

Case study

# Central City Cyberschool

Milwaukee, Wisconsin



## Innovative lease-to-own solution helps wireless elementary school open for classes

Central City Cyberschool (C3) is hailed as a high-tech opportunity for student achievement. The 47,000-square-foot public charter school is capable of serving over 400 students in grades one through eight. Cyberschool is among the first elementary schools in North America to feature a wireless data network system where students can operate laptop computers and access the Internet from anywhere within the building.

An initial \$3.1 million in federal funds obtained through the efforts of the Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee fell short of the \$7 million necessary to complete the project as originally designed. Faced with these budget shortfalls, Dr. Christine Faltz, executive director, took an active role in pursuing the necessary funds and the redesign of building systems in order to complete the project without compromising her vision.

When Dr. Faltz approached Johnson Controls about its Cardkey security system, the company responded with a bundled technology solution and secured the additional funding to help build the school with integrated HVAC, security, fire alarm and lighting controls.

The partnership involves a 15-year lease-to-own contract, after which the building systems are the property of C3. During this same period, Johnson Controls is responsible for the service and maintenance of the building's systems under a Planned Service Agreement. A 10-month construction process from groundbreaking to occupancy enabled classes to begin in September 2000, right on schedule.

"Johnson Controls took an interest in the overall project and provided a more economical solution that allowed us to complete the project without using alternative systems, which we felt were not viable," says Dr. Faltz.

## PROJECT DESIGN TEAM

Technology Contractor	Johnson Controls, Inc. Milwaukee, WI
General Contractor	Stevens Construction Milwaukee, WI
Architect	Aldrian Guskowski, Inc. Elm Grove, WI
Mechanical Contractor	Grunau Project Development Milwaukee, WI
Electrical Contractor	Staff Electric Co. Butler, WI
Construction Management	Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee



Dr. Christine Faltz, executive director and visionary for Cyberschool.

"The Cyberschool represents one of the most significant public-private partnerships in Milwaukee."

**JOHN NORQUIST**  
**FORMER MAYOR**  
**MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN**



Students take turns staffing the troubleshooting lab.

## Transforming the way children learn

Cyberschool is operated by a nonprofit company under a five-year charter granted by the City of Milwaukee. Located in one of the city's oldest public housing developments, Parklawn, C3 is open to all Milwaukee students regardless of family income. It is a school of choice – selected by the families whose children attend it.

"The instructional design of C3 is based on the belief that technology alone is not empowering; rather, it is what people do with technology that empowers them," says Dr. Faltz. Accordingly, the school uses computer technology to help students learn to read, write, and solve math and science problems. Each student has a laptop computer for daily use, allowing them to take advantage of resources available electronically. As its visionary, Dr. Faltz explains, "C3 is a place where teachers work together using technology to enhance the way they teach and where students are provided access to technology they may not otherwise have had."

## From vision to reality

The leasing agreement with Johnson Controls to install mechanical, electrical, plumbing, fire alarm, security and control systems allowed Cyberschool to be built without diverting funds from technology inherent to its design and mission.

Johnson Controls redesigned all of these systems once the financial solution was reached. The company also researched, specified and installed a wireless data network system – a trend-setting learning environment designed to increase student achievement.

The system, which allows wireless communication from the students'

laptop computers within any of the school's classrooms, is the heart of what makes C3 a leading edge educational facility. As students use their laptops to participate in classroom exercises, teachers obtain immediate feedback through their own computer, and are able to provide students additional assistance and refine lesson plans to enhance student comprehension.

## Teamwork essential to fast-track project

The tight timeline and unique needs of C3 required Johnson Controls to partner with Milwaukee's Housing Authority, consulting engineers, and key sub-contractors to validate the design and specify the necessary systems. The company's expertise and existing relationships in the construction community provided an environment in which educated decisions and design changes could be made without delaying construction.

Dr. Faltz indicates that, since the school's opening, many people with a similar idea and vision have remarked about the project's short timeline. She wrote the charter application in 1998 and the school opened for fall classes in 2000. Construction took just 10 months.

"The Cyberschool represents one of the most significant public-private partnerships in Milwaukee," says former Mayor John Norquist. "It serves as an education model for other communities across the country. This partnership brought more than a bricks and mortar investment. Through Johnson Controls' involvement, we were able to develop a state-of-the-art high-tech learning experience, secure monies for delinquency prevention programming, and provide parents with a quality alternative for their child's education."