

Q&A with Forest Lake Academy

An inside glimpse into how video conferencing bridges the geographical divide in special-interest education.



Lower-cost, easier-to-use and easier-to-access video conferencing will impact education profoundly. The technology can place students directly in the classroom, even if they're thousands of miles away, and all they need is a device with a webcam and an Internet connection, whether it's a smartphone, tablet, laptop or desktop. Now students who cannot reasonably access physical campuses can nonetheless partake in classroom communication and acquire the tools they need to succeed later in life.

In the case of Forest Lake Academy near Orlando, Florida, video conferencing gives interested families from other cities access to a parochial education anchored in the teachings of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. We sat down with David Denton, Forest Lake's principal, to hear more about how Lifesize has helped the school achieve its mission through video collaboration.

Can you tell us a little about Forest Lake Academy's student body?

Forest Lake has 362 students. While most live in our immediate community, we have 40 boarders and 15 distance-learning "Connect" students who live anywhere from Bermuda to Chicago. Connect students attend classes via Lifesize Cloud from their webcam-equipped devices.

How does Lifesize help Forest Lake better serve its students?

We use Lifesize to serve members of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church who want to send their kids to a church school but don't have easy access to one. Lifesize is less expensive and more cost-effective than the old bridge approach that we were using.

What are some the biggest changes you've witnessed in education in the past three to five years?

I'd say that the biggest change is the need for students to get things done faster. For example, there's a move toward taking university-credit classes at the high school level to get students ramped up for college sooner.

What are some of the ways Forest Lake is addressing this?

Our partner university sends teachers to our campus to provide college credit classes to our on-campus students. In the next year we will be offering our Connect students access to these classes as well. The professors are already leading distance programs on their home campus, so they're familiar with broadcasting their classes.

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How long have you been using Lifesize?

We used Lifesize’s on-premises system for a number of years and transitioned to Lifesize Cloud about a year ago. The cloud-based service has been excellent—very reliable—and the quality of the video is exceptional. In addition, because the video is so easily accessed by students, all they need is an Internet-connected device with a webcam. The user interface is so simple that it makes our offering very appealing to potential families. It definitely helps us better market our distance-learning program.

Do distance students simply dial into regular daily classes?

Yes. The classrooms have a display at the front and back to give the off-campus students a full view of the room, and we use an eBeam smart board for content. It’s as if they’re really there.

How would you say Lifesize has changed the way the students communicate?

Once they’re in the classroom with Lifesize, the experience is real time and pretty much the same as if they were physically in the room. Communication hasn’t changed. Rather, access has changed.

What’s your favorite Lifesize feature?

The ability to access Lifesize from my iPhone. No matter where I am, if someone has a question or needs me, I can immediately check into that classroom via the video and be a part of the conversation.

What advice would you give other schools that are considering video conferencing?

Be sure you give the teachers enough training—and time to familiarize themselves with teaching via video—to build their confidence. Also, don’t be afraid to engage with Lifesize or your partner for support or questions. That’s what they’re there for. They want you to have a great experience, and you’ll be surprised how helpful they can be.

Learn more

Hear how other customers are using Lifesize to transform their business at: www.lifesize.com/case-studies.

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HEADQUARTERS

Austin, Texas, USA
+1 512 347 9300
Toll Free US +1 877 543 3749

EMEA REGIONAL OFFICE

Munich, Germany
+49 89 20 70 76 0
Toll Free Europe +00 8000 999 09 799

APAC REGIONAL OFFICE

Singapore
+65 6303 8370



www.lifesize.com
E-mail: info@lifesize.com

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