

Gulf District Schools, FL

Building stronger and more resilient after environmental and public health crises



Serving nearly 2,000 students, employing over 150 faculty members and spanning two separate time zones, Gulf District Schools in Florida is a unique institution committed to K-12 education.

As a rural community left severely impacted by Hurricane Michael's destruction in 2018, its leaders knew that successfully reopening would require a significant investment in their facilities.

They were ready to replace aging infrastructure – some of which was originally installed in the 1960s – to become more energy efficient while cutting their utility spend. To accomplish this while tackling their budget deficit, they recognized the benefits of leveraging

alternative financing methods. As a partner to the district for over 20 years, Johnson Controls was brought on board via an RFQ to develop a roadmap to resiliency, supporting the district's vision for decarbonization and modernization.

"Over the years, Johnson Controls has been a trusted partner for our district," said Jim Norton, superintendent of Gulf District Schools. "They have acted as an extension of the Gulf District Schools team to develop and deliver these infrastructure

improvements which provide more efficient and reliable systems across our campuses."

Modernizing school facilities on a compressed timeline

Leveraging a combination of existing budget, performance contracting and \$1M in grant resources, Gulf District Schools and Johnson Controls were ready to get to work. Construction began in August 2020 while buildings were unoccupied due to the

Case study



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**- Jim Norton,
superintendent of Gulf
District Schools**

pandemic, and continued as students and staff returned, with special attention paid to minimizing disruption.

Improvements included full replacement of equipment in the district’s central energy plant – including chillers, boilers, towers, pumps and more – as well as HVAC systems updates, LED lighting and water conservation upgrades, building envelope improvements and new temperature controls. The integration of OpenBlue Enterprise Manager grants the district advanced building controls and insights. In total, \$20.45M worth of upgrades were made across seven buildings in just 22 months.

Strategic updates drive powerful savings and resiliency

The updated facilities will save the school district nearly \$8.3M in utilities, maintenance, operations and capital costs.

All impacted systems and operational metrics have been modernized and standardized to deliver the most positive economic impact while enabling easy maintenance. In addition, the renovated schools are now safer and more comfortable learning environments through upgraded building systems, including individual classroom temperature controls. The project’s guaranteed future-forward energy efficiency and resiliency means the district is prepared for whatever lies ahead.

“We wanted to reopen our doors after Hurricane Michael stronger than ever, and the COVID-19 pandemic only strengthened our resolve,” added Norton. “Working with Johnson Controls allowed us to achieve this goal on a tight schedule. We’re excited to continue to partner on several ongoing initiatives across our campus, and we look forward to many years of success.”

Through strategic upgrades and alternative financing, Gulf District Schools is positioned to welcome students to modern, sustainable and resilient learning spaces for years to come.

To learn more about how Johnson Controls supports K-12 schools, visit:

<https://www.johnsoncontrols.com/industries/k-12-education>