



Welcome to the Real World

High-tech career academy uses Crestron DigitalMedia™ to help deliver world-class convention services

“We believe kids are simulated to death. There’s just not time enough in a 50-minute class period to do anything but talk, watch a video or work on the computer. And so when we began to develop this school, we just kept thinking, we wanted a place where there would be no more simulations.”

That’s Principal Cindy Blakely talking about the real-world education offered at Lanier Charter Career Academy (LCCA) in Gainesville, GA. Not only is LCCA a high school but it’s also a conference center, restaurant, coffee shop, gift shop and a manufacturer of custom business apparel.

Now in its second year of operation, LCCA is a career academy, not a vocational school. That’s a crucial distinction in that most of its students are college bound, with a full, traditional academic workload plus career training.

At LCCA, young adults can learn interpersonal communication skills applied in a working environment, and explore interests in culinary arts, marketing and business management. “There are culinary programs all over this state, but what we teach that will make or break a potential employee is how to serve a customer.”

To prepare their students for the working world, LCCA developers equipped the school with the latest high-tech systems, ranging from digital signage to high-definition video conferencing and meeting recording, all running on a Crestron DigitalMedia™ network.



Extraordinary technology

A program like LCCA's requires much more advanced technology than the typical high school. "We have to have the same kinds of technology as local businesses use, or better," Blakely explains, "so our students can transfer well into the community."

LCCA developers were determined to offer the highest quality AV systems so they called on local audio/video integrator, dB Audio & Video to make it happen.

According to Aaron Turpin, Technologies Director for the Hall County Schools, "Everything, from the network wires to the digital audio and video, was designed as it would be for a world-class convention center. That's crucial if our students are to learn in relevant ways."

The conference center includes projection, sound, video conferencing and recording of client meetings to DVD or to a video-on-demand server.

A digital signage system provides event information, welcome signs and client marketing messages for the conference center, plus overhead menus for the coffee shop, an outdoor menu for the drive-through window and daily announcements for the students.

The classrooms all include dual-screen presentation systems plus access to the video conferencing and digital signage systems.

Neil Philpott, systems advisor for dB Audio & Video, says it was crucial to install a digital backbone able to handle all of these technologies and share video and audio signals throughout the building. The DigitalMedia platform allows the transport of all signals at their native resolution without compression, and the DM switcher makes it possible to send any of the video and audio sources to any conference room or classroom. "We felt at that time, and still feel today, that Crestron DigitalMedia was the only viable choice," Philpott explains.

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Aaron Turpin, Technologies Director, Hall County Schools

The DigitalMedia backbone helps make a building-wide video conferencing system viable. By plugging a portable camera and microphone into the Crestron transmitter, the school is able to originate video conferences in any of the classrooms. A recording device was installed so that meetings and classes could be recorded and referenced at a later date.

Not only can clients hold video conferences with their counterparts in other cities, but students can interact with a chef in New York or Paris from either of the two culinary kitchens, or with a guest speaker in the hospitality management or advertising and promotions classrooms.

And because the Crestron system is compliant with all digital and analog standards, staff and clients can use any source to show any media, from older laptops and DVD players to the newest Blu-ray Disc® players, iPod® or video players, including movies and videos with HDCP copy protection.

The Crestron backbone is also used to support audio and video feeds for the school's extensive digital signage network. Blakely says students in the advertising and promotions classroom design all of the images displayed, including signs for client events.

Crestron touch screens and processors simplify operations so students can comfortably control everything. "When we divide the conference rooms, the control system knows how the room is divided, and adjusts the sound system and cameras automatically," Philpott explains.

dB Audio and Video also installed a theatrical LED lighting system in the conference center's largest room. The Crestron touch screen replaces the lighting board, providing a variety of effects for client meetings and events. The Crestron iLux® Integrated Lighting System handles house lighting.

A transcendent experience

Because everything is based on reality, rather than simulations, Blakely says attending LCCA transcends the normal high school experience. "This is about leaning what you love to do and finding out how your skills align or don't align with what you thought you might love. It's a place where our students can explore their passions and abilities. When they find it, they can go on to make it happen in college, in a technical school or at work."

The technology, too, transcends what's normal in most high schools. "Analog is not where the industry is going," adds Turpin. "The Crestron system is flexible, versatile and powerful. There is a huge difference between the DigitalMedia-based system at LCCA and other AV systems we have in the district."

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