Students benefit from contract for high tech learning environment

Lytle ISD, San Antonio ISD and Cotulla ISD are leading the way in Science Technology Engineering and Math advancement through a contract with Choice Partners for labs created by Creative Learning Systems. SmartLabs utilize 21st century technology to engage students in critical thinking, innovation and real-world problem solving.

SmartLabs are now available for elementary or secondary level and are fully adaptable for any budget, curriculum or class size, according to Gary Nelson, president, Creative Learning Systems.

Lytle ISD, which implemented a SmartLab for both high school and junior high, plans to add a SmartLab to their elementary school in 2014, making the district one of very few across the country to emphasize the STEM initiative from elementary through secondary grades.

Lytle ISD Superintendent Michelle Carroll Smith calls the program “phenomenal” and noted that the engaging work done in the lab “meshes very well with our philosophy.”

New contracts awarded for waterproofing, plumbing and more

Cooperative contracts for electric vehicle charging stations, fuel monitoring, plumbing and waterproofing/ masonry restoration were approved for access through HCDE Choice Partners cooperative during recent board meetings of Harris County Department of Education.

Newly awarded contracts include:

**Electrical Vehicle Charging Stations** (Installation, Repair, Servicing, Purchase, Lease and Lease-Purchase): ABM Building & Energy Solutions, Inc. and LVI Energy;

**Fuel - Fleet Monitoring System, Maintenance, GPS System, Tank Automation and Related Products:** Impact Fleet, Pricelock Inc. and Wright Express Financial Services;

**Plumbing Service (IDIQ Commercial):** Gowan, Inc. and Letso’s Company; and

**Waterproofing/Masonry Restoration and Cleaning:** CBS Roofing, Centennial Moisture, Hefner Roofing, John Walker, LD Tebben, Liqua-Tech, PRC Roofing, Reliable Roofing, Tectra Americas and Weatherproofing Services.

Contracts that were renewed include:

**Job Order Contracting:** Alpha Building Corporation, P2MG and T.F. Harper and Associates, LP;

**QZAB Academic Programs:** National Education Foundation and Technical Laboratory Systems, Inc.;

**Video Surveillance Systems:** Johnson Controls, Inc.

**Window Safety and Security Film Installation:** Phoenix Architectural Products, Inc.

Governmental entities that have signed an interlocal agreement with HCDE may access these legally procured contracts.

Interlocal contracts were approved by the HCDE board of trustees with the following organizations and governmental entities:

- Birdville ISD, city of Comanche,
- Coppell ISD, Crane ISD, Cushing ISD, Etxe Telephone Co-op, Inc.,
- George Gervin Academy, Gordon ISD, Harris County Emergency Service District No. 29, Harrold ISD, city of Honey Grove,
- Katherine Anne Porter School, Kemp ISD, Lipan ISD, Malakoff ISD, McDade ISD, Miracle Educational Systems, Montgomery County Emergency Service District No. 11, Mt. Vernon ISD, Peoples Telephone Co-op,
- Petersburg ISD, Port Neches-Groves ISD, Port of Houston Authority, Rice ISD, Sands CISD, Santa Fe ISD, Somervell County, city of Splendora, Sweetwater ISD, Water Valley ISD, Weston Volunteer Fire Department and city of West Orange.

Entities outside Texas that have registered and become a member include Marshall County Board of Education, Lewisburg, Tenn. and city of Benton Police Dept., Ark.
High tech learning popular with students

Smith said the project-based learning environment is a good model for their teachers in other core subject areas, plus the class is popular with students.

“It’s all hands on, where students can learn at their own pace and make their own choices,” Smith said.

She credited Creative Learning Systems for their flexibility and capability in figuring out what lab components could be used in the temporary classroom last fall when their new junior high building was not yet available. “Doug Graham was very helpful setting up a temporary classroom for our junior high students while we were waiting to move into the new building,” Smith said.

“They were very supportive in training our personnel and getting teachers comfortable with it,” said Smith, describing the installation at the high school.

Smith said using the Choice Partners contract made the procurement easy.

“It just made it a lot easier for us, not having to bid things out, since it was already done for you,” Smith said. “It was a lot easier for purchasing.”

In San Antonio ISD, the district’s 2010 bond provided funding for high tech STEM career exploration SmartLabs in 11 middle schools and more than half of those are complete. The remaining labs are planned for 2013 and future years.

“We have worked with Creative Learning Systems for years, and it was very easy to move to the cloud,” Smith said. “We will have a dedicated room for each grade level and having the cloud makes it easier for our staff.”

Consider moving to the cloud

With the adoption last month of cloud services contracts for **Infrastructure as a Service** and **Software as a Service**, Choice Partners is poised to help meet needs of Information Technology divisions. The benefits and capabilities of cloud systems can be fully utilized to securely access your information anyplace, anywhere, anytime from your smart phone, tablet or PC computer.

