



Idaho Digital Learning Academy Enriches Learning through Online Curriculum

Issue

Located in Boise, the Idaho Digital Learning Academy (IDLA) serves a state-wide role similar to an educational service agency, consolidating online learning opportunities for Idaho's 120 school districts. While individual districts administer final grades, IDLA provides them with high-quality teachers, proprietary curriculum, and the materials necessary to deliver instruction.

One of its largest benefits, IDLA offers classes, such as classes in foreign language, that smaller districts can't due to lack of funding or resources, giving students the opportunity to take classes that normally wouldn't be available to them. Enrollment is close to 3,000 students per semester, and on average, a student will take five classes with IDLA. As the technology director at IDLA, Ryan Gravette advises districts on technology and hardware purchases that help deliver the Academy's digital offerings.

Since IDLA's instruction is provided online, Gravette is always looking for high-quality products that meet the needs of the organization's digital courses. For example, when looking for audio headsets, he decided to search for a product that not only provided good audio quality and simple installation, but also was durable and could withstand use by multiple students. Gravette commented, "If we recommend and deliver a cheaper product, our schools, students and parents might think IDLA offers poor course curricula. We want products that meet our needs, and reflect well on IDLA."

Implementation

After reviewing products in the Organization for Educational Technology & Curriculum's (OETC) online database, Gravette purchased the Califone USB headsets (4100-USB). "Califone has a good reputation of providing reliable headsets in a classroom setting," said Gravette. "The product's high quality, along with the company's warranty program, gives me confidence to recommend it to our districts throughout our state."

IDLA uses the USB headset for online tutorials, language learning and other situations that require isolated, vocalized feedback – exactly what students need for an online class. Equipped with rugged ABS plastic earcups and headband, the headset is built to last with increased durability for multi-student use.

In addition, the ambient noise-reducing earcups deliver maximum protection against exterior sound, increasing students' attention during online lessons and to keep them on task. This feature also reduces the need for increased volume, protecting students' hearing.

"We polled teachers over the course of three years and found that our former headsets had a 30-40 percent failure rate," stated Gravette. "Before recommending the Califone headsets, we used them in our own offices, and they worked so well that we chose to recommend them to districts utilizing our online courses."

Case Study: Idaho Digital Learning Academy Boise, ID



Results

Since all IDLA courses feature two-way communication between students and teachers, all students are required to have a headset. IDLA utilizes an online learning classroom tool called Idaho Live, which allows students to log in to a live classroom for one-on-one interaction with a teacher. The teachers have whiteboards, and students can see the teacher's screen on their computer, enhancing interaction. They also can communicate via instant messaging (IM) and Voice-Over-Internet Protocol (VoIP).

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— Ryan Gravette, Technology Director at IDLA

Instead of using pre-published curriculum content, IDLA creates most of the content for more than 120 different classes. They also provide live demonstrations and events that engage students in the curriculum and illustrate lessons through real-world examples.

For example, they recently scheduled a lecture for government students with Brad Little, State of Idaho Lieutenant Governor, and in the coming weeks, health students will be able to view a live surgery and question the doctor during the procedure. These interactive presentations (and others) are recorded and archived for future classes.

While the USB headsets are used least in math classes, the headsets are used in all courses for student-to-teacher instruction and discussion, guest lectures, and class activities.