Today’s K-12 schools must do it all: teach kids the basics while preparing them for a 21st century digital workforce. But that mission became especially challenging when a pandemic drove students and teachers into remote learning environments. Challenges included:

- Not enough take-home devices for every student.
- Inadequate security and limited bandwidth to deliver a safe and smooth learning experience.
- Fewer dollars left to modernize technologies due to prioritization of student education.

APC by Schneider Electric created its K-12 Makeover Contest in 2016 to give winning schools an extra $10,000 to improve their IT environments and give them the ability to educate anywhere.

Any K-12 school or district can enter for a unique opportunity to win $10,000 to improve or update technology that can help them deliver an in-person, remote, or hybrid learning experience.

Here’s our most recent winner’s story:
A Winner: New Haven Public Schools

New Haven Public Schools (NHPS) serves the city of New Haven, Connecticut. This highly diverse school district has more than 20,000 students in grades Pre-K through 12 with more than 1,800 teachers and 2,500 full-time staff members.

The 2009 winner of a nationally competitive $53 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education, NHPS sought to close the state test performance gap between NHPS students and the rest of the state in five years, cut the dropout rate in half, and ensure that graduating students have the resources needed to attend and succeed in college. Over the past decade, NHPS also partnered with the City of New Haven, the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven, and Yale University to create the New Haven Promise scholarship program—resulting in increased postsecondary education enrollment and the largest increase in black and Hispanic graduation rates among major cities in Connecticut, a 17.5-point gain in seven years.

With the district tightly focused on education—and the shifts needed to educate students during a pandemic—funding the management and maintenance of upwards of 50 buildings and physical infrastructure is challenging.

So when Lauren Strillacci joined NHPS in September 2020 as Grant Writer, she went right to work and submitted their entry on September 28—just two days before the contest closed.

New Haven’s submission showed that they were in desperate need of some help. We’ve had some small schools win the contest before and they had their own unique challenges, but we have never had a school department as large as New Haven win the contest before. With the challenge of so many buildings, students, and the lack of resources, coupled with the unique challenges of education in 2020, New Haven looked like they needed the most help.

— Jay Bogosian, Public Sector Channel Director, APC by Schneider Electric


Ensuring a Modern, Smoothly Running Network

For APC by Schneider Electric, choosing New Haven Public Schools for a desperately needed $10,000 IT makeover was a no-brainer.

The video sent by Strillacci showed not just one but multiple areas with outdated equipment, chaotic wiring closets, unracked servers, makeshift air handlers, and more—all to support some 30,000 or more users, many of whom were working and learning from home.

The district chose to use its $10,000 prize to revamp its data center with eight APC Smart-UPS systems with Network Cards—which were delivered by Whalley Computer Associates, an APC by Schneider Electric partner, on January 21, 2021, when the award was presented. This equipment had been on Supervisor of Network Services Bill Zesner’s wish list for over 10 years, replaced relics from 2003, and joined four other APC SMX Smart-UPS units that were acquired a couple of years ago.

While trying to figure out how to do teach-from-home versus teach-in-the-classroom, school districts shouldn’t need to worry about technology issues like whether the UPS is going to work or not. Our ultimate objective is to take that off the plate for them, through our EcoStruxure software with Monitoring & Dispatch Services, so that they can focus on what really matters—providing the content and experiences that help our kids learn along their education journey as they become our next future leaders.

— Larry Hann, Channel Digital Services Director, APC by Schneider Electric
Not only do the new UPS units minimize costly power problems by keeping the district’s IT equipment and data safe and available, but the network card with environmental monitoring also enables them to remotely monitor and control the APC Smart-UPS via secure network browsers or external command line interfaces.

As an added bonus, APC by Schneider Electric included complimentary EcoStruxure IT software with Monitoring & Dispatch Services for all 12 UPS units! With this service, the district will receive 24/7 expert monitoring by Schneider Electric Connected Services Hub, with on-site support including required parts, to minimize the chances of downtime.

The NHPS project really speaks to the power of partnership. Because of the contributions made by APC by Schneider Electric, the district was finally able to ensure a smoothly running information highway that enables teachers, students, parents, and administrators to have an always-on learning experience—whether in-person, remote, or hybrid.

The New Haven Public School Information Technology department is so grateful to be the recipients of the APC’s K-12 Makeover Contest. We decided to apply for the contest in hopes to win a makeover for our messy server room, but we never imagined the win would allow us to replace our two 2003 UPSs (Uninterruptable Power Supplies). The APC Smart-UPS technology will assist the district central office in case of a voltage drop or power failure in the main server room. Also, the APC Monitoring & Dispatch Services will allow for a better response time during UPS power loss or failure within the school district. Our network is the unsung hero which maintains this information highway and interconnection between students, parents, teachers, and administration and it must be protected. Safety is our primary goal.

— Gilda Herrera, IT Director, New Haven Public Schools

Does your customer have a problem IT area that’s keeping their school or district from efficiently delivering on its promise of creating an always-on learning experience?

In 2021, the school or district selected will win $25,000. Enter the APC K-12 Makeover Contest by submitting a picture or video at k12makeover.apc.com!