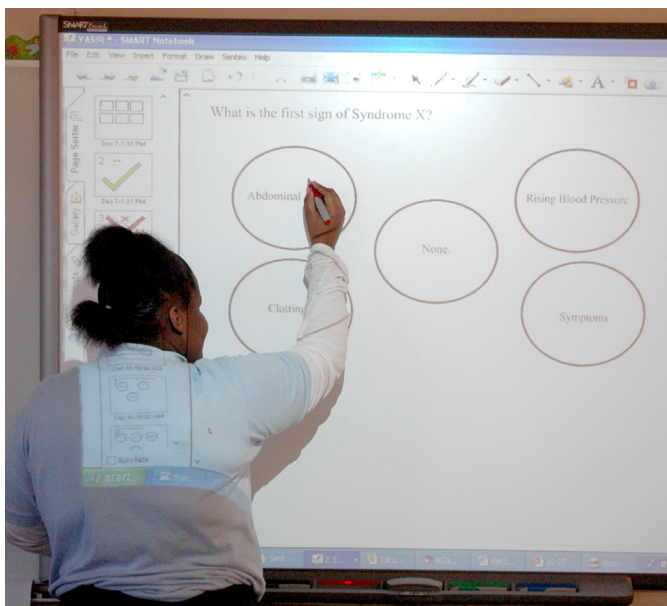# Buying SMART Products on a Budget

By Wendy McMahon

Lincoln Elementary School may be located in a low-income area, with 90 percent of its 1,100 students eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch programs, but that hasn't stopped this SMART Showcase School in Calumet City, Illinois, from standardizing on SMART products. Nearly every one of its 58 classrooms is equipped with a SMART Board interactive whiteboard, a SMART Response interactive response system and SMART Classroom Suite™ interactive learning software. Plus, the school recently rolled out a 1:1 initiative to provide every student in grades four through eight with a laptop.

"How can you afford it?" is a question Mike McGowan, Lincoln Elementary's Supervisor of Technology, hears often.

And his answer is always the same – grants, creative budgeting and a hefty dose of perseverance. He is a firm believer that with this combination, even low-income schools can find funding.

Searching out opportunities

McGowan, who often speaks to educators at state conferences about finding and securing technology funding, applies for roughly 15 to 20 grants a year. The grants vary from small monetary ones for $1,000–$5,000 to those for specific products to large technology grants, such as Enhancing Education Through Technology (EETT).

"I have written for grants as small as a document camera or up to recording studios. And then, of course, the leap for technology initiatives like the 1:1 grants," he explains.

McGowan also never passes up an opportunity to buy SMART products. "I tell schools all the time to stop stockpiling money. If at the end of the school year, you have an extra $2,000, buy a SMART Board now, because what's going to happen is you're going to stockpile 10 grand and you're going to have to use that money to fix the roof."

But McGowan says his final piece of advice is the key to success. "Be persistent. You just can't give up," he explains. "If you want to buy something, you've got to fight for it. And that's the biggest thing I tell teachers, tech directors and administrators over and over. Don't stop. Eventually a grant will come through or

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Aaron Raisbeck, Language Arts Teacher, Lincoln Elementary School, Calumet City, Illinois

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something will happen that is going to allow you to put technology in your schools."

Thanks to these efforts, McGowan says there isn't a room in Lincoln Elementary that doesn't have a SMART Board interactive whiteboard – even his office has one.

In 2011, the school was awarded an EETT grant for US$630,000 to support a 1:1 initiative designed to put low-cost laptops into the hands of as many students as possible. "We needed something to manage the technology and tie it all together, so we used the grant funds to purchase SMART Classroom Suite," says McGowan.

"We also used that grant to buy a couple of SMART Document Cameras because we wanted the ability, specifically in our science classrooms, to have the 3D technology available with the augmented reality."

The school also used US$75,000 from an Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) grant to purchase SMART Board interactive whiteboards for their special needs classrooms.

Putting technology to work

Having the SMART products helps teachers and students succeed in the classroom – and that is something that makes seventh-grade language arts teacher Aaron Raisbeck happy.

"I honestly couldn't imagine teaching in a school where I didn't have a SMART Board and I didn't have a SMART Response," says Raisbeck. "I don't think I would be able to do it. It would definitely change everything about the way that I teach."

Raisbeck uses SMART Response in his classes nearly every day for formal and informal assessments, and the SMART Board interactive whiteboard is used every day – without question. And now that Lincoln Elementary is working toward being an entirely 1:1 learning environment, he uses SMART Sync™ classroom management software, one of the four software components of SMART Classroom Suite, to share files and keep students focused.

Raisbeck says SMART products are much more engaging than the traditional paper-and-pen methods of teaching. "Students seem to do better with their work because they are more engaged, and it definitely helps with behavior."

Your school can become a SMART Showcase School and be recognized for using SMART education solutions to create exceptional learning environments. If selected, your school will receive exclusive membership benefits and opportunities. It will have an opportunity to share its success story and serve as a host site for other educators who want to find out more about the benefits of implementing SMART products. Learn more.