

# Reaching Their True Potential

**EDCompass** newsletter

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## Exceptional Students, Extraordinary Learning

By Kim Hamill

Exceptional students. For the teachers who work with them, the term is fitting. Although they are often defined by their achievements or challenges – or in some cases, both – what's truly exceptional about these students are their unique views and needs when it comes to learning, and the impact their presence has on the classroom.

And teaching exceptional students – whether they are students with special needs, those who are gifted or students who are considered to be both – can be challenging and rewarding. But by creating visual, interactive lessons using SMART products, many teachers are helping to motivate exceptional students to reach their true potential.

Teachers like Pauleen Walsh, who works with gifted second-grade students at [The Weiss School](#) in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida.

Walsh teaches math, language arts and social studies and is the school's Taekwondo instructor. She says that her job is rewarding because she has the opportunity to work with students who are naturally curious global thinkers.

She uses SMART products such as the [SMART Board™ interactive whiteboard](#) to bring out her students' natural affinity for learning and enable them to experiment with lessons.

"SMART products help them develop their curiosity, critical thinking and creativity," Walsh says, adding that because students find these products fun to use, they are more motivated to learn.

"I think if they like learning and if they like how they are learning, they are just going to naturally retain more," she says.

Walsh uses SMART products throughout her lessons, whether it's [SMART Classroom Suite™ interactive learning software](#) to support them during Internet research, the [SMART Response™ PE interactive response system](#) to poll students on their knowledge of a topic or the SMART Board interactive whiteboard to promote small-group learning.

And SMART products are used throughout The Weiss School – even in the Dojang, which is the Taekwondo training hall.

"We are lucky to have so much technology, because the world is becoming such a small place. I think the technology motivates the kids, and it's amazing how much you can learn through technology," Walsh says.

Project-based learning is one of the ways that Walsh uses technology products to motivate her students. Recently, she and her students started working on a project about the U.S. states. Walsh started the project by using her SMART Response interactive response system to poll students about their knowledge of the states.

One of the challenges that Walsh has when working with gifted students is that often one or two of her students have already mastered a topic or subject, so it's important to Walsh that she assess their level of understanding before she starts teaching.



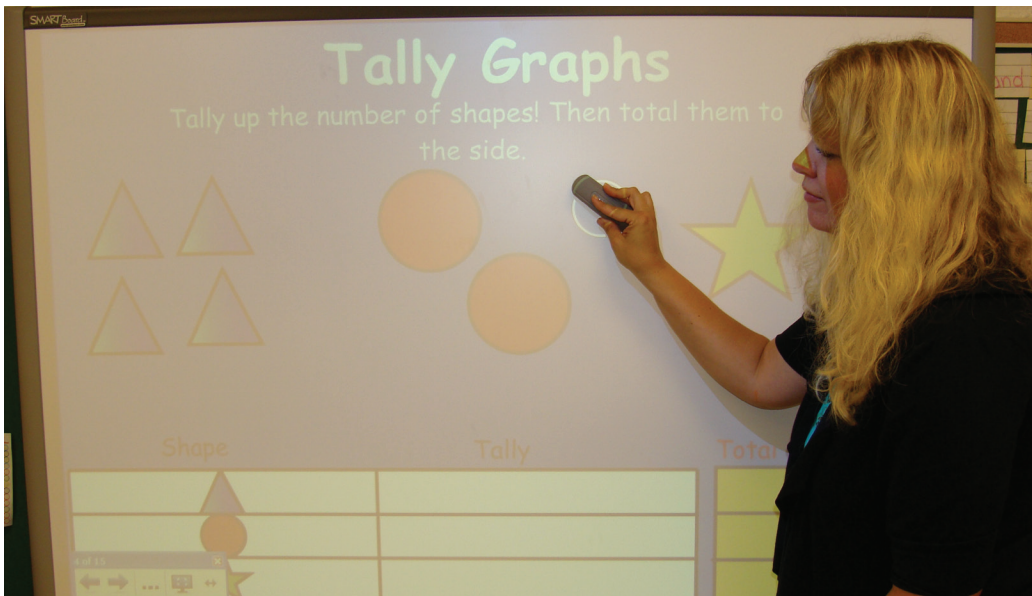
"SMART products help them develop their curiosity, critical thinking and creativity."

**Pauleen Walsh**

Teacher

The Weiss School

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida



After using the responses from the poll to formulate the project's objectives, Walsh assigned each student a different state to research, and then she used Florida as an example of how she wanted the students to conduct their research.

Every student used a laptop with SMART Classroom Suite software to complete the research, with Walsh using the software's features to send website links and monitor progress.

"And the students could also go beyond what they were required to do for this project," Walsh says. "Using SMART Notebook™, some students made timelines, some made poems and some made a presentation with several pages in it – so they were able to kind of go off on their own, on what interests them."

And when a particular SMART product interests students at The Weiss School, they are encouraged to pursue that interest. Walsh says that when she started using SMART products six years ago, she was actually taught to use them by a student in the first grade. Now in sixth grade, this student helps The Weiss School when they host SMART product training seminars for teachers from other schools.

Walsh says that for gifted students, it's really important to give them the freedom to lead and to provide them with an environment that encourages continual learning – and SMART products enable both.

"Students can become more deeply involved in learning, and it's a benefit because they are immersed in the subject matter with the technology," Walsh says. "These kids, they just go for it. And I like to step back and just let them lead."

