

YEARS STORIES 10



LISTEN UP! EDUCATION FOUNDATION GRANT LEADS TO CLASSROOM AMPLIFICATION SYSTEMS

We've all experienced it: A speaker stands at the front of the room and we intend to listen attentively.

But there's a problem: it's hard to hear what the person is saying.

So we continue to listen and fill in the gaps with assumptions, or we lose interest and let our minds wander.

"It happens to everyone," Elaine Janiga, Willow Creek Elementary School's speech language pathologist explains. But when it happens to school children in their classrooms, it can lead to big academic problems. Being able to hear the teacher as lessons are presented are essential to learning.

Allergies, ear and sinus infections, and undiagnosed hearing problems are common in children - making it likely that some students are experiencing a degree of hearing impairment. As long as students look attentive, the teacher may not know.

"You don't really know if a student is listening or not," Janiga said. "You don't know if they can hear you."

Janiga decided to do something about this long-standing classroom challenge by obtaining funding to install sound-field amplification systems in classrooms. When a classroom is equipped with a sound-field amplification system, the teacher's voice is transmitted from a microphone to ceiling or wall mounted speakers, which amplify it above ambient room noise. In this way all students, regardless of where they sit or which way the teacher faces, can hear. Background noises can be especially problematic for students with learning disabilities, those in the early language acquisition process or with fluctuating hearing losses.

Janiga wrote to 22 organizations to seek funding and was denied, but the Humble ISD Education Foundation said yes in 2002. Since then, classroom amplification systems are included in all new elementary schools and bond funds have provided for many older schools to be retrofitted.

Teachers love the systems because they experience less overall fatigue by speaking in a normal tone of voice. They also don't have to repeat directions as often, freeing up more time for academics. "The climate in the classroom changes with the system. The kids are on task. The teacher is no longer raising her voice," Janiga said. "It's across the district now. We have thousands of kids benefiting from better listening in the classroom."

In the Foundation's ten years of existence, over \$3.1 million dollars have been awarded to Humble ISD educators to support innovative enrichment projects in our classrooms. For more information, please visit www.humbleisdfoundation.org.