

# Motivating Children with Communication Disorders at Ardsley Middle School

By Lucas McConnell



Teachers who work in the two programs for students with severe disabilities, including autism, at [Ardsley Middle School](#) in Ardsley, New York, are seeing improvements in their students' motivation to learn. And they attribute much of this to the results they are getting with their [SMART Board interactive whiteboards](#).

"Students aren't afraid to make mistakes on the SMART Board. One student made a mistake, and he didn't want to go back to his seat. He wanted to stay there until he got it right," says Cristiane Souza-Bertone, a teacher in one of the two programs. "The SMART Board is a passion for

them, and it's highly functional and effective within special education."

Souza-Bertone's colleague, Kristen Siegriest, has also noticed how the SMART Board interactive whiteboard engages the students and motivates them to be a part of lessons.

"When I ask, 'Who wants to come up?' every student has a hand up in the air," Siegriest says. "They're willing to take a risk to come up because they want to use the SMART Board. That gets them involved and gives them a connection to the lesson, which is huge for them."

## Getting students excited about learning

Students are making progress in tangible ways. They are demonstrating practical knowledge that they didn't have before using SMART products. As an example, Siegriest cites the time she used lessons from the [SMART Exchange website](#) to help her students learn about the United States.

"Students could come up to the SMART Board and drag the states to where they belong," Siegriest says. "Afterward, I gave them an assessment on it and they all got 100 percent – they were able to place all the states on the map. By coming up and practicing on the SMART Board, they were actually being involved in the lesson, and that's why they were able to remember where the states were."

Souza-Bertone remembers the profound impact the SMART Board interactive whiteboard had on one

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### **Cristiane Souza-Bertone**

Teacher

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particular adolescent student who was an emergent speaker and had not yet learned to read.

“For years, teachers had been trying to teach him using every form of reading material that exists in the market. His parents invested a great amount of money in reading specialists, but nothing they tried would teach him to read.

“One day, after we’d started to implement the SMART Board in our lessons, he got up in the middle of a lesson and decided to volunteer to do a share of the reading. Even though he couldn’t speak, he was reading by making the sounds of the letters. I made a video and I sent it to the mother – she broke into tears and called me up and said, ‘My son can read!’”

### **Giving teachers the support they need to engage students**

The success Ardsley Middle School is having with SMART products wouldn’t be as pronounced if teachers weren’t supported in their use of classroom technology.

Sabrina Rich, Director of Instructional Technology, ensures that teachers receive the training and resources they need to make the most of their SMART products.

“Teachers attend a 15-hour summer workshop. It’s where we do the nuts and bolts of how to use a SMART Board,” Rich says. “Throughout the year, we run a SMART Board study group, which is an excellent opportunity for teachers to share because we’re on three different campuses. The teachers come together and we spotlight something cool – a new tool or trick. And the teachers can use each other as resources.”

Rich is seeing the effort teachers are putting into learning about SMART products pay off.

“Watching students who are passive and non-verbal get that spark in their eyes, you know that something’s clicked and they’re excited and want to participate,” Rich says. “These kids are sitting for seven-and-a-half hours a day. They need to be engaged. The SMART Board provides a form of learning that is fun.”

But it’s not only fun, says Souza-Bertone. By using the SMART Board interactive whiteboard, her students have begun to see the world of learning as a place that is accessible to them.

“The students have taught us how to interact with them through the SMART Board,” Souza-Bertone says. “It motivates them greatly to learn because they feel like it’s a part of their world.”



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