### Success for all

For Kerri Parrish, the technology integration specialist at [Southeastern Elementary](#) in Chesapeake, Virginia, SMART products enable gifted students to lead and students with special needs to get the support they need to learn.

"I think SMART products provide the interaction and the visuals to enable the types of learning that students need to be successful," says Parrish, who has her gifted endorsement and is currently on the special education team for the school.

Over 30 percent of the student population at Southeastern Elementary is considered exceptional – the school serves students with special needs, students who are gifted and students who are twice-exceptional, which means they fall into both categories.

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#### Pauleen Walsh

Teacher  
The Weiss School  
Palm Beach Gardens, Florida

SMART products are used throughout the school, and under the principal's leadership, Parrish expects that every classroom will have a SMART Board interactive whiteboard within the next two years.

According to Parrish, teachers in the special education classrooms are big proponents of SMART products, and they believe that the use of these technology products has opened up opportunities in the classroom.

"The engagement and motivation is huge, because that's what the students want to be doing. Sometimes, in some of the lessons, the students don't even realize they are learning – they don't realize they are right in the middle of a lesson!" Parrish says.

She recalls a time when a teacher wanted to try using the SMART Board interactive whiteboard with her students, some of whom have severe special needs. Parrish created a lesson in [SMART Notebook software](#) that included music, interactive features and visuals.

"It was really amazing, because the teacher would ask them to do something ... and a whole minute went by, but the students would reach their hand out to touch the SMART Board and do what was asked of them. That was the first time the teacher had seen anything like that," Parrish says.

"I was really amazed, too, because I didn't realize there was that cognitive processing going on, and the SMART Board really brought that out," she adds.

Parrish says the SMART Board interactive whiteboard also brings out the best in the school's gifted students.

SMART products are enabling the school's gifted students to construct their own knowledge and be creative in their learning. Parrish recently worked with gifted students on a project where they had to create their own lesson using SMART Notebook software.

"It challenged everybody – the children at the highest levels, there was a lot they could do. They weren't limited, because there were so many features in the software for them to work with, so it was just a really challenging project for them, and they were motivated by that," Parrish says.

According to Parrish, the SMART Board interactive whiteboard and the SMART Document Camera™ have been particularly helpful in providing opportunities for learning. She says that the products enable gifted students to conduct virtual experiments and projects, such as experimenting with creating electrical circuits, which they otherwise wouldn't have been able to do.

And for Parrish, that's the true value of SMART products – when they enable teachers and students to do what they otherwise couldn't.

Parrish says that the educators at Southeastern Elementary just want all students, whether they are in the special education or gifted education programs, to be as successful as they can be and to reach their highest potential.

### Inclusive learning

Make the lesson relevant. For Deborah Rudenko, that is one of the keys to successfully reaching students – especially those with special needs.

After working in special education for more than 30 years, Rudenko has the experience to know what works and what doesn't. And she knows that when she uses SMART products, every student benefits, not just those with special needs.

Rudenko supports students with special needs by working in inclusion environments at [South Side High School](#) in Hookstown, Pennsylvania. The school has had an inclusion model for 15 years and is considered an exemplary model for inclusionary practices in the state.

By using SMART products, including the SMART Board interactive whiteboard, SMART Document Camera and SMART Response interactive response systems, Rudenko is not only able to support the success of her students in an inclusionary environment, but she is also able to make the lessons relevant and interactive.

"I really feel the number-one issue is keeping kids engaged. A lecture just doesn't equal a good lesson, so the SMART products help with making it engaging," Rudenko says.



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#### Kerri Parrish

Technology Integration Specialist  
Southeastern Elementary  
Chesapeake, Virginia



Rudenko usually teams with five or six teachers in a year, working mainly in English, social studies and biology classrooms, where she provides differentiation for students who have been identified as needing additional learning support.

"My primary responsibility is to make sure the IEP [Individualized Education Plan] students are serviced. So I develop SMART Board lessons and certainly everyone profits. And the regular teachers are really quite happy I developed a lesson," Rudenko says.

For instance, if Rudenko is teamed up with a biology teacher, she will use the dual page display feature in SMART Notebook software, and while the biology teacher uses one side of the page to explain the theoretical principles of a concept, Rudenko will use the other side along with items from the software's Gallery to provide a visual representation of that same concept.

The Gallery items are popular with Rudenko, who says that she often uses the Lesson Activity Toolkit, which is found in the Gallery, to create activities that involve the students and help them seek understanding in a different form. For instance, she has used ordering activities to help students understand how to write a paragraph in proper sequence.

And Rudenko frequently uses the SMART Video Player in her life skills class, a course that some students with special needs take to learn the essential skills for independent living.

For example, she'll take her life skills students on an experiential field trip, such as to the hardware store, where they will learn about discounts and taxes. Rudenko films her students doing math problems in the hardware store, and when they get back to the classroom, she plays the videos on the interactive whiteboard so students can recall the experience and what they learned.

"The SMART Board is making the kids feel good about themselves. The light bulb going off – 'now I understand cell division, or how to simplify fractions,'" Rudenko says.

For Rudenko, Parrish and Walsh, having the right technology products can make all the difference when it comes to their students' learning. And all three educators have discovered that SMART products enable the learning experiences that can help students realize their potential. **EC**

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#### **Deborah Rudenko**

Inclusion Teacher  
South Side High School  
Hookstown, Pennsylvania

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