



## Case Study: Fairfax County Public Schools Fairfax, Virginia

# Fairfax County Public Schools Focuses on Higher Thinking Skills

Throughout the past 40 years, research has shown that there is a strong correlation between oral reading fluency and comprehension. According to Carol Chomsky, well-known researcher and former professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education Reading and Language Department, students' fluency improved while reading along with audio tapes. Her study on assisted, repeated oral readings, was also expanded upon later, indicating that repeated oral readings gave non-fluent readers methods for capturing the essence of the text, therefore improving comprehension.

As research shows that speaking and reading aloud helps to increase language fluency, students can learn and enhance pronunciation by listening to their own articulation and comparing it to an original. And, increasing comprehension through enhanced fluency is critical in developing higher-order thinking skills.

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One of the largest school districts in the United States, Fairfax County Public Schools in Fairfax, Virginia, is concentrating on developing students' critical thinking skills. "We want our students to reflect on their own learning," said Aron Sterling, the district's School Based Technology Specialist. "We are using technology to help kids create and to evaluate their own work. Following Bloom's Taxonomy, we see the development of critical thinking skills vital to personal growth."

Looking for hardware that could help tie together several technologies – such as microphones, headphones and computers – to create a learning center for the foreign language department and to help support the district's goal in encouraging students to use their critical thinking skills, administrators decided to purchase the USB Jackbox (1216USB) from Califone.



### 1216USB

The only USB-compatible jackbox available on the market, the hardware is helping students and educators to design and develop podcasts, practice their language skills and discuss lessons with other students. As the unit allows for 6 headphones and 6 microphones to be connected to the same computer or music player at the same time, the jackbox gives students chances to practice their oral skills, without the lag or impediment that other technologies may create.

In addition, the USB Jackbox is the only unit that has microphone inputs, allowing students to capture their own responses when the jackbox is hooked to a classroom computer. This feature can help students when practicing language skills, giving them a chance to practice, then hear their recorded responses, and compare them to the original.

The USB technology offers educators with the option of combining the functionality of audio output and input to help students enhance both listening and oral skills. In addition, the unit can greatly benefit those who many need additional reinforcement, including English language learners or special needs students.

Connecting the USB Jackbox to the classroom computer through a USB plug, students can practice language skills or listen to recorded books and online streaming videos as a group. In addition, students also can create their own podcasts or connect with pen pals thousands of miles away through any VoIP application with the input functionality.

The USB Jackbox helps to save users the hassle of computer settings by having volume control through the output (green) and input (pink) knobs, and has virtually an unlimited life through its AC adapter.

"We chose the jackbox from Califone because we trust that the company's products are made specifically for the classroom. They are easy to store, work efficiently over long periods of time, are made specifically for children, and are actually durable enough for use by students." Sterling said.

In the foreign language lab, students and educators are using the USB Jackbox to create video clips with voice-overs in the languages they teach, such as Spanish and Chinese.

"The important part is that students are not noticing the technology. The technology works seamlessly with the other parts of the learning center, allowing the students to concentrate on their lessons and not on technology that doesn't work," Sterling concluded.