

SMART Showcase School

EDCompass newsletter

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Building Best Practices at Kildare Elementary

By Wendy McMahon

From professional development for teachers to language instruction for students, educators at [Kildare Elementary School](#) in Edmonton, Alberta, are leading the way in putting education best practices into action.

With over 500 students and both English and Mandarin language programs, Kildare's staff are always looking for new ways to increase student engagement. With that goal in mind, two years ago they decided to standardize on SMART products, adding 26 [SMART Board™ interactive whiteboards](#) and 24 SMART Document Cameras to their classrooms.

"The teachers were on board, but the real excitement came when we devoted all of our PD to developing a deep understanding of the way the SMART Board worked and could be utilized," explains Heather Langenhahn, Assistant Principal.

Using funds from the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement, Langenhahn booked one of the Edmonton Public School Board's (EPSB) technology consultants – Anton Lakusta. Together, they created a professional development plan that generated excitement and created product experts while letting teachers move at their own pace.

"We really, really worked with our staff and differentiated for their needs when it came to professional learning so that everyone was on board and everyone felt really strong and confident with the technology," explains Langenhahn.

Differentiating professional development

Training began with one main session for all teachers that covered the basics, beginning with where to plug in the interactive whiteboard and how to turn it on, and moving on to basic functionality. For each subsequent session, Langenhahn and Lakusta worked with teachers to assess their individual needs and strengths. They asked them ahead of time to rate their comfort level as beginner, intermediate or advanced and highlight their main questions. From there, Langenhahn and Lakusta divided the teachers into smaller groups and tailored the content to meet their specific needs.

Once teachers were ready to delve deeper into [SMART Notebook™ collaborative learning software](#), they met with others working with the same grade level to plan and create content for upcoming units. Now teachers hold formal content planning days two to three times a year and informal sessions when needed.

Other schools in the EPSB have shown so much interest in Kildare's success with SMART Board interactive whiteboards that Lakusta helped develop the EPSB SHARE site, where teachers can post their SMART Notebook files for other district teachers to learn from and use.

Bringing best practices to the classroom

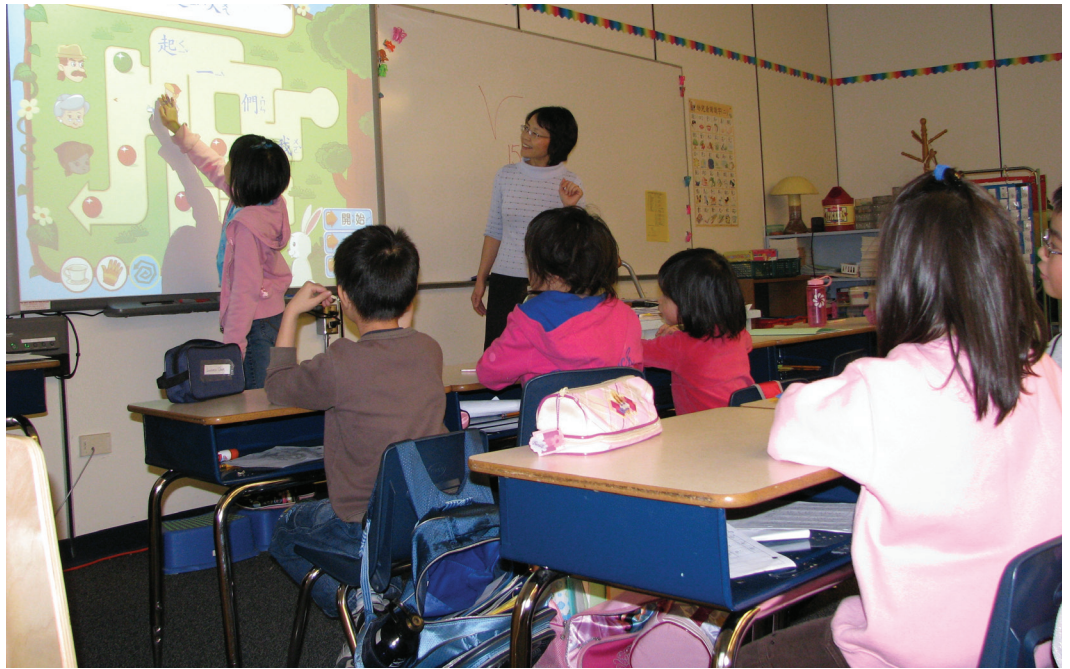
Iain Watson, a sixth-grade language arts teacher in Kildare's English program, sees the benefits that great professional development has brought to Kildare's classrooms, including his own. "We don't use these boards just as a presentation surface," explains Watson. "The kids manipulate things, we have small group discussions, and we're editing things on the board."



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Heather Langenhahn

Assistant Principal
Kildare Elementary School
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada



If you'd like to visit Kildare Elementary to find out more about its chosen path to success and see firsthand how teachers are using SMART products, please visit the [SMART Showcase School](#) section of our website. From this page, you can also find a SMART Showcase School or District in your area.

Watson says he's had great success using the interactive whiteboard and SMART Notebook software to teach sentence or paragraph construction. He'll start a lesson with a basic sentence or topic and then ask students to develop it as a group, coming up to the interactive whiteboard to add details, descriptive words and punctuation, until eventually they have a well-written sentence or paragraph. "It's good modeling – it teaches the weaker writers how to expand what they write and put new ideas into their writing."

Exercises like this one also help Watson assess whether students understand the writing principles he's trying to teach. "The SMART Board has definitely changed the teaching experience," explains Watson. "It's become very interactive, and students get really involved in what they're doing."

Wenqi Chen, who teaches Chinese language arts, math and physical education in Kildare's Mandarin language program, says he loves how the features of SMART Notebook software help improve student understanding when he's teaching Chinese language lessons.

"I use almost every single function and tool of the SMART Board that is available. For example, I can write something in a Chinese character and then change it to a computerized font. After that, I can switch to different colors and different fonts to cater to students' needs." Chen also types phonetic versions of new words to help the students learn how to properly pronounce them.

Chen has found that using SMART Notebook software's object animation feature to make a Chinese word fly in, fade out, flip upside down, grow and shrink also gets his students excited about learning.

Since starting to use the SMART Board interactive whiteboard and SMART Notebook, Chen says his students' sentence patterns have improved significantly, helping them improve their speech. He attributes this change to the high level of engagement in class and his ability to create differentiated and interactive lessons through SMART Notebook software.

From start to finish, Langenhahn says adding SMART products to Kildare has been an incredibly successful experience for both teachers and students. "Student engagement increased just from seeing the teacher work on the board and increased again as students became proficient with the board themselves," she explains. "It's just taken off like a rocket here – and still is." **EC**

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