

SMART Showcase School

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Louisiana School Creates Powerful Change with Differentiation and Technology

By **Wendy McMahon**

When Shannon Wall joined **Donnie Bickham Middle School** as principal in 2007, the school had been losing some of its best students to nearby magnet schools. It also had just one computer lab, and its School Performance Score was an average 71.1.

Fast forward to the 2008–09 school year, when this Shreveport, Louisiana, school had **SMART Board™ interactive whiteboards** in every classroom. It was not only retaining current students, but also attracting new ones – and its School Performance Score increased to 81.6.

How did the school achieve this success in such a short period? “It’s simple,” explains Wall. “It all came when we got the SMART products.”

“We wanted to retain and attract students and needed a niche to keep students from leaving for these highly successful schools. That niche quickly became technology,” says Wall.

Focusing on a plan

Over the past four years, Wall and his staff have worked diligently to develop and implement a technology plan that centers on differentiated instruction and SMART Board interactive whiteboards.

“Differentiated instruction was the very first thing we focused on when I got here because it is, to me, the best instructional strategy there is,” explains Wall. “Instruction has to be differentiated for kids to get the most from it.”

Because SMART Board interactive whiteboards could be embedded in the instructional process to support differentiation, Wall knew it was the ideal technology product for his school. “Without even trying to be, the SMART Board interactive whiteboard is a tool of differentiation,” says Wall.

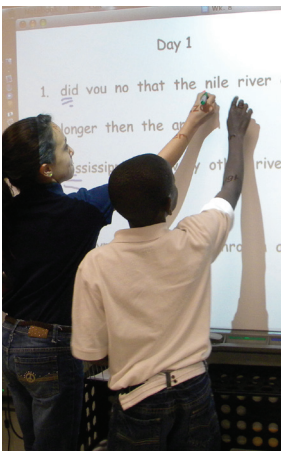
So with the help of Title I funding, the school purchased 40 SMART Board interactive whiteboards during the 2008–09 school year.

Engaging students with differentiation

Emily Smith, a seventh-grade social studies teacher, admits that despite hours of professional development, she was still intimidated using the SMART Board interactive whiteboard and applying the school’s strategies for differentiated instruction.

“But the SMART Board made it so it was difficult not to differentiate. It has completely changed my classroom,” says Smith.

Smith often differentiates instruction by breaking students into groups and assigning them a variety of related tasks on the basis of their learning styles and knowledge level. For example, when studying the 13 colonies, one group will draw a map on paper, another group will write out answers to related



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Principal
Donnie Bickham Middle School
Shreveport, Louisiana



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questions and another group will use [SMART Notebook™ collaborative learning software](#) to create a map on the interactive whiteboard.

Smith finds that using the SMART Board interactive whiteboard to differentiate during whole-class lessons helps engage and excite students.

"One day we were working on a timeline, and the kids were getting a bit bored because it was taking a long time," says Smith. After a quick Internet search, she found a version of the same timeline for the SMART Board interactive whiteboard – one that students could touch to hear related voice clips. "It was the exact same timeline I was using, only it took half the time to prepare, and in the classroom, we got twice as much out of it."

The results she's seen from her students also indicate they are benefitting from these teaching strategies.

"My test scores have gone up considerably. But what I see most is classroom participation. Instead of having 25 percent of your kids engaged, I would say that I probably have 90 to 95 percent of the class that wants to work every day."

Making learning fun

Smith attributes the success to student engagement with technology. "They don't realize that they are learning and doing classroom work. They think we're going to play. And although it's like play to them, we know we're covering our benchmarks."

Eighth-grade math and algebra teacher Justin Gordon agrees. "Any time we offer them the opportunity to use these technologies to learn, they see it as playing, and that's what they want to do. It's more fun than working out of a book or just doing problems. It's interactive and it requires more higher-order, problem-solving skills."

Gordon uses cooperative learning groups almost daily in his classes, rotating groups through stations to expose students to different objectives and to appeal to a variety of learning styles. And the SMART Board interactive whiteboard is always used as one of the stations.

"It plays into my differentiation because it's given me that technology component for those visual and those tech learners. The SMART Board becomes one of my components of differentiating," says Gordon. "The SMART Board has been a big key to making differentiation happen. Everything runs more smoothly. The kids are motivated. They want to interact with the board."



Continuously striving for success

By motivating and exciting the students, it has brought many improvements to Donnie Bickham Middle School, including increased performance.

“That first year we received the technology, we had a gain of 10.5 points in our School Performance Score. We went from a 71.1 to an 81.6 School Performance Score. I can’t tell you how enormous that is,” says Wall. The school has maintained that increase, scoring 80.1 on the 2009–2010 School Performance Score.

“We have increased our test scores more than any other middle school in the parish, and we believe that is a direct result of the excitement that we have created in our community about the technology available at Donnie Bickham Middle School – and it all began with the SMART products,” says Wall. **EC**

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