

SMART Showcase School

EDCompass newsletter

smarttech.com/EDCsubscribe

California School Overcomes Funding Obstacles

By **Mike MacKinnon**

Finding extra funding can be a daunting task for any school at the best of times, but what about when the country is mired in a once-in-a-lifetime recession – one that brought your state to the brink of financial ruin?

That's exactly what Frank Wright School, in California's [El Monte City School District](#), had to do. Located in Los Angeles County, the district has faced severely decreased state funding since 2008's global economic crisis. With state leaders desperate to stave off collapse, billions of dollars were cut from K–12 education funding, which left the state's school districts scrambling.

Making the best of a challenging situation

When officials at all levels are cutting expenditures, educators need to be resourceful. Just ask Jose Marquez, Principal at Frank Wright. "The less revenue the state generates, the less funding the schools get," he says. Marquez's school has taken an inventive approach to filling funding gaps. "Promoting out-of-the-box fundraisers has come out of necessity, due to lower revenue limits and our desire to continue with programs such as acquiring more SMART Board technology."

The [SMART Board® interactive whiteboard](#) and other SMART products are key components of the vision at Frank Wright, a [SMART Showcase School](#). "SMART Boards make it easier for teachers to present and students to understand steps or key concepts in lessons due to their incremental possibilities and interactive capabilities," says Marquez.

Frank Wright is currently building an addition, and they plan to equip the new rooms with technology products at the outset. "We want SMART Boards in 100 percent of our rooms," says Marquez. "And we want 100 percent of our teachers to be tech proficient."

To accomplish that goal, you need community support and an open mind, especially when you rely on fundraising to make it happen. Marquez has an open-door policy when it comes to fundraising plans. "The principal has to be open to any and all ideas, and to be willing to take the correct risks to help the school." That policy has led to successful – if unconventional – fundraising tactics.

Innovative thinking brings surprising results

One such idea, from a track friend of Marquez's, was for the Mile Classic, an annual track meet held in partnership with [Azusa Pacific University](#). Designed to raise money for the school and to promote healthy lifestyles among students, the Mile Classic provides an opportunity for elementary and middle school students to compete on a world-class track facility. In its first two years the meet has been a rousing success.

"No one except track clubs was promoting races for the elementary level, so we thought we would give it a try," says Marquez. "The results surprised all of us. We had close to 500 runners competing from all over southern California. How many elementary schools can claim that?"



"SMART Boards make it easier for teachers to present and students to understand steps or key concepts in lessons due to their incremental possibilities and interactive capabilities."

Jose Marquez

Principal

Frank Wright School

El Monte, California



If you'd like to visit Frank Wright School 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.

Community support is key

Frank Wright relies heavily on the community to raise money. Partnering with local businesses to sell products on behalf of the school is one way Marquez and his staff have been able to move beyond the traditional PTA bake sale. For example, the school works with beverage chain Jamba Juice to hold sales, with the proceeds benefiting Frank Wright. "We simply do a presale and they bring in what we sell," says Marquez. "We do this about twice a year. The response and support from students and parents has been phenomenal."

The school also holds a regular open house event, where families can enjoy dinner at the school before touring classrooms. The school also has movie nights, where families are invited onto the campus to watch a movie under the stars. The PTA sells hot chocolate, popcorn and pizza, once again providing much-needed extra funds for purchasing technology products.

Leaders in fundraising, leaders in technology

In addition to being front-runners in fundraising, Frank Wright is also a district leader in classroom technology. The school obtained its first SMART Board interactive whiteboard through a California Technology Assistance Project grant some three years ago, and it was the first school in the district to implement SMART products.

Doris Tran, a [SMART Exemplary Educator](#), says teachers at Frank Wright are encouraged to incorporate technology products in their teaching, and a support system is essential to that goal. "If there is a support system in place," says Tran, "teachers are more prone to use technology in the classroom." She helped form the SMART Board Lead Teachers, a group devoted to helping teachers learn to use SMART products not just at Frank Wright, but throughout the district. The lead teachers create instructional videos, manage online lesson repositories, conduct training and provide technical support and demonstrations to visiting schools – all to encourage their colleagues to adopt classroom technology effectively.

It's all about the students

So why, in the face of dire economic times, does Frank Wright continue its drive to adopt classroom technology? "Our goal, first and foremost, is to meet the academic needs of our students," says Marquez. "SMART products are a key component because they give our teachers and students additional resources to become successful." **EC**

© 2010 SMART Technologies. All rights reserved. EDCompass, SMART Board, smarttech, the SMART logo and all SMART taglines are trademarks or registered trademarks of SMART Technologies in the U.S. and/or other countries.