

SMART Showcase School Profile

EDCompass newsletter

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Salt Lake City School Leads Learning Exploration

By Heather Ellwood

When a school is named for an explorer who determinedly voyaged into the unknown over 230 years ago, there is an expectation that discovery and innovation will be found in large doses in its classrooms. Such is the case with [Escalante Elementary](#), a science-focused school in the Salt Lake City School District. The school was named after Silvestre Velez de Escalante, who was one of the first Europeans to journey in 1776 to the area we now call Utah. Nicknamed *the explorers*, the school's 625 students have recently embarked on an educational voyage powered by SMART Board™ interactive whiteboards and creatively funded by a wide range of community support groups and private organizations.

In 2007, Escalante Elementary was an Intel Schools of Distinction award winner in science education. As part of its prize package, the school was given three SMART Board interactive whiteboards. With science and inquiry already driving instruction and learning in the school, the boards were a perfect fit, says Dr. Richard Aslett, Escalante's principal.

"After seeing those three SMART Boards in use, our teachers believed the technology would have some real implications for our student body. Our school is unique because not only are we Title I, but nearly 55 percent of our students are second language learners. We're always looking for ways to use our time more intensely, and we thought SMART Boards would help us meet our goals," Aslett explains.

Rather than implement SMART Board interactive whiteboards on a piecemeal basis, as district and school funding would allow, Aslett and the Escalante faculty began a vigorous program of fundraising so they would have the means to do a one-time implementation – one SMART Board for every classroom. They first approached various stakeholders within their school community, including the parent-teacher association and local school council. After seeing demonstrations of the kind of classroom that could be achieved with a SMART Board, parents and other community members were impressed – especially when they realized the impact the product could have for second language learners. The groups were wholeheartedly behind the implementation.

Next, Aslett and the team approached the Salt Lake Foundation, which raises private funds and donates them to the city's public schools for enhancement projects. They too jumped on board, committing funds to the school's tech-buying plan. Other business donors, such as GMAC and Tesoro, were also presented with Escalante's well-documented proposal. Again checkbooks were opened, and the school was well on its way to a full implementation.

The last fundraising piece fell into place, says Aslett, when Salt Lake City School District agreed to foot the bill for the installation of the 27 interactive whiteboards the school had purchased. Escalante Elementary found itself, in six short months, with a SMART Board interactive whiteboard in every classroom.



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Dr. Richard Aslett

Principal

Escalante Elementary
Salt Lake City, Utah



If you would like to visit Escalante Elementary School to talk with educators about their success and see firsthand how they're putting SMART products to work, visit the [SMART Showcase School](#) section on our education website. From this page, you can also find a Showcase School or District in your area.

Exploring interactivity together

Having all the SMART Board interactive whiteboards installed at one time gave the Escalante faculty the opportunity to explore the new technology as a team. "We recognized there would be some strength in doing this implementation all together. We've been building lessons together, and we've supported each other along the way. Having all of us starting at the same time, in the same place, with the same technology has been a very unifying experience for our school and our community," Aslett explains.

Educators at the school did receive formal training on the use of the SMART Board, and sixth-grade teacher Amanda Mantas and two others visited another SMART Showcase School to learn its program. But according to Mantas, Escalante teachers discovered that jumping in with eyes wide open was the way to go. "We've found that being hands-on – getting in there and exploring with the kids and taking lots of chances – has really helped us to use SMART Boards more effectively," says Mantas.

The hours spent fundraising and taking chances in the classroom have paid off, teachers say, and that's after only one year of using the interactive whiteboards. Elaine Manousakis, one of Escalante's kindergarten teachers, believes the SMART Board interactive whiteboard has increased the speed at which her second language learners pick up English language vocabulary. Manousakis presents images and their matching words on the SMART Board and then lets her students take mastery by touching the board to manipulate the material. "When I use the SMART Board, the content is more accessible for all my students. It's more engaging, and they are more invested. That helps push them on," she says.

Mantas agrees with Manousakis's assessment of the technology – Mantas's students are "glued to what's happening on the interactive whiteboard." They are also more eager to volunteer answers and share information.

Where Escalante Elementary goes from here hasn't been determined. But considering that the school motto is *Exploring Our World*, Mantas has no doubt that the direction will be student led. "Our students have always been the reason for what we do here in this school. We did all that background work to raise the funds and get SMART Boards for the kids, and the reason we use them is for the kids. Wherever they lead us, we'll go."

Educators at Escalante Elementary believe there is no limit to what their students can achieve with SMART Board interactive whiteboards in every classroom, especially when the technology is coupled with their focus on exploration and excellence. Aslett says, "We think being a SMART Showcase School is going to allow all of us – our teachers, administrators and staff – to access technology and training that will help us maintain an edge and will help us keep pace with our students." **EC**

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