

Professional Development

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The Power of Professional Development

By **Kim Hamill**

At **Bailey Elementary**, training teachers *how* to use SMART products isn't really the main focus. Rather, learning effective and innovative ways to teach with SMART products is.

As a technology resource teacher, Kelly Derushia is in charge of providing professional development for teachers using SMART products at Bailey Elementary, which is located in a rural area just outside of Tampa, Florida.

Derushia, a **SMART Exemplary Educator**, spends his days looking at the needs of teachers and then helps them learn to incorporate SMART products into their classrooms to meet those needs.

Yet two years ago, when the school opened, less than 10 percent of the teachers at Bailey had even turned on a **SMART Board™ interactive whiteboard**.

According to Derushia, putting the pedagogy first and the technology products second ensured that teachers effectively incorporated SMART products into teaching and learning.

"We really focus on how kids learn and then look at what we need to help them," Derushia says. "For example, if one of our needs was on formative assessment in the classroom, I would probably offer something on using **SMART Response™**. The goal is formative assessment, and we are just using SMART Response as a tool in that training."

This approach has led to a successful school-wide implementation. Every classroom has a SMART Board interactive whiteboard and **SMART Notebook™ collaborative learning software**. **SMART Response PE interactive response systems**, **SMART Slate™ wireless slates** and **SMART Sync™ classroom management software** are also used throughout the school.

Derushia says he's seen the teachers' knowledge about and confidence in using SMART products increase, which is making learning more engaging and interactive. And increasing student engagement is the elementary school's main goal for professional development this year.

Derushia says that he and the school's administrators wanted to ensure that professional development would help teachers "get kids out of their seats, and get kids learning and actively participating in the lesson."

And, he adds, encouraging and supporting teachers' innovative use of SMART products is a sure way to impact student engagement and motivation.

"I've had teachers who have been teaching for 40 years and have never even turned a computer on before, but when they sit down and see how the students interact with a SMART Board interactive whiteboard and absorb lessons, they say 'I want to learn how to do it, too. I want to use this in my classroom,'" Derushia says.

He tries to tailor professional development to ensure the topics and frequency are meeting everyone's needs, which is why when teachers requested workshop-style sessions, he introduced a weekly half-hour of professional development.

At the workshops, Derushia spotlights a specific skill or technique that teachers can use on the SMART Board interactive whiteboard or with another SMART product. Teachers then have 15 minutes to experiment and make something to bring back to their classroom.



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Kelly Derushia

Technology Resource Teacher
Bailey Elementary
Dover, Florida



Derushia says that often teachers will begin to use the new techniques they've learned the very next day, and this immediately improves the overall atmosphere in the classroom.

"We see an immediate impact on teachers' classrooms, and more importantly, we see the students in that classroom become more open and active," Derushia says. "If a student has been reserved or quiet, now they are raising their hand because they want to come up to the SMART Board, and that gets the teacher excited and more eager to learn and do more on the SMART Board."

Connecting the education community

According to Greg Mentzer, professional development has the power to ensure SMART products are used to their fullest potential. And he should know – for the past three years, Mentzer and his colleague, Debbie Richards, have been the driving force behind the [Tatnall SMART Board User Conference for Mid-Atlantic Educators](#).

This regional conference, which continues to grow in popularity each year, offers teachers a full day of professional development on SMART products, like the SMART Board interactive whiteboard, SMART Response interactive response systems and the [SMART Document Camera™](#).

Mentzer teaches a laboratory science program in the Lower School at [The Tatnall School](#), a college preparatory day school in Wilmington, Delaware.

Since attending an information session on the SMART Board interactive whiteboard seven years ago, Mentzer has been passionate about the product and how it can benefit teaching and learning.

"I've been trying to continually push the envelope, in terms of 'this is a great tool,'" Mentzer says. "What I can do is present the opportunity for people to see what the SMART Board can do in the classroom, and slowly, as teachers have bought into the technology and used it ... it's become a groundswell – everyone wants one."

When Mentzer first received a SMART Board interactive whiteboard, there wasn't any internal support or professional development at his school. He completed [SMART Training Certification](#), becoming the first SMART Certified Trainer in Delaware.

Mentzer wanted to ensure that other Tatnall teachers had support as they learned to incorporate SMART products into their classrooms, so he became the Tatnall SMART product support person.

Today, Mentzer, a SMART Exemplary Educator, provides professional development for teachers and supports the school's 51 SMART Board interactive whiteboards and other SMART products.

