

To Give Is To Receive

By Kim Hamill

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– Renee Fruge, Teacher, W. W. Stewart Elementary, Basile, Louisiana





Grants turn wishes into reality

When Renee Fruge received a **SMART Board™ interactive whiteboard** for her classroom, she did what any other teacher whose time and effort have paid off would do.

She danced the bunny hop with her students.

Receiving the interactive whiteboard was a dream come true for Fruge, who had wanted it for her classroom since she'd first seen one in action. But her victory dance was celebrating more than just the product. She was also celebrating the way she received her SMART Board interactive whiteboard – through a **grant**.

Fruge first learned about grants from one of her college

professors, who made a comment that inspired her to look beyond what she had in her classroom and to seek out what she needed to engage her students.

“When I found out that there was money that someone was going to give to me to get things for my classroom, I was all for it,” says Fruge, a teacher at **W. W. Stewart Elementary** in Basile, Louisiana.

“The first time I saw a SMART Board, I was just in such awe of it. And for what I figured it would be able to do for my classroom, I decided to write the grant,” she says.

When Fruge received her SMART Board interactive whiteboard, she had written a

few grants, but she was by no means a grant-writing expert.

“After I wrote the grant for the SMART Board and I received the grant, the teachers in the school were really excited about it and wanted to see what it could do. I ended up helping 28 other teachers at my school receive the same grant that I did – the SMART Board, the laptop and the projector – which was probably in excess of \$90,000 that we got added into our school,” says Fruge.

Over the past seven years, Fruge has continued to refine her grant-writing skills, finding applications on websites such as **grantwrangler.com** and **grants4teachers.com**.

To date, she has received more than \$13,000 in grants, enabling her to purchase science materials, tag readers and big books, to fund field trips and to buy additional SMART products, such as the [SMART Response PE interactive response system](#) and a [SMART Document Camera™](#).

Writing a grant isn't always easy – or successful – says Fruge, who has applied for many grants that she didn't receive. But she says that the amount of money you can bring to your classroom, school or district makes it worthwhile to “write, write, write.”

Today, she feels she has most everything she needs for her classroom, but her involvement in grant writing hasn't ended. She has become a mentor at her school, encouraging and assisting other teachers as they write grants to obtain what they need for their classrooms and sharing the items she's received through her own successful grant applications.

“Grants have definitely given me materials and products that I know there is no way I would be able to get on my own,” Fruge says. “I've gotten \$13,000 worth of materials and equipment that either would have come out of my pocket – or I wouldn't have.”

Renee's Five Tips for Grant Writing

Be informed – Know all of the requirements for your grant, including what is and isn't approved

Be prepared – List all your materials, along with any other information, when you begin the grant application, so you don't have to leave the website in search of extra materials

Be aware of special needs – Ensure you are meeting the needs of your students in special education and incorporating all of the learning styles in your classroom

Be on time – Know the deadline for your grant and never miss it. Most funders will not accept applications after the deadline.

Be persistent – Don't give up. Even if you don't get the grant, keep writing.

Fundraisers bring the community together

After learning there wasn't money available in the school budget, Glenn Cermak decided to purchase his own classroom set of SMART Response interactive response systems. He had no idea that this decision would spark a successful fundraiser for his school, [Central Dauphin Middle School](#) in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Because he was the first teacher in the district to have the SMART Response system, Cermak was asked to share his experiences using it. At one of these product demonstrations, he was approached by a school board member who saw the SMART Response system's potential and wanted to bring more of them into the school.

Together they decided to create a DVD that showed Cermak using the SMART Response system in his classroom and included student testimonials. Cermak and the school board member went to local businesses, handing out the DVD and asking them to donate money to help purchase more systems for the school.

“Some said, ‘Yes, we'll go ahead and buy a whole set,’ while other businesses gave us \$50 or \$100. And after doing that for three weeks, we

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wound up with 22 sets. I think they were around \$1,800 at the time, so that's like \$35,000 worth of equipment," says Cermak, who is also the social studies department chair and a technology integration facilitator.

Cermak says that was the first time he had reached out to the business community for a [fundraiser](#), and he said that having his students share why the SMART Response system benefitted them was helpful for bringing in donations.

"The community doesn't want to hear that SMART Response makes it so much easier for *me* to grade my tests, and it saves *me* so much time. They don't want to hear about that. They want to hear from kids why *they* think it's better to have that in their classroom," Cermak says.

In addition to those at his own school, Cermak has helped surrounding districts and schools in Maryland and Virginia plan and execute fundraisers.

Whether it's a basketball tournament, talent shows, candy sales or cupcake decorating contests, Cermak says that involving the community in school fundraising is the key to success.



Through fundraisers, Central Dauphin Middle School has been able to purchase more than 30 SMART Response systems and 35 SMART Board interactive whiteboards. Cermak says that he plans one or two large fundraisers and a few smaller ones each year.

Dr. Deborah Mansfield has had similar fundraising experiences at her school. Since becoming principal in 1999 of [Bay View Elementary School](#) in Norfolk, Virginia, it has been her goal to acquire a SMART Board interactive whiteboard for each of the 33 classrooms in the school and for the conference room, art and music rooms, media center, computers labs and resource areas.

Read more
about
Cermak's
fundraising
experiences
on the
[EDCompass](#)
blog.





Today, she is four interactive whiteboards away from completing that goal. And many of the SMART Board interactive whiteboards were purchased with money earned through fundraising. Mansfield says that one major fundraiser a year can bring in between \$10,000 and \$11,000, which enables her to purchase two or three interactive whiteboards.

Bay View Elementary also has an active parent community, with many parents being school alumni. Every year, when Bay View has its frozen pizza fundraiser, parents are happy to sell pizzas to their friends, family and colleagues.

“It’s pretty much on our parents, and they are very

supportive. Parents are excited about technology – especially when they know what it’s going for,” Mansfield says, adding that Bay View parents have seen the SMART Board interactive whiteboards in the classrooms and know their potential.

Cermak says that showing the community what the money is going toward is a great way of increasing support and enthusiasm. In fact, he says he tries to use SMART products whenever the community is present – at back-to-school nights, sports tournaments and school concerts.

Cermak says he will continue exploring new fundraising ideas and that acquiring SMART products will remain his focus.

“You could fundraise for a field trip, and the kids are going to be more engaged, and they are going to take something away from that, but it’s one day. Whereas if you fundraise for a SMART Board or SMART Response, you can be having a positive impact on their learning every day,” Cermak says.

Whether it’s applying for grants or planning fundraisers, Fruge, Cermak and Mansfield have all found that through time and effort, they’ve received more than just funds – they’ve gained the support of their community and colleagues as they work toward providing the best education they can for their students.