

Hear this, class! Sound systems for schools touted

By Janice Tibbetts

OTTAWA — All Canadian teachers from kindergarten to Grade 3 should wear microphones and classrooms should be equipped with surround-sound systems to give every student a “front row seat” when it comes to hearing, say audiologists and speech pathologists.

Citing research showing young children cannot hear one of every six words the teacher says, the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists said Monday that classroom chatter, the din of computers, the hum of lights and outside distractions make classrooms noisy places that hinder learning.

“When we put speakers in a classroom... everybody shuts up and listens,” Andre Lafargue, a New Brunswick audiologist, told a news conference on Parliament Hill.

The new study, which involved 1,162 students in kindergarten to Grade 3, was conducted by the New Brunswick government and professors at University of New Brunswick and the Atlantic Baptist University in Moncton, N.B.

The study found that sound amplification is a significant benefit to young students and should be considered a “vital part” of helping them learn.

In the study, researchers studied 31 classes with sound systems installed and 29 without.

Students hear poorly if they are more than 2.75 metres from the teacher. Another significant problem is that teachers’ voices become strained trying to make themselves heard.

In tens of thousands of

classrooms across Canada, teachers are already donning lightweight microphones around their necks to project their voices in the classroom.

Teacher Anna Crosland at Bear Creek Elementary School in Surrey, B.C., said surround sound appears to be making a difference since it was installed last year.

“Even the youngest children are able to articulate that it’s easier for them to hear the teacher,” said Crosland. “I see the children physically sit back in the chairs, knowing they’re not going to have to struggle to hear what the teacher has to say.”

The systems also appear to be making a difference for students who are learning English as a second language, she said.

The nearby West Vancouver School Board just bought dozens of systems for about \$1,200 each.

“We think it’s going to help our children,” said superintendent Geoff Jobson.

The speech-language pathologists and audiologists association said classrooms are getting noisier than ever.

Not only are computers and other technology creating a classroom buzz, students are also doing more talking than ever before because of interactive learning that requires more participation and group work.

“When you walk into a typical classroom these days, you see a lot of interaction, children helping each other, assistants moving around, children are not sitting still in their chair,” said Linda Rammage, president of the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists.