Assessments Get a Boost at Grand Rapids Area Schools with the Help of AE-55 Headsets

Durability and flexibility are keys to student success during listening activities, assessments

As classrooms continue to evolve, so does the need for adequate tools within them. New methods of teaching and updates to curriculum require the proper resources to be successful.

Ena St. Germain, fourth grade teacher and technology specialist at Burton Elementary, a school within Grand Rapids Public Schools, is no stranger to the world of digital activities in the classroom. St. Germain has a need for headsets for instructional activities and assessment taking. Two major assessments that Michigan students are required to take were updated to offer an audio feature, making it important for teachers to have headsets in order for students to take the exam.

Updates such as these, paired with a rise in tech-based activities for classrooms across the world, has meant that teachers have been tasked with seeking out and testing effective and efficient tools. For St. Germain, this came in the form of AVID's AE-55 headset. AVID Education products are built specifically for the classroom setting, evolving technologies and state testing requirements. The AE-55 model features a noise-canceling microphone with a rotating and adjustable ambidextrous design, superior sound quality and reinforced cord strain relief, providing an affordable audio solution for educators.

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AV supports 1:1 learning

As a district that supports one-to-one technology initiatives, using headsets as a regular part of instruction was not a new aspect of the typical Burton Elementary classroom.

"We are a one-to-one Apple iPad school, so each student is given a tablet at the beginning of the school year," said St. Germain "We didn't need to be convinced that technology resources are beneficial, but rather needed to find the right resources to fit our school's needs."

Students at Burton Elementary are required to take two major assessments during the school year. One of them is the Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress (M-STEP), and the other is the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) exam. The M-STEP is a 21st century online exam that is given to students to gauge how well they are mastering state standards, offering a comprehensive view of student progress. The MAP is a computer-adaptive test that covers reading, language usage and math.

Each of these assessments has an option for students to have portions of text and directions read aloud, making headsets an essential part of the test-taking process.

"Our school has 85 percent English as a second language speakers, so this functionality is often depended on during test-taking," St. Germain continued. "The ability for students to hear and replay instructions is directly correlated to how well they may perform on these key assessments."

English language learners at Burton Elementary regularly use the AE-55 during class time when translator support staff is not available. The headset allows students to follow along to lesson plans and repeat phrases as necessary while minimizing external interruptions. Students are able to focus on activities and work at their own pace, encouraging an individualized approach to learning.

St. Germain's curriculum also includes using different apps and websites to complete classroom activities, meaning that headsets are used daily by all students. As an Apple school, Burton Elementary has received the ConnectED grant, where all staff received a MacBook Air, and every classroom received a set of 30 headphones, headsets and earbuds.

"We were encountering several breakage and sanitation issues that prompted us to seek another supplier, which is how we found AVID," said St. Germain. "Our students love using the iPads to complete activities, and teachers would be lost without the MacBooks, but the audio equipment wasn't up-to-par with what our district required."

On the importance of durability

In classrooms where multiple students are repeatedly using tools, durability is a crucial aspect. The AVID AE-55 is built for heavy student use, and reinforced to last long-term.

"Our teachers need durability and headsets that are comfortable for students of all grade levels to wear. I've heard about data that shows that earbuds can do damage to the ears of younger children, so those were out of the question," said St. Germain. "The AE-55 offers over-the-ear cups and reinforced cables, a must for daily use."

The AE-55 also offers something that earbuds typically can't: easy sanitation. The ear pads are meant to be cleansed, giving teachers the ability to sanitize and maintain headsets after they have been used.

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AE-55 delivers on state specifications

In addition to being compatible with the M-STEP and NWEA MAP, the AE-55 was developed following the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) as a baseline. These specifications make the headset a leader in delivering on state-specific assessment guidelines.

"It was important that the headset we invested in meets our state's specifications, especially when it comes to assessments," St. Germain explained. "I'd recommend any school looking into AV equipment first checks to see if it meets these important standards."

While audio-visual equipment is often seen as an accompaniment to curriculum, the right headset can make the difference between roadblocks and success for a student.

"The feedback from students tells us much of what we need to know when it comes to evaluating if an implementation was successful or not, and in the case of the AE-55, we've heard nothing but positive things," said St. Germain.