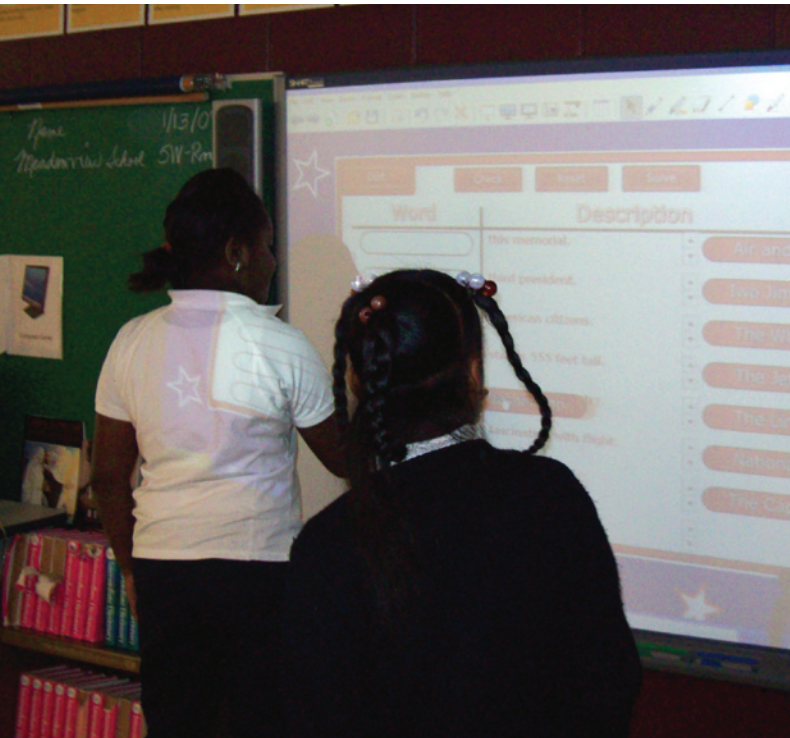


Changing Learning Culture with Classroom Technology

By Mike MacKinnon



During the summer of 2006, Meadowview Elementary School in Country Club Hills, Illinois, was completely transformed. In an overhaul that saw half the library and several classrooms taken over by boxes and supplies, every classroom in the school was equipped with **SMART Board interactive whiteboards** and complementary products, including **SMART Response interactive response systems**, AirLiner™ wireless slates and **SMART Notebook collaborative learning software**, as well as printers, cameras, document cameras, microscopes and calculators.

According to Jane Driver, Technology Coordinator at Country Club Hills School District 160, it took three

months to sort and distribute all the equipment. “It was like Christmas,” says Driver. “You had so many Christmas presents – you just had to organize everybody and everybody had to work together.”

The remarkable transformation was funded by the U.S. government with the Enhancing Education Through Technology (E2T2) state program. In Illinois, the program requires a minimum technology configuration for each classroom applying for the grant. Rather than deciding which grade levels or classrooms would be left out, Driver says they decided to outfit the entire school, which includes grades 4–6.

Learning through collaboration

According to Driver, the change in the school’s culture was almost immediate. As part of the grant, teachers were expected to learn how to use the new classroom technology. “They’ve made that leap . . . to actually integrating technology into their daily lessons and the way that they run their classroom,” Driver says. “The change has been more the mindset of the teachers to use the technology to engage the students, to keep them on task and to keep them interested and excited about what they’re doing.”

The teachers also began sharing their new skills and knowledge. “There’s so much collaboration that goes on around these SMART Boards,” Driver says. “They’re trying to work as a unit to improve their skills with it. When teachers use their free time to teach themselves how to do things or to work with

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Country Club Hills School District 160
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other teachers to do things, you know that they’ve bought into it.”

When others saw the transformation at Meadowview, they realized the potential. “It was kind of an ‘aha!’ moment for the whole district,” Driver says. As a result, the district began adding classroom technology into other schools, giving as many students as possible the chance to use interactive whiteboards. “We did second and sixth grade. And then we did seventh and first grade. And then we did eighth [grade] and kindergarten,” says Driver. “So from that center core, we were able to expand to the higher grades and to the lower grades at the same time.”

A lasting impact on students

“We’re now seeing the results of those children who were in the third grade and now in eighth grade,” says Driver. The students who were part of the original implementation moved on and helped

teachers in the higher grades learn to use the SMART Board interactive whiteboard. “They trained the teachers,” says Driver. “When they walked in and saw the SMART Boards in there, they just kind of took over.”

Driver says this positively affects not only students’ skill sets but also their self-esteem. “Any time you can empower the students and allow them to pass along the knowledge that they’ve learned, this is a good thing,” she says.

And the increase in students’ technology skills has been measurable. “We did a survey at the beginning and the end of the first two years,” says Driver. “We measured the fifth graders at the beginning of the E2T2 grant, and then we measured those same fifth graders at the end of their fifth-grade year. And then we measured them again at the end of their sixth-grade year, and they had made at least 25 percent gains in their technology skills.

“SMART Boards really jumpstarted everybody to start thinking about educating students in a different way,” Driver says. “When you put the SMART Board in the room, it’s almost like there’s a hum in the room. It wasn’t that there wasn’t learning or interaction going on before the teachers got SMART Boards, but it’s almost palpable when you walk in the room. And it makes a big difference.”



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