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## Amplified instruction

### Educators can reach back of room

12:01 AM PDT on Friday, October 28, 2005

By STEVE FETBRANDT / The Press-Enterprise

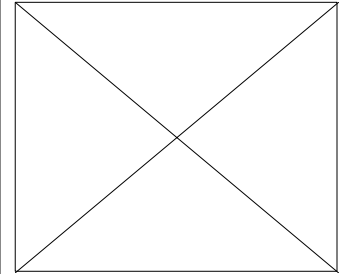
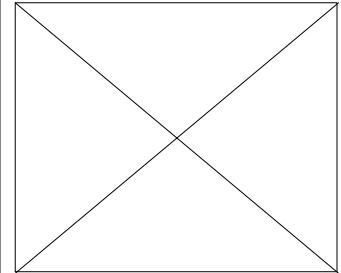
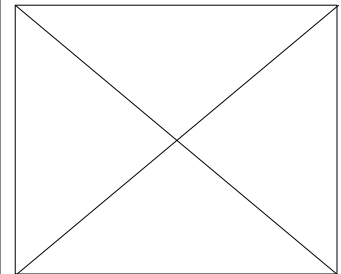
**BANNING** - There was a time not long ago that Hoffer Elementary School teachers strained their voices or shifted students with auditory problems to the front rows so they could hear their lessons better.

Technology has solved the problem. Today, almost all of Hoffer's teachers are wired for sound with equipment that amplifies their voices through strategically placed classroom speakers.

Principal Joya Baker said the devices have been in use for three years in the Banning Unified School District at Hoffer and Central Elementary schools.

"We have so many kids who have auditory-processing problems, we thought we might want to try it," she said. "Our third-grade teachers volunteered to be the guinea pigs, so we bought enough to install them in eight classes."

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Over time, more teachers saw the benefits and asked for their own systems. Now, almost all 35 classrooms at all grade levels are equipped.

"The teachers love them. They feel like they can speak in a normal voice and project to the back of the room and reach all of the children," Baker said.

Industry studies show that as much as 43 percent of elementary students fail a hearing test on any given day, and the average grade-school student misses 25 percent of what a teacher says.

In addition, half of all teachers experience voice disorder at some time in their career, compared to approximately 5 percent of the general population.

The sound system consists of a transmitter about the size of a pocket pager that is worn on the teacher's clothing. A microphone hangs from a lanyard around the neck, and speakers are mounted in the corners of the room near the ceiling.

The setup costs just under \$1,500 per classroom, but once installed, requires only batteries or replacement of an occasional bad microphone.

Fourth-grade teacher Troy Sheldon said it has made a huge difference in having the attention of the students in his classroom.

"With the speakers positioned in the back of the room, my voice comes back to them. Students are able to access all of the sound coming from me. It's also much better for clarity of voice and helps filter through the lower-level hum in the classroom.

"It actually gets them to stop chattering, because the level at which they have to talk is too loud."



Steve Fetbrandt / The Press-Enterprise

**The microphone and speaker system used by fourth-grade teacher Troy Sheldon helps stop chatter, he says, because the level at which they have to talk is too loud. The equipment, which costs about \$1,500, is in almost all of Hoffer Elementary's classrooms.**

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Third-grader Patrick Flores said he likes the amplified instruction because everyone in the classroom gets to hear what's going on.

"Once in second grade, my teacher didn't have it, and she speaks really low. It made it hard to hear," he said.

Patrick's teacher, Gretchen Pelle, has been teaching 28 years, including 20 at Hoffer.

It was her daughter, a speech therapist, who brought the technology to her attention. In turn, Pelle presented the idea to Baker.

"It's much easier to get the children to pay attention," Pelle said. "It's really important to have a clear voice and good pronunciation."

In the past, Pelle said, teachers' throats would become dry and their voices strained by day's end, especially at the start of the school year after the instructors returned from summer vacation.

The equipment also works as a classroom discipline aid.

"Now it takes absolutely nothing to get everyone's attention," she said. " I can say, 'One, two, three -- eyes on me,' and everyone looks up because they can hear in every part of the room. It's very easy for the teacher, in a calm manner, to call them back together or get them on task."

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