

SMART Showcase School

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Teacher Support Is One Key to Success at Disney II Magnet School

By **Wendy McMahon**

In 2008, Chicago Public School's **Disney II Magnet School** opened its doors with the mission of being an exceptional school that increases student learning by integrating arts and technology across all subjects and activities.

To date, their ever-growing list of successes is impressive.

For example, 92.2 percent of this elementary school's third-grade students met or exceeded state standards this past March on the Illinois Standard Achievement Test, which covers reading, math and writing. The district's average for third grade is 69.5 percent.

"When the school opened in 2008, only 36 percent of students were reading at or above grade level," says Principal Bogdana Chkoumbova. "We finished the first year with 78 percent reading at or above the grade level. And this is just continuing – every year we see this upward trend."

How did they achieve this success? As Chkoumbova and her staff explain, combining the use of the **SMART Board™ interactive whiteboard** with consistent, meaningful and targeted technology support and professional development opportunities has created a teaching and learning environment that is remarkably effective.



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Bogdana Chkoumbova

Principal
Disney II Magnet School
Chicago, Illinois

Planning for success

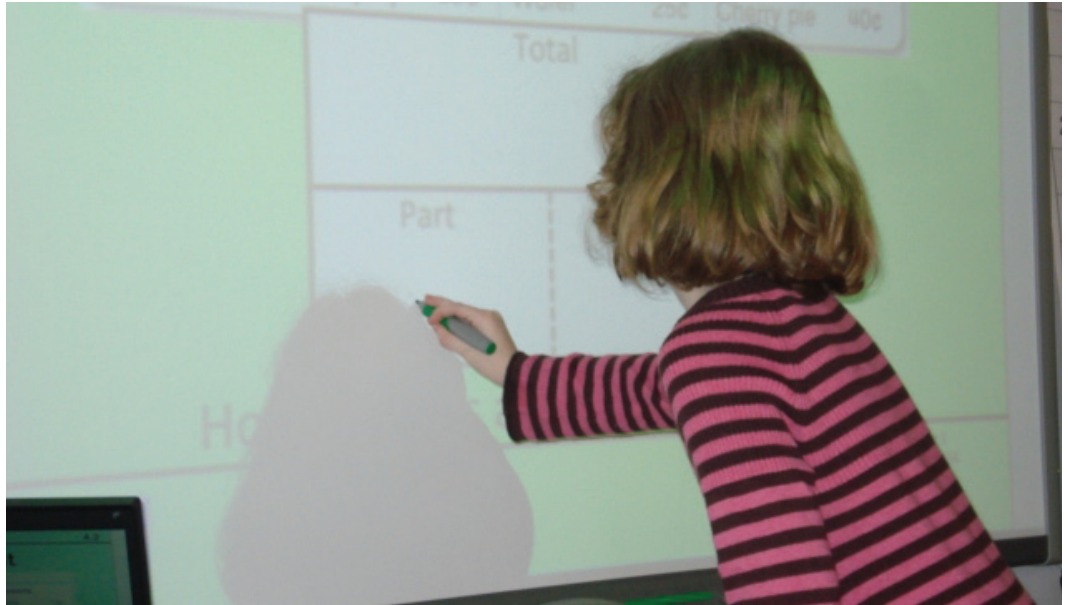
Chkoumbova says it all started with a plan – a plan that led to SMART Board interactive whiteboards being installed in all of the school's 14 classrooms, including the prekindergarten and art rooms, and used daily by all 19 teachers.

The plan included a nontraditional approach to classroom technology by incorporating it into every classroom rather than in a standalone lab that students only visited once a day. Other key elements of the plan included supporting differentiation in instruction and engaging students with different learning styles. After some research, Chkoumbova discovered that the SMART Board interactive whiteboard was the best technology for supporting their plan.

Chkoumbova believes SMART products are appropriate and effective tools for this age group. "The kids can get up and touch and move objects," she explains. "And being able to integrate sound, pictures and so many other things, we just felt that this was a great tool for this age group."

Supporting teachers with training

Knowing that many of the teachers coming to the Disney II Magnet School wouldn't be familiar with SMART products or the school's approach to technology, Chkoumbova wanted to provide extensive and ongoing professional development and training. With this in mind, she purposefully searched for a technology specialist who was also a SMART Certified Trainer and found the ideal candidate in Sarah Benko.



“When you watch someone much like yourself using something so easily and quickly, you realize that it’s not as daunting as it may seem to create these really quick activities that you can basically use forever.”

Katie Rollings
Second-Grade Teacher
Disney II Magnet School
Chicago, Illinois

Benko’s role in supporting the teachers and helping them learn to use their SMART Board interactive whiteboards to full advantage was indispensable. “From my perspective as a principal, it’s just so crucial to have a person like this on staff,” says Chkoumbova.

Before students started classes the school’s inaugural year, Benko developed and offered a two-day intensive training workshop for the teachers. The same workshop is now offered to all new teachers at the beginning of each school year.

Benko has since moved on from her position as technology specialist at the Disney II Magnet School, but the best practices, training techniques, routines and processes she put in place are still used there.

