

Making Global Connections without Leaving the Classroom

By Kim Hamill



“We’ve got a lot of students who have never and will never venture outside of this area that they’re living in. They don’t go to museums, they don’t go on vacations. They’ve never been out of this little area – let alone out of the state or out of the country – to be exposed to what is out there in the world.”

According to Principal David Flynn, this challenge is one of the main reasons that SMART products are critical to teaching and learning success at [Westside Elementary School](#), a [SMART Showcase School](#) in Westmoreland, Tennessee.

Rich in learning experiences

Located in a rural, high-poverty area of the state, Westside Elementary School serves 325 students from pre-kindergarten to fifth grade – 300 of whom qualify for free or reduced-cost lunch programs.

But even though this Title I School is in a low-income area, students receive a high-quality education. In fact, Flynn and the rest of the school’s educators work hard to help students with the social issues they face and ensure they receive a global education.

They accomplish these goals using products such as [SMART Board interactive whiteboards](#), [SMART Response interactive response systems](#), the [SMART Document Camera](#) and [SMART Table interactive learning center](#). The entire school district has standardized on SMART products.

“SMART products are letting us present a global aspect of the world in our classrooms, and that has been a huge, huge advantage to us here with our kids being so out of the real-world picture,” Flynn says.

And because Westside students haven’t had opportunities to explore the world, more background information is often required about a lesson before teachers can begin teaching.

“Their world is so closed in when they come to us – there is no other way to really get them global experience,” Flynn says. “We have a lot of social factors we have to deal with here. But on top of that, when you try to teach a lesson ... about where the President lives and they have no clue where Washington, DC, is, where Virginia is, where that’s at in the United States. The global aspect that SMART [products] bring to the entire class has revolutionized our students. It’s truly been an altering situation.”

Kindergarten teacher Leslie Goad agrees, saying that providing her students with a visual,

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David Flynn

Principal

Westside Elementary School

Westmoreland, Tennessee

interactive way to connect to information makes teaching the basics much easier.

“Our kids come to us at all different levels, and where they are is unbelievable. You have some that have never held a crayon, you have some that have never been around other children, you have some that have never been separated from their parents – so they come to you having lots and lots and lots of needs,” Goad says.

Success for everyone

Westside Elementary is an inclusion school, so some of Goad’s students have special needs. She has found that SMART products enable these students to participate in activities with her higher-functioning students, creating a collaborative environment that’s beneficial for all.

“Our inclusion program merged with our technology program to get student scores up, and we’ve made some real progress with our special needs kids in that area. So, at one time, we were about 87 percent below proficient for our special needs kids, and that currently is riding around 17 percent,” Flynn says.

“We’ve made that gain in the last five years, so that’s

pretty huge. We received a commendation from the state of Tennessee for our progress, so we’ve made some real progress through inclusion merged with our SMART products.”

Fifth-grade teacher Ashley Shouse says that with SMART products, no learner is left behind. The products appeal to every learning style, enabling her to find creative ways to help her students understand concepts.

She is currently tutoring a student who struggles with many math and reading concepts. At first, she was struggling to help him understand the concepts, until she spoke to the student’s mother and learned the student was interested in computer programming.

“I thought, ‘How is this kid, you know, who’s into computer programming failing fifth-grade math and English?’ So I started finding tons of stuff with my SMART Board and my iPad, and he’s definitely passing now. You had to teach it to him in a whole different way and he gets it,” Shouse says.

Although the challenges of Westside educators are great – sometimes before Shouse and Goad can start teaching, they have to help a student who hasn’t had breakfast or a child who’s been awake all night – Flynn says that SMART products have helped these students reach out and connect with the world at large.

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