



# Inspiring Imagination IN THE CLASSROOM

How does a top-ranked school district provide even more competitive advantages for its students and teachers? For Katy ISD, the answer was to create an educational foundation that provides grants to extend classroom learning and transcend budget constraints.

In 2012, Katy ISD Partners in Education Director Janet Theis and the newly formed Katy ISD Education Foundation gathered together to determine their purpose and to find a name that would capture that purpose. Right away the decision was made to give grants to individuals and teams of teachers who are imaginative and think outside the box.

## Selecting the Winners

With the foundation ready to go, they next issued a challenge to all Katy ISD teachers: imagine your classroom where every dream is a possibility, where thinking big means going big, where extraordinary endeavors are the norm, where opportunities are limited only by one's imagination, where the creative reality of one changes the trajectory of thousands, and where the community makes all that happen.

Katy ISD teachers didn't hesitate to rise to the challenge. In 2014, the second year of the foundation's existence, some \$209,599 in grants was given to 26 campuses. The selection of grant proposal winners is a three-step process. First, the district evaluates the proposals to make sure they align with the district and state standards. Second, each proposal is scored with a rubric. No teacher or school names are listed with the proposal, to ensure a blind scoring. Last, the committee votes on which proposals will make a deep student impact.

## Stimulating the Senses

One winning proposal was submitted by two Pattison Elementary special education teachers. Kristina Sica, PPCD teacher, and Gail Pope, a resource teacher, have planned a sensory motor lab designed to target the different sensory systems like visual, auditory, and tactile. They plan to purchase a bubble column, fiber optic lights, a swing, calming music, things to crawl on and through, and other equipment to either calm or stimulate different senses. "A strong sensory diet has been shown to have positive effects on student learning and on their overall sensory systems," says Sica. "It is our hope that spending time in the sensory motor lab each day will lead to more productivity."



## *Katy ISD Education Foundation rewards creative teachers with grants to continue their successful work in the classroom*

*Written by Susan Perini | Photography courtesy of the Katy ISD Partners in Education*

### *Journey to the Edge of Space*

One grant proposal that was representative of the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) program was written by Don Adams and Richard Johnson II from Taylor High School. They have created an out-of-the-box idea that requires the cooperation of computer science classes with earth and science classes.

They plan to have the students design a program to launch and recover a real weather balloon, then collect and interpret data from the sensory equipment on the balloon. This exciting project will show students real-world processes and will show them how different subjects work together.

"The foundation supporting our educational aspirations in the culmination of ever-changing technology of today, and dynamic science and mathematics into one long-term project, is a terrific way to strengthen the knowledge students have. This project would not have been a possibility without the generosity and support of the foundation," says Johnson.

### *Supporting STEM Programs*

The Education Foundation has been successful thanks to the support of community members and businesses that recognize the long-lasting benefits they hope to create. After working closely with Katy ISD, the Junior Achievement program, and the Cinco Ranch FIRST Robotics program, BP decided to become the cornerstone investor in the education foundation as well.

"Because there is a great need for more people with backgrounds in STEM, it was natural for BP to support the Education Foundation by creating the BP STEM grant program," says Michael Moore, BP senior director for communication and external affairs.

### *Contagious Passion*

Thesis exudes contagious passion and enthusiasm when she talks about the Inspiring Imagination grants. "It's really exciting to see how one teacher can inspire the students, other teachers, and maybe even other grade levels," she says. "We're building this to last - to touch students and teachers long after we're gone." KM

*SUSAN PERINI lives in Katy with her husband and three children.*



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## *A Few of the* 2014 GRANTS AWARDED TO KATY ISD

**Recipients:** Hayes Elementary teachers Lauri McKnight and Brandi Pickens

**Grant:** GEMS Club - Girls Excelling in Math and Science

**Amount:** \$1,400

**Recipients:** Mayde Creek Elementary teachers Jessica Crandall and Julie Brigance

**Grant:** Bookstore on the Bayou

**Amount:** \$5,000

**Recipients:** Stanley Elementary teachers Michelle Luster, Melissa Moyer, Jennifer Shortt, Leslie Grayson, Michelle Burnitt, Jennifer Middleton, and Kelly Caballero

**Grant:** Let it Grow, Let It Grow, Let it Grow: A Campus Greenhouse Project

**Amount:** \$5,000

**Recipients:** McMeans Junior High teachers Karen Lewis, Kate Hildebrand, Michelle Jeffrey, and Pam McCrory-Bartlett

**Grant:** Connecting to the Global Classroom Project

**Amount:** \$3,612

**Recipients:** Seven Lakes Junior High teachers Caitlin Gardner, Sandra Rodriguez, Aimy Thorsen, and Rick Turner

**Grant:** Apple Technology in the Eighth Grade Science Classroom

**Amount:** \$2,790

**Recipients:** WoodCreek Junior High teachers Tanya A. Swindell and Brittany Fannon

**Grant:** Cross-Curricular Integration in English, Language Arts, and Social Studies

**Amount:** \$4,749

**Recipients:** Morton Ranch High School teachers Karen Sparks and Myrea Schmidt

**Grant:** 100 Stories Told: Students Create Their Own Published Works

**Amount:** \$5,000

**Recipients:** Seven Lakes High School teachers Sara Mullenax, Julie Irving, and Nancy McCanlies

**Grant:** Array of Hope: Cancer Analysis Using Microarrays

**Amount:** \$4,284

*Learn More Visit [katyisdeducationfoundation.org/pages/home.aspx](http://katyisdeducationfoundation.org/pages/home.aspx) or call 281-396-6031.*



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