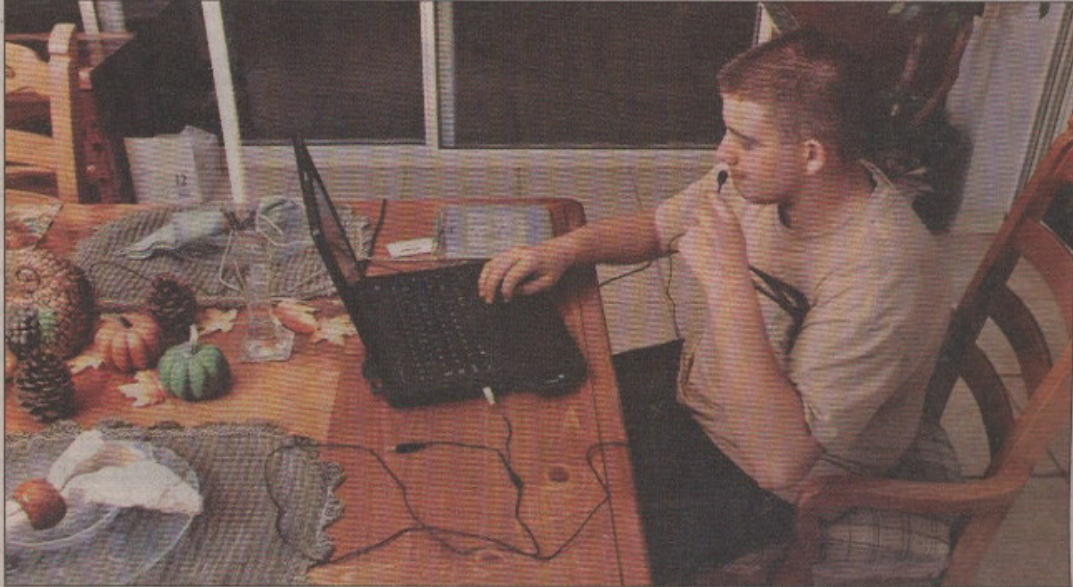


and The Tampa Times

Tutoring Virtually Done Overseas



Tribune photo by MICHAEL SPOONEYBARGER

Justin Knowles, 17, is tutored in English grammar through TutorVista, a company in India. For \$99.99 a month, he gets unlimited tutoring sessions, as opposed to American private tutors who charge \$50 an hour or more.

Technology meets education as more U.S. students use instructors in India.

By MARILYN BROWN
The Tampa Tribune

HAWTHORNE — A 17-year-old high school student living in rural Hawthorne is learning English from his tutor in Bangalore, India.

Four times a week, Justin Knowles sits at the dining room table, laptop open, messaging and talking to Kishori Prabhu. His mother found TutorVista through an Internet search.

"We joke about it all the time," Janet Knowles says. "Justin is learning to speak English from a foreigner." He does speak English but admits his spelling and grammar are horrible.

At \$99.99 a month for unlimited one-on-one tutoring, online tutoring from India is less expensive than American private tutors charging \$50 an hour or more. Available 24 hours a day in most subjects, kindergarten through college, it's also more accessible.

It blends four of today's hottest topics: outsourcing, free enterprise, technology and education.

Soon, TutorVista's service will be free to all children in 10 poor, rural counties across the country, including Hamilton County. The company also serves private customers such as Justin Knowles

and has its sights set on millions in federal tutoring dollars funneling to states, starting with Florida.

The question, says Krishnan Ganesh, founder of TutorVista, may be how well the competition to America's giant tutoring companies is received.

The federal government spends tens of millions nationwide on private tutoring for students under the federal No Child Left Behind law. If TutorVista can qualify to tap into that money, it would be competing with tutoring giants such as Sylvan and Kaplan, with tutors in India paid the equivalent of \$275 to \$300 a month, Ganesh said, although they all have graduate degrees and teaching credentials.

Americans shouldn't balk at buying education at a lower cost from India, he says. "It's like buying from Nike and Reebok. Parents are very happy getting their shoes."

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TutorVista hopes for federal money.



Keyword: Tutor for a video of a Florida teen using TutorVista for online tutoring from India.



Photo from David I. Barkoe
Kishori Prabhu, in Bangalore, India, tutors Justin Knowles in Hawthorne via the Internet.



Map by The Associated Press

ONLINE TUTORING

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Ganesh, an entrepreneur who founded one of India's first business processing outsourcing centers, or call centers, said he was looking for another area where his global resources could be used.

