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Bad sound top issue at hearing

PTA Council bulks at Hairton's response

By: Mike Fila

Making it easier for students to hear headlines a county PTA convocation Oct. 25th at New Town High school, showing the issue is still top priority for local education interest groups.

As Baltimore County continues the early stages of operating budget planning, local PTA chapters stand firmly behind sound enhancement as a necessary supplement to County classrooms.

A sound-enhanced classroom features at least four speakers and a wireless microphone, worn by the teacher. The system allows teachers to maintain a conversational tone that is evenly distributed throughout the classroom, creating a surround sound effect.



FILE PHOTO
In 2005, Christopher DeMallie, then 6, and his mother Suzanne DeMallie, of Towson, demonstrated the sound enhancement system Suzanne DeMallie and the Baltimore County PTA Council want in every county classroom.

PTA Council wants to improve sound in all classrooms

The county allotted \$50,000 for sound enhancement projects over the past two years, although the Board of Education requested \$900,000. Equipment costs \$1,500 to \$1,700 per classroom, according to county PTA.

The \$50,000 was used to retrofit classrooms in Stoneleigh Elementary School in Townson with audio technology. “What has over the past two years is an embarrassment,” said county PTA president Susan Katz. “The school board has said this is important and with the strike of a pen the county executive has said this is not import or not as important as something else. Well, we think it should be at the top of (the county’s) agenda.”

Susanne DeMallie brought the issue of sound enhancement to the PTA in 2005 after her son, Christopher, now 8 years old, was found to have an audio processing deficit in 2004.

Christopher attends Stoneleigh.

She found that a child’s hearing does not fully develop until age 15, and that that the decibel level in a teacher’s voice dissipates the farther it has to travel, so children sitting farther back in the class have a more difficult time hearing, according to studies by F.H. Bess and Carl Crandell.

This causes teachers to strain their voices, something that can be easily avoided with sound enhancement technology. DeMallie said.

DeMallie, a Townson resident, founded the Institute of Enhanced Classroom Hearing in 2006, her cause taken up as part of the legislative platform of the 5.5-million –member national PTA chapter.

The technology is already in place in states like Michigan, Ohio and Florida, with positive results.

“Sound enhancement systems have become an integral part of the 21st century classroom. As the role of the teacher transforms from sage on the stage to guide on the side ... teachers are able to maintain a level of control without having to raise their voices to a shouting level,” said Kate Kemker, head of the Florida school system’s bureau of Instution and Innovation.

For more information about on county PTA activities, go to www.beptacouncil.org.

For more information about the Institute for Enhanced Classroom Hearing go to www.classroomhearing.org.

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