**David A. Wanner**, executive vice president corporate and healthcare strategic alliances for Reach IPS, a business partner of Choice Partners contract holder ARC, says most frequently he is asked: “How can I depend on the cloud for my IT system needs?”

He recommends an adequate comparison of both onsite server systems and cloud-based technology. Even if an entity uses a cloud provider to host applications, the entity will still own the data.

See a video news report about the San Antonio ISD program in the blog titled “How cool is this!” http://www.creativelearningsystems.com/blog/2011/10/default.aspx
Wanner recommends considering:

- **Initial and ongoing expenses.** Cloud-based technologies allow conversion of standard capital expenses to operational by leasing the hardware and software instead of purchasing it. This may lower expenses by an amount as modest as 1% to an average of 30%.

- **Reduced IT expenses.** Cloud companies have service desks which answer calls 24/7 as part of the monthly service, eliminating the need to call an IT service technician to the site. Significant savings can also be seen in reduced server and network infrastructure costs, desktop management costs and future server and application upgrades.

- **No requirement to invest in upgrades.** Most monthly cloud services complete all software upgrades by working with the vendor to ensure things are done correctly while avoiding any system downtime. Service Level Agreements are key to ensure that the cloud company does as promised and is accountable through financial reimbursement if SLA’s are not met.

- **Built in compliancy.** Ever increasing federal, state and organizational regulations can require more know-how. Partnering with the appropriate cloud provider can significantly reduce the risks of non-compliance and ensure a safer, more robust data environment.

Look for a cloud provider that advocates a holistic approach as an IT partner instead of just selling a service. Good companies combine cloud applications along with on-premise services to bring a seamless environment offering compliance, security and proven results, and can include risk reduction services, such as disaster recovery. Look for companies that have multiple data centers with rollover capability to ensure that you have 24/7 support.

*This information was provided by Choice Partners contract holder ARC*

**Definition**: Cloud computing is a model for enabling ubiquitous, convenient, on-demand network access to a shared pool of configurable computer resources that can be rapidly provisioned and released with minimal management effort or service provider interaction.

*National Institute of Standards and Technology*

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**Ennosphere introduced to assist schools**

Collaborating with Choice Partners, HCDE’s Instructional Technology division now offers cloud consulting services for school districts. Named Ennosphere, the service offers development and implementation of plans to transition to a cloud environment, training for accessing and using the cloud in the classroom, and customization of curriculum. Developed for educators, Ennosphere provides support for delivery of content and curriculum through digital or mobile technology.

Services include:

- Classroom Technology Review
- Cloud Readiness Assessment
- Action Plan Development
- Cloud Implementation
- Training
- Cloud Hosting and Services Licenses – CP solution
- Cloud-Based Curriculum Deployment

For more information, contact David McGeary at 713-696-1343 or dmcgeary@ennosphere.org.

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**Choice Partners Cloud services awarded contracts**

- **Software as a Service**
  - HP
  - IBM
- **Infrastructure as a Service**
  - ARC
  - IBM
  - Phonoscope Light Wave, Inc.
  - SHI Government Solutions
  - SunGard

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**CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

**JANUARY 17**
- No. Texas Facilities Services Association – Haltom City

**JANUARY 17–20**
- MASBA – Austin

**JANUARY 28–31**
- TASA Midwinter – Austin

**FEBRUARY 4–8**
- TX Computer Education Assn. (TCEA) – Austin

**FEBRUARY 18–22**
- TASBO – San Antonio

**FEBRUARY 19–20**
- County Judges & Commissioners Conference – Austin

**MARCH 27–29**
- TX Public Purchasing Assn. (TXPPA) – Austin
on the installation of four labs, so far,” said Oscar Perez, San Antonio ISD director of facilities and planning. “[We] are pleased with the service to date, with representatives of the company working closely with us on ensuring timely project completion.”

Cotulla ISD was the first district to use the Choice Partners contract to access the Creative Learning Systems SmartLab.

The SmartLab is an integrated system of furniture, hardware, software, electronics, multimedia equipment, construction kits, manipulatives, curriculum and assessment. As students use the labs, they learn technology skills for mechanics and structures, computer graphics, science and data acquisition, publishing and multimedia. They apply these technology skills to projects which may include robotics, circuitry, computer simulation and alternative energy. Students present and maintain their projects in online ePortfolios.

Nelson noted that each SmartLab solution is unique, tailored to the learning objectives, design considerations, existing resources and needs of the customer. “We customize the lab to every school and district,” he said.

For more information about the Creative Learning Systems contract go to www.choicepartners.org, www.creativelearningsystems.com or call 800-458-2880. ●

Choice Partners open house celebration