

Wenger Corporation Case Study

High-Tech Music Practice Room Aids Assessment, Learning

With accountability and testing growing in importance across all school subjects, even the arts, a recent innovation from Wenger Corp. – the Virtual Acoustic Environment™ or VAE™ -- is aiding the process. With the VAE, Wenger now offers an integrated learning environment for music featuring a built-in recording/listening environment, active acoustics for “virtual reality” simulations and guaranteed sound isolation.

“I used our two VAE practice rooms for assessment purposes this spring. It was excellent – the rooms worked very well and made my life a whole lot easier,” says Jennifer Mann, band director at Lindsay Thurber Comprehensive High School in Red Deer, Alberta, Canada.

“While I was testing students individually in my office, other students took turns recording their tests in the VAE rooms. My students are assessed four times a year, and this approach really saves me time – I’ll definitely do it again!”

As part of this school’s modernization, the music department moved into a new fine arts suite in December 2005, an area constructed out of the former gym.

Vice principal Rick Ramsfield, who was overseeing the school’s renovation, says the school’s music programs have a very strong reputation, not only in Red Deer, but provincially and nationally. He encouraged the music department to look at Wenger’s practice rooms with active acoustics.

Ramsfield had experienced this technology firsthand at a convention. “I was blown away by the different acoustical settings and the idea of being able to change the hall you were playing in,” he says.

“We knew that acoustics were going to be a fairly significant issue in our new music area, and I also knew we needed practice spaces,” he

recalls. “I was very interested in this freestanding option, which I thought might be an affordable solution to our acoustical issues.”

Ramsfield says there was nothing they could have done in a construction manner that would have come even close to what Wenger engineering had accomplished as a freestanding unit. The school’s technology budget funded a portion of the cost.

In a VAE room, musicians can learn how to optimize their performance by selecting from nine active-acoustic settings, including Baroque room, recital halls, auditoriums, cathedral and arena. Benefits include accelerated development of critical listening skills; improved articulation, dynamics and timing; and a more enjoyable practice session.

Mann says student reaction has been very positive – the rooms are almost in constant use. “My students use the acoustical settings a lot, and I’ve encouraged them to experiment,” she says. “Having the VAE technology will help them discover how they need to adjust their playing to different acoustical environments.”