

# Hunterdon County Democrat

## There's No Back Seat In Valley View Classes

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By Sandra Rauschenberger

LEBANON TWP. — At Valley View School, teachers and administrators are hoping that a simple auditory device will have students spending less time looking out the window and more time focusing on class.

The school is almost completely wired with the FrontRow Active Learning System. A teacher's voice is transmitted through a small, lightweight wireless microphone worn around the neck to four small speakers arranged around the classroom. A handheld microphone can be passed around by the students. The device has a mute button, and the system turns off when the teacher leaves the classroom. According to Principal Jason Kornegay the system is installed in all but two classrooms in the school, and the equipment's already been purchased to hook up those rooms.

The system's purchase was spearheaded by Marjorie Meyer, the supervisor of special services, who was able to get grants to cover the \$1,500 per classroom cost. Anonymous donations also came in from parents who felt strongly about the benefits of having the system.

Mr. Kornegay describes Front Row as a "sound field system" that benefits all students. "If we have a student with a hearing impairment, it helps them hear the voice of the teacher," he said, "but it also helps students who have learning difficulties and those who don't." The teacher's voice is projected evenly throughout the classroom, giving students the feeling that the teacher is near. "Proximity enhances the child's ability to hear and understand directions," said Mr. Kornegay. As a result, children don't get lost and distracted as easily and

classroom time isn't spent on repeating information and answering questions. "It's not a loud P.A. system. It just enhances the teacher's voice," he said. "It saves them from having to holler out directions. It keeps the children focused and makes sure that directions are understood and don't have to be repeated." Because the children understand the information as it is given they are also responding more quickly, he said. "So much of teaching is the subtle interchange of language between the student and the teacher. If you enhance that, you enhance their ability to learn."

Fourth-grade teacher Colleen Bollette was one of the first teachers to use the system. "I love it," she said. "The device doesn't make your voice louder, just crisper. It's at the level of background noise, so it goes over background noise." The school is switching over to all-tile floors because of cleaning concerns, so background noise is an issue. Chairs have tennis balls placed on their feet to keep the noise level down.

The system has provided some unanticipated benefits. The children use a traditional microphone to ask questions. Many times they are required to stand and use the microphone in front of the classroom and large assemblies. Since the school has started using the system, Mr. Kornegay has noticed "a dramatic difference in how the kids use the microphone and are able to be articulate in front of a large audience."

"It helps children with a quieter voice. It helps introverted kids," said Ms. Bollette. "It gives kids think time to process the question because they have to pass the microphone." She added with a laugh, "Sometimes they pretend they are on *American Idol*."

According to FrontRow company representative Kena Frank, similar systems are in place in the following school districts: Califon, Clinton, Hunterdon Central Regional High School, Flemington-Raritan, Hampton, High Bridge, Milford, Clinton, Tewksbury, Kingwood, Union, West Amwell, Franklin, Delaware and Readington townships.

Mr. Kornegay said that the system has been so successful at Valley View that parents ask to have their children placed in classrooms that have the system. The school is looking into getting a portable system for larger areas. The school is already in the process of purchasing a system for the cafeteria, leaving only the library and gym to be wired. Plans are in the works to wire Woodglen School as well. "I think it would be a benefit to all schools," said Mr. Kornegay.