

## → Learning Goals

**Grades:** 6–12

**American history:**  
Underground Railroad;  
Harlem Renaissance

**English/language arts:** persuasive writing;  
research skills

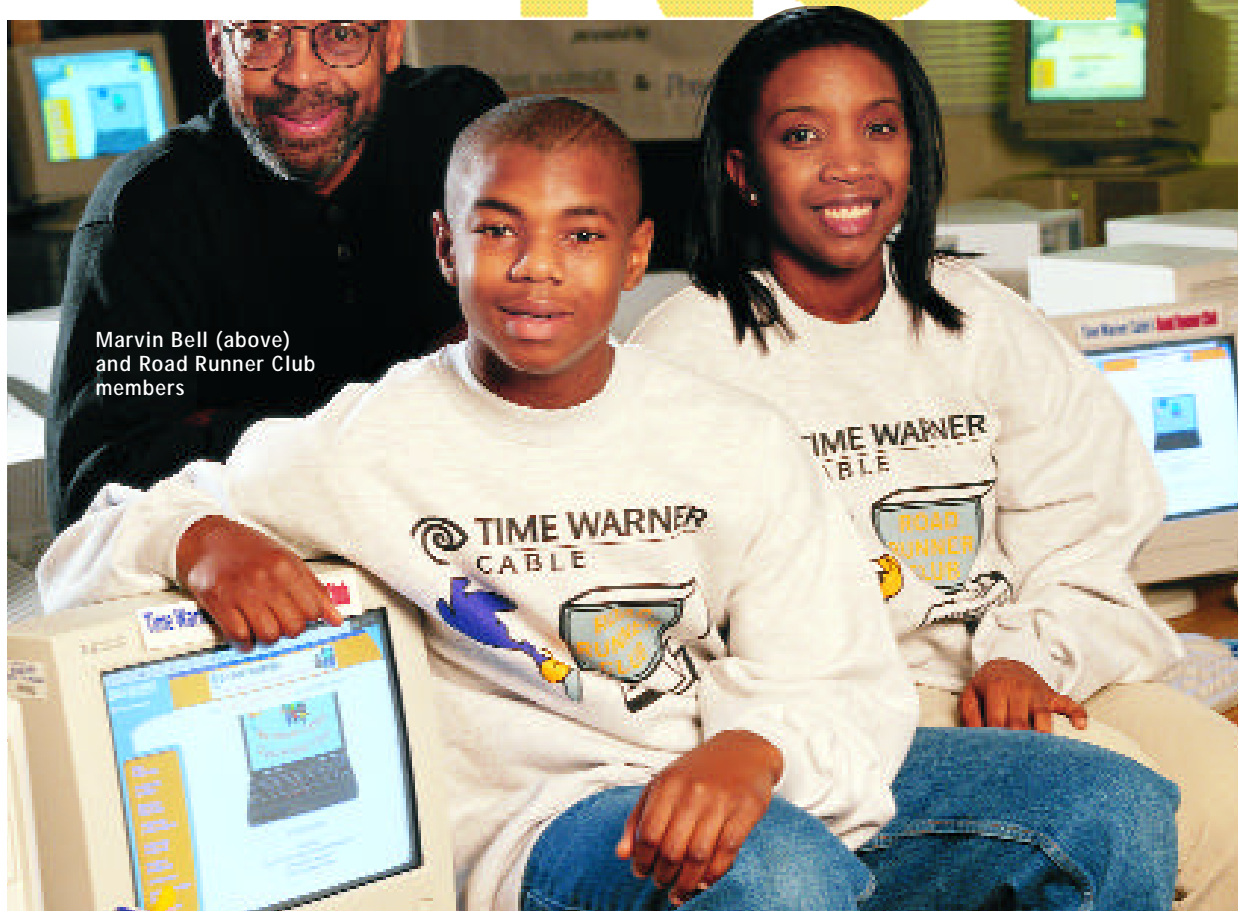
**Technology skills:**  
computer and  
Internet skills

**The Road Runner Club in Milwaukee offers inner-city students a constant connection to learning.**

*by* Jeff Carter

**C**an expanded access to computers have a positive impact on students' academic performance? In Milwaukee, Wisc., a unique public/private partnership was formed to find out. Since December 2000, this pilot project, called the Road Runner Club, has provided Milwaukee middle- and high-school students with access to computers and the Internet

# Nothing Net



Marvin Bell (above) and Road Runner Club members

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TIMEVANS

# “The idea is to envelop and support students with technology and Internet access not just in their schools, but in their homes and neighborhoods.”

at school, at local Boys & Girls Clubs and YMCAs, and at home. The idea, says Bev Greenberg, the vice president of community and government relations for Time Warner Cable Milwaukee, is to “envelop and support students with technology and Internet access not just in their schools, but in their homes and neighborhoods.”

