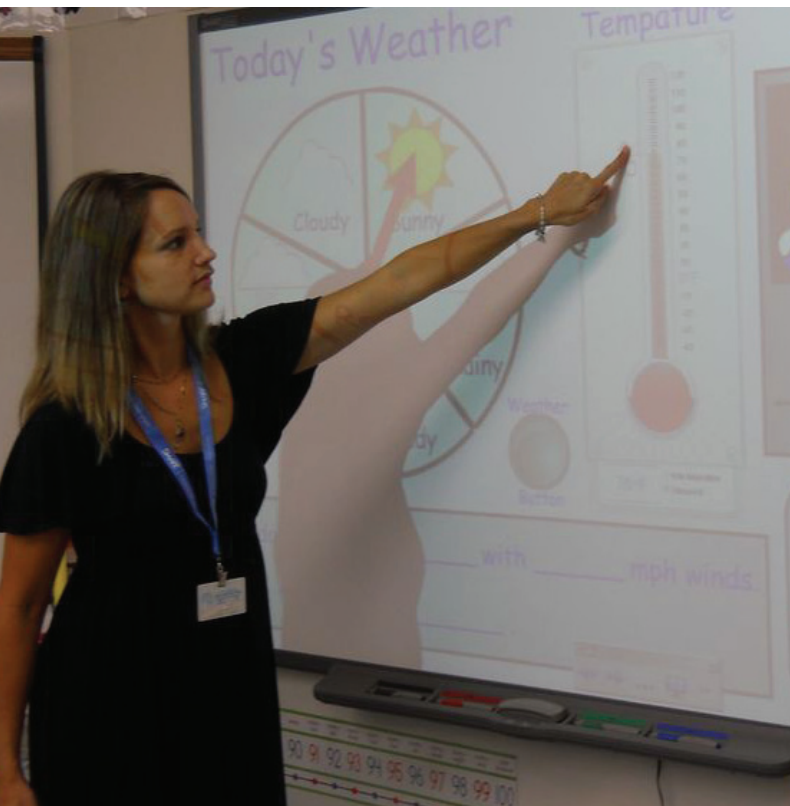


SMART Products Help Mount Harmony Elementary Students Prepare for State Assessment Tests

By Christine Roulston



Over the past 10 years, [Mount Harmony Elementary](#) in Owings, Maryland, has been turning heads for its high scores on the [Maryland School Assessment](#). This SMART Showcase School consistently outperforms most other schools in the state, ranking eighth this year on [The Washington Post list](#) of top Maryland elementary schools with advanced test scores in the Washington, DC, area. But unlike many of the schools on the list, Mount Harmony is not a magnet school. So what's its secret?

While there's no easy formula, for Principal Liz Gebelein, it starts with teachers working as a team. "We meet and come up with goals to close gaps on student achievement and push students who are proficient up into the advanced category," Gebelein says. "We dig a bit deeper and think about what's best practice. More often than not, this involves the use of a SMART Board and sharing effective Notebook lessons."

The school installed its first [SMART Board interactive whiteboard](#) in 2006 and has since outfitted every classroom – 30 in total. Many teachers also use [SMART Response interactive response systems](#), [SMART Slate wireless slates](#) and the [SMART Document Camera](#). "The SMART products are a great conduit for everything we've learned about how to take kids to the next level," says Gebelein.

Addressing gaps early

Taking kids to the next level begins early at Mount Harmony, with screening for gaps in vocabulary and language beginning in kindergarten. The screening helps teachers pinpoint where they need to focus their energies well before students are faced with the reading and math state assessment tests in grades 3–5. "It's not as obvious as you might think, trying to develop those language skills," Gebelein says. "The SMART Board helps engage the kids that much more and provides the teacher with a powerful tool to reach both the visual and kinesthetic learners."

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Liz Gebelein

Principal
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Similarly, teachers in the English language learner program use SMART Board interactive whiteboards to help bring students up to the same level as their native-English-speaking peers. “Often, this involves delivering targeted instruction in small groups,” Gebelein says. “Teachers take students on virtual field trips and build up their vocabulary to give the students the background knowledge they need before launching into a new topic in the classroom.”

Many teachers also use the SMART Response systems to conduct math assessments, so they can see right away what concepts the students have already grasped and what areas require further focus. “Using the data, they can group the students according to where they have their weaknesses,” says SMART Exemplary Educator Charity Harbeck, who is Mount Harmony’s media specialist and technology coordinator. “For example, these five kids don’t understand numeracy or these five are having trouble with factors, and these groups change every unit.”

Practice makes perfect

Once it comes time to prepare for the state assessment, teachers use the SMART Response systems and upload questions similar to those students would find on the state tests. “It’s real-time, instant data for the teachers,” Gebelein says. “They know exactly who’s mastered it and who hasn’t and can address it quickly without grading and sorting everything themselves.”

Harbeck says Mount Harmony teachers who don’t have SMART Response systems will bring up district-level benchmark tests on the SMART Board interactive whiteboard for students to practice. “Several teachers use games like *Jeopardy!* and content from the [Lesson Activity Toolkit](#) that involves using the Dice and matching activities,” she says. “It adds a visual and tactile element to the review for the students.”

Test-preparation efforts appear to be paying off for students. This year, 57 percent of Mount Harmony students scored in the advanced category, compared with 40 percent of Maryland state students. In math, 58 percent of Mount Harmony students placed in the advanced category, compared with 33 percent of students in the rest of Maryland. So while seasoned educators know there’s no easy route to assessment test success, Mount Harmony’s strategy provides as close to a blueprint as possible.



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