The Urban School of San Francisco "ignites a passion for learning," it proclaims on its web site. This independent private high school aims to "inspire its students to become self-motivated, enthusiastic participants in their education – both in high school and beyond." As part of their ongoing quest to attain such a lofty goal, the school's 1:1 laptop program provides everyone with a MacBook for use on and off campus. As an Apple Distinguished School, and as a pioneer in integrating technology into education, Urban identifies the best Mac-based solutions available, including MacSpeech Dictate. Several dozen students and faculty members at Urban rely on MacSpeech Dictate as a key component of their academic workflow.

Director of Technology Howard Levin explains: "Voice composition is more effective for many of our students and teachers. It's easier for them to get their ideas across and set down a rough draft."

The Urban School doesn't hand out grades, instead relying on extensive reports that all teachers must compose on a regular basis. Levin notes that some faculty members are uncomfortable with technology, but MacSpeech Dictate has freed them to become more productive by speaking their thoughts, rather than dealing with slow typing speeds or unfamiliarity with using a computer.

**Speaking More Fluently**

Math teacher Richard Lautze, whose wife championed the use of MacSpeech Dictate at the school, is one such faculty member. "I can speak more fluently than I type," he says. "I can be more in-depth with my thoughts, which is crucial because it's daunting to have to write 60 reports every six weeks. It's much easier when I can sit back with a cup of coffee and do it."

Lautze adds: "I'm surprised by the ease of use. Training MacSpeech Dictate took about 15 minutes, and it learns my phrases. We repeat a lot of phrases, like 'Doing well in group work,' so that helps. Corrections aren't a big deal, and spellchecking isn't an issue."

Like many Urban School teachers who rely on MacSpeech Dictate, Lautze often uses the software with Microsoft Word, although he typically reserves that application for letters of recommendation, preferring to speak directly into The Urban School's online grading system when composing reports. Levin says some teachers and students even speak their reports and assignments into the school's FirstClass email system because it's server-based and secure.

**Salvaging Her High School Career**

Urban School graduate Amanda Joyce credits MacSpeech Dictate with "pretty much salvaging my high school career." The amount of typing she did her freshman year contributed to a severe repetitive strain injury. Speech recognition helped her overcome this obstacle: "Before MacSpeech, I had to choose between dictating my writing assignments to my long-suffering mother or causing further pain and damage to my hands by attempting to type them myself," she says. "At times, I had to verbally present entire polished essays based on the minimal notes I was able to type, which was not easy."

Like Lautze, who enjoys the freedom of dictating reports while not looking at a computer screen, Amanda Joyce says "it was liberating not to be stuck to a keyboard. I ended up writing many essays while pacing back and forth in my room, and then editing later. I was able to work independently and turn in work I was satisfied with."

She adds that MacSpeech Dictate helped with her writing productivity and creative expression: "MacSpeech allowed me to take writing at my own pace so that I could craft sentences carefully and actually organize papers, like anyone else. That was impossible under the pressure of speaking to a real person and needing to get the entire essay right in one try."

**Broadening the Use of Voice**

Surprise, says Levin, is a common theme among the Urban School students and teachers who install MacSpeech Dictate on their MacBooks: the sudden realization that they don't have to let slow typing, frustration with technology, or a physical disability get in the way of their work. Levin uses MacSpeech Dictate too, and even the school secretary and a jazz teacher rely on it to boost their productivity.

He relates the story of a teacher who broke her wrist and was stuck typing narrative-based reports with her left hand. "I saw what she was going through," he recalls, "so I installed MacSpeech Dictate on her MacBook, and within ten minutes she was beaming that she could write reports with her voice. We're working as an institution to broaden the use of voice."
Amanda was the first student to begin using MacSpeech Dictate at Urban. Director of Technology Howard Levin says that within three hours of setting her up with the software and a microphone-equipped headset, she sent him an email that said: “I would like to announce that MacSpeech already works almost perfectly the first time I have used it (and life has consequently improved like crazy).”

She relied on MacSpeech Dictate for all of her classes except math and Spanish. “I usually used it in Microsoft Word,” she recalls, “but I also used it to type email or ‘stickies’ notes. I was able to work much faster since I did not have to rest my hands and do exercises every 10 minutes.”

Amanda even found a creative way for MacSpeech Dictate to help with her procrastination strategies: “Normally when I wanted to procrastinate for a while, I would have to leave the room to find a distraction. With MacSpeech Dictate, when I needed a break I would not have to move at all. I just started singing to the software, and I enjoyed the interesting remixed lyrics it spit back at me.

“That by eliminating the time required to leave the room and decide on a procrastination tactic, MacSpeech Dictate drastically reduced my distraction-to-focus turnaround time.”

IMPORTANT NOTICE: This success story and case studies provides an overview of the users experiences with MacSpeech Dictate. As a result of the acquisition of MacSpeech, Inc. by Nuance Communications, Inc. in 2010, the MacSpeech Dictate product was renamed Dragon Dictate for Mac.