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Kevin Egan
Third-grade teacher
B. W. Tinker Elementary School
Waterbury, Connecticut

Fundraising success stories

By Heather Ellwood

When Kevin Egan realized that he’d be responsible for raising funds to purchase a SMART Board™ interactive whiteboard for his classroom, he turned to the most ubiquitous of education tools – the pencil. The scented pencil, to be exact.

The third-grade teacher from B. W. Tinker Elementary School in Waterbury, Connecticut, wanted a simple fundraising activity with lots of appeal for his students, and he found it in the lowly *smencil*. Egan took his idea to his administration and convinced his principal to put any funds raised through his “Smencils for SMART” sales campaign directly toward the purchase of SMART products for the school.

“I found the parents love the idea because we’re not selling junk food, but something practical and healthy. The pencils are made of recycled newspaper, and they come in 10 different scents. Of course, the kids want to collect all 10. They trade them, and it becomes a cool activity at a reasonable price. That’s the key. It’s a quick and easy idea to implement. They only cost one dollar, and the kids actually use them in their class work,” he explains.

Egan breaks his fundraising efforts into three steps: initiate, motivate and follow through. He has two words of fundraising advice for other teachers: don’t wait.

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Don’t be afraid to ask

A similar mind-set causes Shelly Bostwick, currently an instructional technology specialist at Eagle Nest Elementary in North Charleston, South Carolina, to kick-start various fundraising campaigns in her school communities. Her fundraising motto? Don’t be afraid to ask.

And ask she did. While Bostwick was at her previous school, Hanahan Elementary, she and other staff members found themselves facing a funding challenge. Hanahan had SMART Board interactive whiteboards in every classroom, but they had been partially financed through federal funding for which the school no longer qualified. The payments that were due began mounting. Bostwick needed a fast way to raise a large amount of money. She ventured outside the confines of the school yard and into the larger community, inviting parents, nearby business owners, elected officials and local dignitaries to a technology presentation at her school.

“We fed them a cafeteria style lunch, and we talked about our technology program and all of the positive things happening in our school community. Our guests were really into it. They hadn’t seen SMART products in action before, and more importantly, they didn’t realize what was happening in our classrooms. The whole event really peaked their interest,” Bostwick explains.



Then, she forthrightly explained their funding predicament and asked those in attendance for financial support. The results were overwhelming. Not only did the school raise enough money from community donors to meet their financial obligations, they are now considering using additional funds to purchase other SMART products, such as AirLiner™ wireless slates and Senteo™ interactive response systems. A spin-off effect, Bostwick explains, has been an increased interest in the school from the parent body and the greater community. They've become partners and advocates for the local school.

Reaching out

Fundraising at the wider community level, says SMART's Shayla Rexrode, is a wonderful way to increase a school's profile and share the many ways technology enhances education. Rexrode, a SMART education consultant based out of North Carolina, often helps North and South Carolina schools develop and implement fundraising plans. She says one of the keys is making certain that schools publicly recognize the involvement of community donors.

Bostwick came up with a simple, long-lasting and cost-effective way to honor the donations made to Hanahan Elementary. She purchased plaques that were engraved with the words *SMART ROOM Sponsored by* and the name of the donor or donors. Some community members and parents have requested that their donations support specific classrooms, Bostwick says, and the plaques have become points of pride for the entire school population. Hanahan's teachers and administration also give thanks to their benefactors in the school newsletter, on their website and at various public gatherings, such as parent-teacher association meetings.

Hanahan's cafeteria luncheon, maintains Rexrode, was another key to their success. Getting parents or community members in front of a desired product is a vital link in the fundraising chain. Demonstrating the power of a SMART Board interactive whiteboard to parents puts it into context and helps them understand how their children's education will be enhanced by their donation.

In fact, Rexrode has even taken a SMART Board interactive whiteboard to book fairs at Barnes & Noble stores in her area. During a fair's hours, the store designates a set percentage of purchases to a partner school. After stocking up on the page turners on their list, patrons walk away knowing they've helped out students in their neighborhood. By featuring the board at the bookstore, parents and other community members can see firsthand what their fundraising dollars are helping purchase.

When it comes to technology, Bostwick finds taking the time to share the products with parents has made a big difference at her current school, Eagle Nest Elementary.

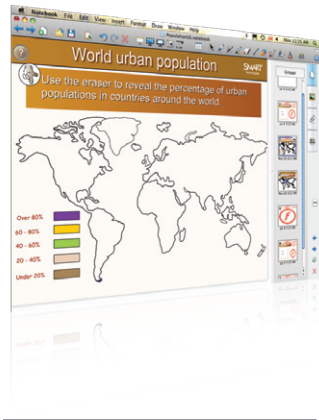
"Our parents aren't familiar with the Senteo interactive response system, so they really can't understand the power of it. Sharing the technology with parents, showing them exactly how it works – that has really helped us raise funds," she explains.

To accomplish this, Bostwick planned a trivia night to raise money to purchase a number of classroom sets of the system. Heeding Rexrode's advice, Bostwick and her fellow staff members made full use of a borrowed set of Senteo remotes. That event created huge fundraising excitement in the school corridors and in the community.



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Shelly Bostwick
Instructional technology specialist
Eagle Nest Elementary
North Charleston,
South Carolina



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Shayla Rexrode
SMART education consultant
North Carolina and
South Carolina

Such excitement is crucial, according to Egan. Now, with two SMART Board interactive whiteboards and projectors at B. W. Tinker, Egan is setting his sights on raising more money to outfit even more classrooms. Lately, parents have been asking why their son or daughter doesn't have a SMART Board in his or her classroom.

"Once they ask that question, it really opens up the dialogue. We can talk about fundraising and how we plan on making that technology dream a reality. I tell them my plans outright – I want to see a SMART Board in every classroom, and I'm going to do it by selling pencils. Then the buzz really starts to catch on," he explains.

More fundraising strategies

Rexrode has often witnessed little ideas, like selling scented pencils, bring about big changes. But she also encourages administrators to examine their existing budgets, a task that may not be as much fun as selling pencils but is just as productive. A surprising amount of money can be raised just by reallocating funds within an existing budget.

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She also advises schools to visit the website [Digital Wish](#), which has a mandate to help schools raise funds for technology. There, schools or teachers can create a profile, identify the technology products on their wish lists and provide a summary of the outcomes they expect to see as a result of the technology implementation. They can then direct stakeholders to the site by including a link on the school's website, sending a note home in backpacks or writing a blurb in the school's newsletter. Individuals log on to the site, donate funds online and help make a digital wish come true for the classroom of their choice. Technology providers such as SMART sponsor the site, and teachers can access information on all SMART's products, including technical specifications and prices. As well, teachers can find out more about over 40 available grants and can apply for them online.

Digital Wish is just one more weapon in a school's fundraising arsenal. Big, small or somewhere in the middle, it's not the size or scope of the project that matters, insists Egan. Once you follow through on an idea, no matter the idea, the results will be pretty spectacular.

"I just hope other teachers will read this article and get motivated to pursue some of the ideas. There are so many great opportunities out there. You just have to initiate and do it." **EC**