachers are female, five of whom are African American with an average age of forty-nine. Of the five men, one is Nigerian and periodically teaches in Africa, on behalf of Cisco Systems, Inc., where he prepares French-speaking teachers to sit for the CCNA exam.

“Technology levels the playing field, it has no face, no color—it’s all about knowledge,” says Mae Diaby, a 26-year teaching veteran of the Philly school district, who recently earned her CCNA certification. Diaby teaches algebra and geometry at Bok Technical High School where the population is comprised of African American, Cambodian, Caucasian, Chinese, Italian, and Latino students.



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Anne Marie Urevick, CCNA  
Regional Academy Coordinator



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Historically, Bok prepared students for vocational careers in fields such as cosmetology or auto mechanics. But today, that *is* history. “Bok has dropped those traditional vocations and is focused on technology,” notes Diaby, “technology is the future for our children. Not every child is going to go to college, and the Cisco Networking Academy Program is helping prepare kids for good-paying careers.

“The Networking Academy curriculum enables all cultures to succeed,” continues Diaby. “The curriculum is dynamic, and the presentation of material is animated through multi-media and graphics. It’s a true e-learning model as opposed to just text or a CD.” The curriculum’s dynamic nature not only engages students but teachers as well. “The Cisco Networking Academy Program has made me more of a coach rather than the sage on the stage,” says Diaby. It’s made me a better teacher. I’m guiding students to the next level and learning from them as we progress.”

### **A Passion For Teaching and Learning**

“Teachers like the Networking Academy program because it’s stimulating,” maintains Anne Marie Urevick, coordinator of SDP Cisco Regional Academy. Urevick, who trained Philly’s most recently certified CCNA instructors, says, “Teachers with 30 years experience are coming through this program and enjoying it. Imagine teaching the same subject for 30 years? It can get pretty deadly.” While veteran teachers are curious about learning new subject areas and new technologies, the associated time and costs are prohibitive for most. “But, Cisco brought the opportunity for professional development right to our doorstep,” continues Urevick. “It’s provided the resources to learn about networking and enabled teachers to acquire new pedagogical skills that empower them to be effective.”

Philly CCNA-certified teachers credit much of their achievement to Urevick’s passion for teaching technology and a shared commitment to improve their students’ futures. “Anne is a motivator and a role model,” says Tanya Riddick, a 27-year-old teacher at University City High School, which is located in a US government-designated Empowerment Zone (severely underserved and economically deprived). A graduate of University City High School herself, Riddick earned her B.A. in African American studies from Temple University. She is working on her M.A. in education from Temple, and has a life-long interest in electronics.

“Anne imbued us with her enthusiasm for the subject matter and stressed how this program gives kids a future,” notes Riddick. “It would be very difficult for me to teach something that my heart wasn’t into and this program breeds success. We see huge improvements in reading, math, and organizational skills. Students also learn to work in groups and come to an understanding that this is a skill required in the workplace,” continues Riddick, “but more importantly, students discover their strengths and weaknesses and develop heightened self-esteem.”

### **The Bottom Line—Jobs**

Philly’s Networking Academies are enjoying success measured not only by improved learning outcomes—but also by the bottom line: jobs. A growing number of Cisco Networking Academy graduates—some as young as 16 and 17 years old—have landed jobs. Students are working with brokerages such as Smith Barney and institutions including the University of Pennsylvania and the New York Institute of Technology where they may be trouble-shooting PCs,



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pulling cable, or installing switches and hubs. Out the gate, entry-level networking specialists are earning \$30K–\$45K annually. And, according to a *Certification Magazine* study of 2000, “the holder of one technical certification had an average income of \$53,000.”

Despite a downturned economy, the opportunities for job placement continue to improve for Cisco Networking Academy students in the School District of Philadelphia. Take for example, the IT apprenticeship program sponsored by the Lockheed Martin Company and the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Department of Labor. The Cisco Regional Networking Academies at Mastbaum Area Vocational Technical School and Kensington High School are piloting this program, which can lead to full-time employment at Lockheed Martin. The Academy program is also expanding to increase student Internet knowledge and marketability through optional partner-sponsored technology courses in *Fundamentals of UNIX* through Sun Microsystems, and *Fundamentals of Web Design* through Adobe Systems.

“As the program grows, we see school specialization evolving as well,” predicts Urevick, “some schools will specialize in Web design while others will focus on UNIX or construction trade IT courses.” And, as the program grows so too grow the opportunities for achievement. “Our students are working on an involved curriculum that requires their best,” says Riddick, “when they succeed, it's a well-earned accomplishment.”