Kentucky School Offers Students Multiple Ways to Learn

By Lavonne Boutcher

This fall, 99 percent of the 2010 graduating class at Assumption High School in Louisville, Kentucky, went to college – that's significantly higher than the state average. And that figure is even more impressive when you consider that 41 of those students had diagnosed learning difficulties.

"It tells us that we're very successful," says Principal Becky Henle, who attributes some of Assumption's success to a commitment to differentiated learning, which the school supports with SMART products.

"A lot of the students who really benefit from the SMART technology products that we use in the classrooms so religiously are those students who have different learning styles and need accommodations to complete a college preparatory curriculum and go on to college," says Henle.

Teachers at this private all-girls school use a variety of SMART products to individualize learning for the nearly 870 students. They use the SMART Board™ interactive whiteboard, SMART Notebook™ collaborative learning software, SMART Slate™ wireless slate, SMART Audio™ classroom amplification system and SMART Ideas™ concept-mapping software.

As a SMART Showcase School, Assumption opens its doors to other educators who want to see how teachers are using SMART products to help each student learn in her own unique way.

"I'm always an advocate and promoter of the SMART technology," says Sheila Palmer, a teacher who supports students who have diagnosed learning difficulties. She sees the benefits the SMART Board interactive whiteboard has on their learning. She says that when teachers use the SMART Board interactive whiteboard in class, students have less difficulty following instructions and are better able to understand lesson material. And she says that ultimately shows up in their grades.
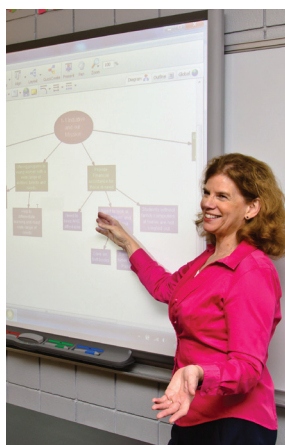
Supporting differences, not disabilities

Palmer's official title is *learning differences teacher*, and the use of *differences* is a deliberate effort to make every student feel comfortable with her own learning style or ability. "When you call it a *learning difference*, it's just more palatable to them because they really start to understand that no two people learn exactly the same way," says Palmer.

"The things we have put in place at our school technology-wise are things that benefit all students, but especially help students who have auditory processing problems, attention deficit disorder or a specific learning disability," she says.

Most of the students Palmer works with have mild-to-moderate learning difficulties – some can't stay focused, while others have problems understanding oral instructions. There's no special curriculum for those students. Everyone has to learn the same precollege curriculum, but classroom technology enables teachers to offer students multiple ways to learn the material. "It allows teachers to give students choices in the way they want to present what they understand," says Joyce Koch, the school's technology director. She feels that choice is good for all students, whether they have learning difficulties or not.

"What is essential for some students is beneficial to all. And that's how I feel about the SMART products – some students absolutely need them but others also benefit from them," says Koch.

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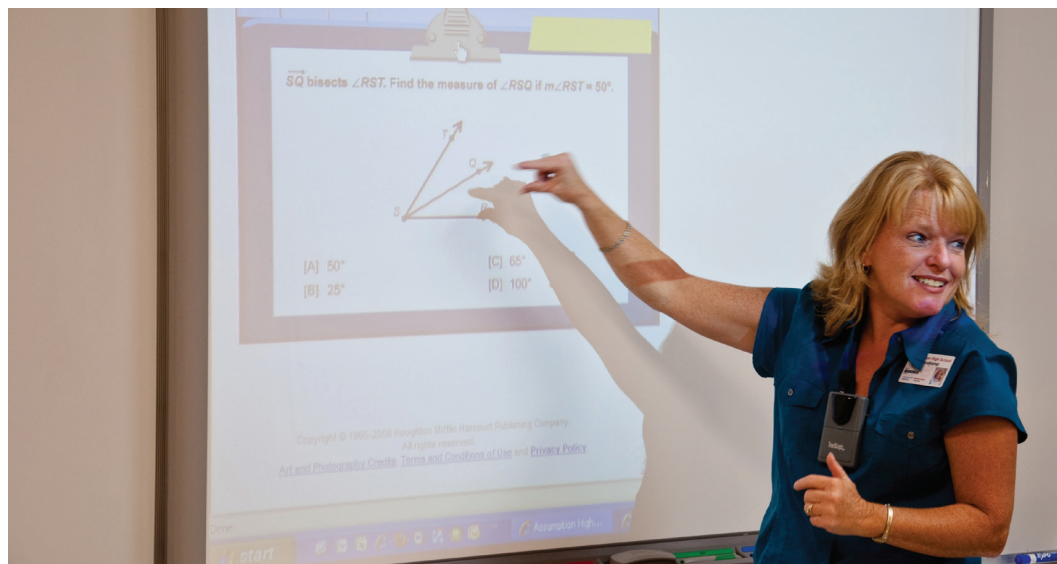
Joyce Koch
Technology Director
Assumption High School
Louisville, Kentucky

If you would like to visit Assumption High 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.

Making math class more engaging

Math teacher Kelly Hovekamp appreciates how the SMART Board interactive whiteboard, SMART Slate and SMART Audio system help her engage students and meet their individual learning needs.

"I use the SMART Board daily," says Hovekamp. "I feel like I can't live without it – just for guiding the visual information and for student interaction."

"It makes lessons more engaging because you've got exciting stuff that's interactive," she explains. "It helps keep any student on task and more engaged, but especially those students who are having difficulty staying focused."

The SMART Slate is a wireless slate that allows her to write notes on her SMART Board interactive whiteboard while moving around the room. She says it's a great way to get students involved in a lesson and make sure they're paying attention.

With the audio system, Hovekamp can be sure even students sitting in the back of the room can hear her. "It's a wonderful thing for all of the students but it's especially helpful for students who have an auditory processing difficulty. It allows them to actually hear the information so they can process it more easily."

Hovekamp says technology products not only help students learn more effectively, but also make learning enjoyable. She thinks that's why nearly all of this year's Assumption graduates went on to further their education. "The technology makes the learning exciting and makes them want to continue learning."

Assumption is eager to build on its success. Next year, the school plans to start implementing a 1:1 learning program where each student has her own tablet PC. Teachers are already looking forward to complementing the computers with **SMART Classroom Suite™ interactive learning software**. The software suite combines four applications that support every phase of teaching and learning and will help the school take personalized learning to a new level. **EC**

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