Eleven sites were chosen to host the clubs, including four schools: Milwaukee Education Center Middle School, Riverside University High School, Rufus King High School, and Urban Day School. With the help of PowerUP, a national leader in the development of community- and education-based sites that provide underserved young people with computer skills and resources, Time Warner Cable Milwaukee equipped or upgraded each site with new computers and helps manage the sites. Time Warner then provides the high-speed Road Runner Internet service at each site. In addition, Time Warner and PowerUP provide 10 students and their families with computers and Road Runner Internet service at home. Time Warner employees installed and set up the equipment, and serve as volunteer mentors in computer skills to the Road Runner Club students.

## Knowledge on Call

Establishing sites at schools and in community centers helps meet the growing need for student access to computers to complete their homework. “The Boys & Girls Club tries to support what’s going on at school by providing homework help,” says Liz Humphrey of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee. “Previously, at clubs that didn’t have computers at all, kids weren’t able to do research or type a paper.” Having a computer at home has helped parents get more involved in their children’s education, and in some cases, empowered students to teach their parents new computer skills.

After a year with the program, Dominique Johnson, a tenth-grader at Riverside University High School, says her computer skills have dramatically increased, along with her grades and her research skills. In fact, her computer skills are so good that she has obtained an internship with Time Warner for this summer. At school, she says her new skills especially help her write persuasive essays in English class. Using the computer to search the Internet, she can quickly find the information she needs to back up the point she’s making. Having the computer and Internet connection at home has saved her “lots of time,” she adds.

## Motivation to Learn

Before the Road Runner Club, Milwaukee Education Center Middle School didn’t have Internet access. Now computer teacher and Road Runner Club site coordinator Marvin Bell says that the new technology is motivating students throughout the school. “I had some

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of these kids in sixth grade,” Bell says, “and now that they are in eighth and have been in the Road Runner Club for a year, I’ve seen a definite change in them. One of the boys in the club had a few ‘rough edges’ in sixth grade, but now he’s more focused on his schoolwork and he’s joined the school band and the gospel choir. The club members all come in here as members of regular classes, but I notice that they share their knowledge of computers with other students. Helping other students, transferring knowledge like that, really locks in learning. And while they’re learning to use the computer and search the Internet, they’re learning academics.

“Last year, I created this project called the Underground Railroad Board Game, and I made a contest of it,” Bell continues. “I had five classes during the day and I asked students to research the Underground Railroad on the Internet and CD-ROMs. Then once they got their facts about the people and the events, they had to create their own board game. I wouldn’t have gotten the kind of enthusiasm I got without the Internet search and making the board game on the computer. The fact that they could create something themselves and make it very colorful was a real incentive to learn.

“This year, students are doing multimedia presentations on the Harlem Renaissance,” Bell continues. “They search the Internet for information, they are interviewing some of the teachers here who grew up in Harlem, and they are incorporating period music by Duke Ellington. In the end, they’ll each put together a PowerPoint presentation. Another one of the students in the Road Runner Club who I had in sixth grade would never have been able to do this, or even had any interest in it, if it weren’t for the club.”

The Road Runner Clubs have had a significant impact not only on the kids participating in the club, but on all the other students as well, according to Bell. “Whether I’m teaching social studies, reading, math, or anything—if I can put it into a computer format, I’m going to have more success reaching students with it,” he says. “There are some students who are going to be successful either way, but for some of the marginal students or the ones who lack motivation, if you give them a math problem or a math game on the computer, they’re much more likely to take hold of it and give it their best effort.”

## teachingtools

### Hardware/Software

Gateway Computers  
Hewlett Packard Printers  
Road Runner Modem Service  
PowerPoint

### Links

PowerUP  
<http://www.powerup.org>  
Road Runner Club  
<http://www.wi.rr.com>

For a version of this story with a complete list of Road Runner Club partners and a hardware list, visit the Features area of CIC Online.