"I looked at the millions of dollars in funding the government is spending on students for private tutoring," he said. "A lot of it is mass tutoring. A child requires more personal attention than what a classroom can give them. To do that in the U.S. is too expensive."

TutorVista secured \$2 million in capital funding from Sequoia Capital India for its expansion into the United States in late 2005. Sequoia Capital also backed innovators from Google, Yahoo! and Cisco Systems.

So far, TutorVista has about 600 customers in the United States, said Jarrod Brown, the 27-year-old philosophy major who is TutorVista's academic director in the United States. He works from his home in Kentucky; his other U.S. partner works from California.

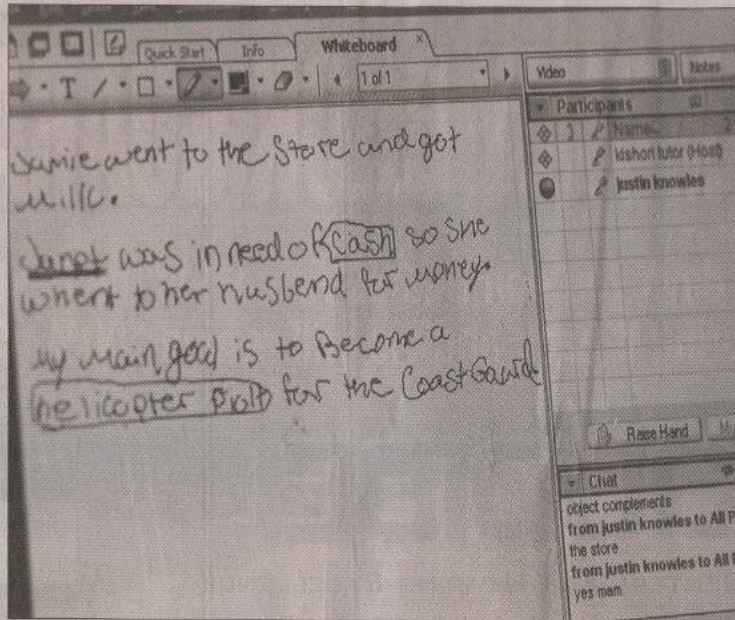
'There's Almost A Stigma'

One barrier to the American venture is attitudes, Brown said.

"There's almost a stigma attached

to tutoring in the United States," he said. "In other ... [parts] of the world, the idea of having a tutor is acceptable. It's supplemental education."

No Child Left Behind mandates all states offer poor students from repeatedly low-performing public schools either transfers to other



Tribune photo by MICHAEL SPOONEYBARGER
Justin Knowles uses a graphic notepad during his online tutoring sessions. Here, he's working on object complements. He also uses headphones and instant messaging on his laptop to connect with his instructor in Bangalore, India.

year, \$9 million is available for up to 5,700 students to get about \$1,250 each in private tutoring, said Jeff Eakins, Hillsborough's director of federal programs.

be fingerprinted and have certain background checks, said Mary Jane Tappen, deputy chancellor, K-12 student achievement.

"That would be tough to get in In-

out to parents Wednesday."

Tutoring will be offered to all 2,000 students in the district's five schools, Scott said. Transportation and computer access are concerns because so

In addition, the district has been approved by the federal Department of Education to compete with 77 private tutoring companies for parents' business. Eakins said the district can provide more tutoring with certified teachers at a lower cost than private companies.

dia," Tappen said. One tutoring company was required to drop a tutor working out of India, she said.

Not a problem, Brown insists. "We can provide background checks and fingerprinting. I'm hoping an equivalent in India will be sufficient."

few families have computers or high-speed Internet access. The district will leave schools open later, work out access with the library and call on churches for bus transportation, she said.

"Providers don't like to go to small,

dents from rural Florida academic help but was financially for the fee even if he still attended. His father is a firefighter or a paramedic.

Until 10th grade, he went to Peniel Baptist Academy in Duval County schools, but because he was far behind.

"I was getting A's and but I didn't know grammar," he said. "All they do is prepare for the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, the state's required tests."

Now the high school work is improving.

In January, the family tutor, a certified teacher, said. It didn't help Knowles said.

Bye-Bye From Bar

In June, the family for company. Despite having an Indian accent, Justin he is learning a lot during hour sessions. Besides month, the family spent headphones and a graph he can write on the computer board as well as type in is a slight delay in the which is dotted with permanent inquiries as understands, "yes, ma knowledgegements of "excellent."

He requested the s

continuity and sets up meetings as each session day night, communication and Prabhhu thought he his session. They final but halfway through the said, "I have another student who has been