



# Access Technologies Group

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **ACCESS TECHNOLOGIES GROUP, INC. AWARDED NATIONAL GRANT TO TEST SOCIAL SIMENTOR™ AT HAWTHORNE CEDAR KNOLLS UFSD**

Access Technologies Group, Inc. wins one of two National Center for Technology™ Innovation Grants to continue research and development of interactive software to teach social skills through role play in collaboration with Hawthorne Cedar Knolls Union Free School District

**New Canaan, CT and Hawthorne, NY May 7, 2007-** Access Technologies Group, Inc and Hawthorne Cedar Knolls Union Free School District today announced the official notification that they have been awarded a National Center for Technology Innovation Grant to support the continued development of an interactive simulation e-learning tool entitled “Social Simentor™”. Social Simentor™ is patterned after the successful business training simulation tool, Simentor®. Social Simentor™ e-learning software is aimed at students and adults with cognitive disabilities that interfere with their ability to accurately read and correctly interpret social cues and conventions. The grant funding is made possible through the National Center for Technology. “These awards represent innovative technologies applied in innovative ways with strong collaborative research designs to determine the impact of the technology for students with special needs” <http://www.nationaltechcenter.org/> The grant award of \$15,000 is especially significant due to the recognition of NCTI, an organization tasked with identifying and fostering technology innovation in tools and applications for individuals with disabilities. The National Center for Technology Innovation (NCTI) is funded by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) in order to “broaden and enrich the field by providing resources and promoting partnerships for the development of tools and applications by developers, manufacturers, producers, publishers and researchers”.

The award also provides an opportunity for the entire team to share research results at the Annual Technology Innovators Conference November 14- 16, 2007 in Washington, DC where they will be highlighted and featured. This research will be conducted at Hawthorne Cedar Knolls Union Free School District (HCKS) to prove the e-learning simulations transfer and generalize to life situations when used by students who have cognitive disabilities and/or learning idiosyncrasies.

Joining in the announcement were Lucy Baney, , the President and CEO of New Canaan based Access Technologies Group, Inc, who will also serve as the Project Director, Superintendent of HCKS, Mark Silverstein, Yorktown Heights, NY resident, Leslie Walker Hirsh, an internationally known expert in Social and Sexual Development

in children and individuals with disabilities and co-creator of the nationally utilized CIRCLES® curriculum series and Somers, NY resident, Dr. Christine M. Casey, a consultant on statewide technology education implementations and developer of the BKFK/XEROX Inventive Thinking Toolkit rounds out the research and design team. Dr. Casey also currently serves as the Director of Human Resources at Hawthorne Cedar Knolls UFSD. The team will be working together with staff from ATG to continue development and research of this e-learning tool to develop interpersonal and social skills for individuals with cognitive disabilities and those with Autistic Spectrum Disorders in order to improve appropriate social responses, specifically in preparation for successful inclusion in the workplace. Dr. Clare Rosen, Assistant Superintendent at HCKS, also sits on the Social Simentor Advisory Board and has been a consistent supporter over the past three years of development.

Social Simentor™ provides a unique e-learning experience offering interactive scenarios and feedback on key social conventions, including verbal responses and reacting to body language and facial expressions, in a penalty-free, non-judgmental environment. During the research HCKS High school students will use Social Simentor™ simulations to practice interviewing skills and then participate in a career fair interview with local business leaders who will rate the students on their social and interviewing skills and consequently their “hireability”.

According to Leslie Walker Hirsch, for many individuals with disabilities, “reading” social cues may be as difficult as reading words. Individuals with disabilities often have difficulty in obtaining and retaining a job due to issues with non-verbal communication, poor social judgment and missing social messages. The unique nature of this role play product allows for customization of vignettes to role-play and replay. The use of technology allows for the repetition sometimes necessary for skill acquisition while making the experience embarrassment proof and enjoyable.

Research shows that students retain 5% of lectures, 10% of what they read, and only 20% from audio visual lectures. But when “practice by doing” was combined with “immediate use” and added to other learning components, the retention rates increased 75-80% ( [www.ntl.org](http://www.ntl.org) ) This unique role play e-learning product will offer the opportunity for immediate application and feedback. The research from this grant will offer evidence that providing meaningful and compelling repetitive practice will increase the rates of retention among the cognitively disabled for the social skills they may require in a work environment.

Lucy Baney spoke for the ATG team when she said: “The funding is not as important as the recognition that we are the only company working on developing specific software to improve social skills through an interactive role play simulation. We are excited about the confidence the NCTI leadership and staff have in the importance of our work. A tool like this can greatly enhance and supplement the role of thousands of dedicated job coaches.”

Dr. Clare Rosen shared her view that involvement in research would be a great project for the HCKS staff and students. “My years as a psychologist have shown me the importance of social skills in people’s lives. If schools can find a cost effective way to allow kids to practice these skills on the computer, this would be a wonderful addition to special education programs and a benefit for the field.”

## **About Access Technologies, Inc.**

Access Technologies Group (ATG) is a provider of e-learning tools, and solutions as well as patented simulation authoring software. Founded in 1994, ATG has a ten-year history of working with Fortune 1000 clients to structure, develop, execute, and manage custom Internet-based training solutions targeted at increasing the productivity of their clients' human capital. ATG's current business consists of a mix of simulation development, e-learning consulting, and custom development of web-based courseware and other Internet-based applications.

One of the featured products of the Access Technologies Group, Inc. is Simentor<sup>®</sup>, a patented simulation-based authoring platform that currently is used with adult employees to perfect their interpersonal skills by simulating corporate interactions. It provides the ability to create limitless role-playing scenarios for learners, targeted to specific business needs. It has been used to practice leadership skills, sales training and avoidance of sexual harassment behaviors. The unique value of the Simentor<sup>®</sup> software lies in the power of its patented administrative interface, which allows the application to respond to learners' choices in a scenario. The pictures and content can be customized.

For more information about Access Technologies Group, Inc., Simentor<sup>®</sup> and Social Simentor<sup>™</sup>, visit [www.simentor.com](http://www.simentor.com)

## **About Hawthorne Cedar Knolls Union Free School District**

Hawthorne Cedar Knolls Union Free School District is a Public Special Act School District located on the grounds of the Jewish Board for Family and Children's Services. The Hawthorne Cedar Knolls Union Free School District provides the educational component for residential and day students with social, emotional, psychological and academic disabilities. Day students are classified and referred by their local Committees on Special Education. HCKSUFSD has a strong commitment to programming for the academic, social and emotional needs of children in a technology rich environment. It is the only school district in New York State with a Smartboard in every classroom and conference room.

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