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Seattle Teachers Talk with Technology

District chooses new classroom sound system to bring comfort, clarity to teaching

PETALUMA, Calif. – August 1, 2006 – The Seattle Public School District will outfit roughly 1,500 classrooms with new sound technologies called FrontRow Pro and FrontRow To Go over a 6-month period beginning this year. Intended to improve comprehension for all students while reducing vocal stress for teachers, the systems will be installed in every elementary classroom in the district. The decision was based on a two-year study of effectiveness and durability by teachers, principals, special educators, and educational technology staff.

The 1,500 FrontRow systems are intended to clarify and evenly distribute the teacher's voice throughout the classroom — allowing students to more easily understand teachers regardless of where they're seated. Key research studies have shown significant improvement in student test scores, comprehension, behavior, and attention in classrooms using the technology. In addition, teachers find they take up to 60% fewer sick days due to laryngitis because the sound systems allow them to teach while using a normal voice level.

"Projecting to the back of the room and controlling unfocused kids takes a toll on teachers," says FrontRow president Jens Holstebro. "Because FrontRow technology lets teachers speak in a normal conversational tone, most educators using one report remarkably better classroom control and lower fatigue."

Children may be missing on average 25% of what teachers are saying — up to 40% in back rows. The reason is that classrooms are acoustically hostile environments according to Holstebro; noise from kids and computers, distance from the teacher, and echo all form obstacles to clear communication. In addition, children lack the complete brain development and language experience to compensate for less-than-ideal listening conditions. "That's why classrooms sound fine to you, me, and other adults," says Holstebro, "but that's not the way they sound to kids." FrontRow classroom amplification systems compensate for these problems, gently amplifying and clarifying teachers' and students' voices, essentially giving every student a front row seat. The system includes a small, lightweight wireless microphone for the teacher, one to four small speakers and a handheld pass-around microphone for the students.

A FrontRow classroom amplification system can be easily installed in a classroom for about the same cost as a computer. "The difference," says Holstebro, "is that these systems benefit every student, all day long."

Headquartered just north of San Francisco, FrontRow's wireless technology has helped build more engaging learning environments since the mid-1960s. Since 2005, the company has focused on using classroom amplification (sound field) technology to improve behavior, comprehension, and test scores for all children. It is the only ISO-registered and FDA-cleared supplier of classroom amplification (sound field) technology in the market. Other company divisions supply hearing assistance technology for public facilities, tour usage, and home applications.

FrontRow is part of the William Demant Group, founded in 1904 as a hearing aid company. Listed on the Copenhagen Stock Exchange (WIDE.CO), William Demant comprises a group of international companies that develop, manufacture, and sell innovative and highly advanced technological solutions in the hearing healthcare and educational field. Through 45 Group companies located in over 20 countries, consolidated group sales exceeded US\$750 million in 2005.

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