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Almost every classroom at Tatnall has a SMART Board interactive whiteboard, and they are used every day, because it's Tatnall's strategy to have teacher interest – rather than the school – drive the implementation of technology products.

That means if teachers express interest in having an interactive whiteboard in their classroom, they are first encouraged to convert their curriculum into a digital format and to use SMART Notebook software.

With the support of professional development, teachers would use their SMART Notebook lessons with an LCD projector for one year, and if they continued to show interest and progress, a SMART Board interactive whiteboard would then be installed in the classroom.

Because of this strategy, and Mentzer's continuous professional development, it wasn't long before word began to spread about how effectively Tatnall teachers were using their SMART products. This led the school to host its first user conference.

Mentzer says that when he first sent out an e-mail to Mid-Atlantic educators announcing the conference, he wasn't sure if he'd get a good response. They received 350 RSVPs in the first couple of weeks. In March of this year, they hosted their third conference – they had 507 attendees, with a waiting list of 100 people.

"A lot of these people are coming from schools where there is no one in-house supporting them," Mentzer says. "The idea of this conference is all about professional development. It's all about sharing and collaborating and coming together to help one another."

This year, the conference featured 75 presenters from places such as Delaware, Virginia, Maryland, New York, West Virginia, Illinois and Pennsylvania. Educators could choose from 109 session options – for a range of grades, subjects and SMART product experience – and attend four different sessions and a keynote speech.

For Mentzer, bringing all these educators together is a way for the community to support one another and to ensure that educators can truly grow in their knowledge of SMART products and gain new insight into enhancing teaching and learning.

"Without the professional development component, teachers are not going to be able to maximize the technology. No one knows it all – you are constantly learning and constantly seeing how other people use SMART products in unique ways. So I think there's always a need for people to share and collaborate."

Mentzer says that as long as they can coordinate the event and put together a program, Tatnall School will continue to host a conference.

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Greg Mentzer

Science Teacher and
SMART Board Trainer
The Tatnall School
Wilmington, Delaware

Job-embedded, meaningful learning

For Kathy Rollo, the past year and a half has been about planning and preparing the transformation of her district's professional development strategy.

Rollo is the executive director of professional development at [Lubbock Independent School District](#) in Lubbock, Texas. Her role is to unite the district's overall vision with the professional development efforts being made in each department and school campus.

One of the district's goals is to use technology to enhance learning and prepare students for the future. Rollo says accomplishing this goal means ensuring that all students have equal, consistent and daily access to technology products.

Currently, there are approximately 300 SMART Board interactive whiteboards throughout Lubbock ISD, but the goal is for every classroom in the district to have one.

"Parents have a hard time understanding why the child in the classroom next door has a SMART Board and gets to do all of these great things that encourage engagement, and yet their child's teacher doesn't have one," Rollo says. "So this is creating equity for every child in the district to have access to SMART Boards."

Lubbock parents are very supportive of the use of SMART products, which Rollo says could be part of the reason the community approved a \$198 million bond package last November.

In addition to providing a SMART Board interactive whiteboard for every classroom, this bond will also support the shift in professional development to ensure the effective use of these products.

"There is an expectation that the SMART Board be used, and, of course, along with that comes the need to equip teachers with how to use it. There is also a need to equip our administrators to ensure that it's used, because they will be the ones monitoring the effective use of technology in the classrooms," says Rollo.

But one of the biggest proposed shifts in Lubbock's professional development strategy is that almost all the professional development will take place on the campuses rather than at the central office, where training has traditionally occurred.

Rollo and her colleagues have proposed to create teams on each campus to serve as SMART product mentors and provide professional development that is integrated with the core-content areas.

"If a teacher needs help with something right then and there, there's somebody on that campus that can help immediately. We are striving to build more capacity on campus," she says.

By focusing on creating success for Lubbock educators, Rollo and her team are offering one more way the district can help their students succeed.

"I think it's just building the capacity of all our educators, which, in turn, will help them be better instructors. This will help students learn and keep students more engaged in learning. The ultimate impact is that we will help our students be more successful and prepared for their futures," Rollo says.

There are many different routes and strategies for providing professional development on SMART products. But the examples of Bailey Elementary, Tatnall School and Lubbock ISD all show that when learning is concrete, ongoing and pedagogically focused, teachers can gain the skills and resources to effectively use these products and improve student achievement. **EC**



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Executive Director of Professional Development
Lubbock Independent School District
Lubbock, Texas

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