Modeling teaching techniques

Although Benko’s initial training session helped teachers get started using the SMART Board interactive whiteboard, the teachers agree that her continued and frequent training and support throughout the year were invaluable.

Chkoumbova says it was helpful to have Benko available during the school day to model teaching techniques with the SMART Board interactive whiteboard for teachers in the classroom.

Additionally, Benko would hold a weekly demonstration for teachers to introduce them to different features of the SMART Board interactive whiteboard and **SMART Notebook™ collaborative learning software**, along with the many other products available from SMART.

“I tried to make it something that is relatively new – a new lesson, a new SMART Notebook tool, a feature of the Lesson Activity Toolkit. Or I’d demonstrate the **SMART Response™ system**,” says Benko.

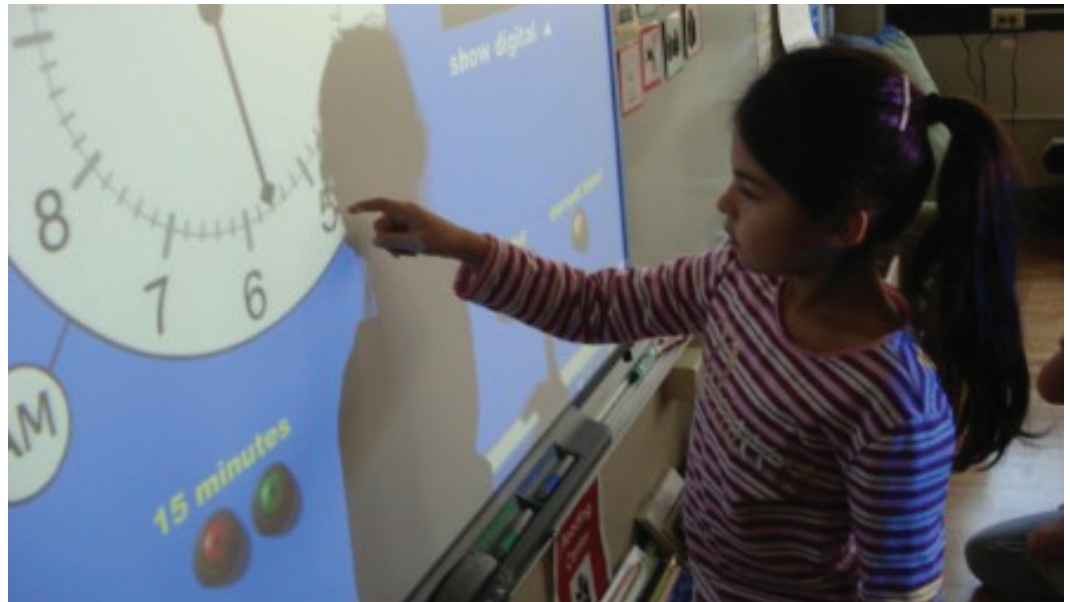
Benko also made a weekly visit to each teacher’s classroom to teach whole-class or small-group lessons, giving teachers the opportunity to observe how she uses SMART products in a classroom setting. She was available for 30-minute, individual consultations every school day and held professional development days throughout the school year.

As second-grade teacher Katie Rollings explains, this type of support and professional development helped build teachers’ confidence, knowledge and skills.

“It takes the intimidation out of using the SMART Board,” Rollings says. “When you watch someone much like yourself using something so easily and quickly, you realize that it’s not as daunting as it may seem to create these really quick activities that you can basically use forever.”



If you would like to visit Disney II Magnet School to talk with educators about their success and see firsthand how they're putting SMART products to work, visit the [SMART Showcase School](#) section of our education website. From this page, you can also find a Showcase School or District in your area.



Collaborating to create resources

In addition to providing training and professional development, Benko also met with teachers during their planning to discuss learning objectives so they could create resources that support the curriculum.

Benko and the teachers found so many useful learning resources on the [SMART Exchange™ website](#) and created so many lesson activities of their own that they started posting and sharing them on the school's website. In addition, teachers can also submit questions and requests through an online help-desk feature.

Knowing the importance of easy access to resources and support, Chkoumbova also provided plenty of time for collaboration and resource sharing in her ongoing technology plan.

"I allocated a lot of time for the technology specialist and the teacher teams – the grade-level teams – to be able to plan and to share respective resources. We have learning fairs for teachers, and they visit each others' classrooms and everyone will do a presentation on some of the tools that they have created."

Reaping the benefits of a well-laid plan

It would seem these support and professional training efforts are paying off if student achievement over the past two years is any indication. Because teachers are so proficient with the classroom technology, they are able to use it to its full advantage.

"I think if we had not had so much professional development on the SMART Board, teachers would be a lot more reluctant to try it and realize how valuable it could be in the classroom," Rollings says.

Benko agrees that they'd be missing some great benefits.

"When SMART Notebook lessons are implemented with small groups, teachers are able to meet the needs of the various learning styles and target instruction toward a group of students who need further instruction or review on a specific skill or topic. These planned, small-group lessons enable teachers to differentiate instruction within the classroom, and, because of this, the lessons play a major role in meeting students' educational needs." **EC**

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