

KENTUCKY SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF



Kentucky School for the Deaf is using TANDBERG video communications equipment to unite its students with other deaf people across the country.

CHALLENGE

Located in Danville, The Kentucky School for the Deaf (KSD) has approximately 150 elementary, middle, and high school students. Because the deaf population in the state is only three percent — as compared to the national average of 10 percent — KSD students seldom have the opportunity to interact with other deaf people outside of the school.

Clyde Mohan, who has been teaching at KSD for more than 30 years, has spent 14 years trying to get video communications equipment installed at the school. Approximately one year ago, he succeeded in getting videophones for the school — a far cry from the video technology he knew was needed to provide opportunities for KSD students to communicate with other deaf children.

Four years ago, his efforts began to pay off when Deby Trueblood joined KSD as Director of Technology and was immediately given the task of laying the foundation for a videoconferencing program. Three years later, with federal E-Rate funding and additional funding from the state, Mohan, who is now also KSD's Videoconferencing Project Manager, and Trueblood were finally able to buy the equipment for which Mohan had fought for so long.

SOLUTION

Mohan, who is deaf, and Trueblood, who is not, worked closely to select which equipment to install.

“Every piece of equipment we buy has to meet the needs of both the deaf and the hearing,” says Trueblood, “and that’s a hard job.”

Mohan and Trueblood had several meetings with a vendor that sells TANDBERG equipment, during which “They taught us about video communications and we taught them about the deaf,” notes Trueblood.

Realizing the uniqueness of KSD’s needs, “TANDBERG built equipment just for us,” Trueblood remarks. “It’s two huge screens side by side — one for the interpreter and one for the presenter.”

KSD has made good use of its TANDBERG equipment, connecting its students with other deaf schools, taking virtual field trips and providing professional development as well.

“For our very first videoconference, we connected our first- and second-grade classes with a first and second grade class in New Mexico,” says Mohan. “The kids introduced themselves and shared facts about Kentucky and New Mexico and they really enjoyed it.”

“We also had a video meeting with the Kansas School for the Deaf,” recalls Mohan. “Our middle school students wrote short stories and then signed those stories to the middle school students in Kansas. They knew they were writing for a real audience. They want to do more...Kansas students provided our students with feedback regarding their stories.”

KSD has used the TANDBERG equipment for several other events, including:

- A virtual field trip for first, second and third graders to the Museum of Puppetry to learn about parts of the butterfly
- A virtual field trip for Grade 4 and 5 students to learn about Native Americans
- A mask-making virtual field trip for first, second-, and third-graders
- A hip-hop dance with both deaf and hearing middle school students
- Professional development on the use of video in the classroom
- Collaboration with other Schools for the Deaf in Florida, West Virginia, Montana and Texas

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RESULTS

When KSD undertook the project to implement video, says Trueblood, “We set goals. Our goal was not videoconferencing, but five big goals that video is allowing us to meet.”

Those goals, she explains, include “providing collaboration opportunities between deaf schools, expanding the community with which our kids communicate, increasing both English and American Sign Language skills, helping students see beyond their immediate world, and establishing the first annual MegaDEAFConference.”

“Video allows us to unite deaf students,” Trueblood continues. “It will allow us to share resources. For example, let’s say there are two students who need to take an Advanced Placement (AP) course in Science. What do you do? You can’t hire. But, if you have video communications equipment, you do have the possibility of one school having an AP teacher and sharing that teacher with other schools.”

Of course, not every deaf school is equipped with TANDBERG. And, Trueblood remarks, “This is where TANDBERG has been awesome. They are helping us to make sure we can always connect with those schools that have different equipment. Most vendors would have sold us the equipment and left. I have another system to prove it — they put it in and they left, but TANDBERG keeps coming back and working with us.”

In addition to the benefits cited by Mohan of “allowing collaboration in real time with deaf peers and providing the ability to see more outside of the classroom,” TANDBERG video equipment is delivering significant cost savings.

“For these field trips,” Mohan observes, “if you look at the added cost of driving, gas, food and the driver’s time, we are saving money.”

But the biggest savings come from not having to pay for contracted interpreters. As Mohan explains, “With video, TANDBERG has been experimenting with their partners to provide real-time online interpreters during our videoconferences, which will mean huge cost savings.”

“Our interpreters at KSD are so busy it’s hard to schedule one — they are mainstreamed in the schools with our kids,” says Trueblood. “Without video equipment, we would have to contract with local interpreters, and they are extremely expensive. In fact, without video, we probably wouldn’t even be able to provide our students with these experiences. Video has opened up a whole new world for us.”

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