

Making the World a Better Place

By Heather Ellwood-Wright



Sometimes a tiny crystal of an idea can snowball into an avalanche of change. That's what happened when 10 teachers at [Preston Middle School](#) in Fort Collins, Colorado, decided that the school should be a [SMART Showcase School](#). So, with the advice of Tracey Winey, the school's media specialist and a SMART Exemplary Educator, each of these teachers posted a lesson on the [SMART Exchange website](#).

"From a staff aspect, that small step of putting our lessons on the Exchange really pushed our teachers to go to the next level. We say part of the 21st century skill set is to share and collaborate, and through the Exchange our staff collaborates worldwide. By doing this, we are setting a great example for our students – collaborating globally and making a real impact," explains Winey.

Susanne Martino, a seventh-grade math teacher at the school, believes that sharing lessons on SMART Exchange is empowering for teachers. "I feel good about sharing the work of other teachers. I know I don't have to recreate it, because I know they did their best thinking and put it on the Exchange, just as I have," she says.

A clear focus

Sharing those initial lessons led to the entire school's staff exploring how technology products can best be used to support STEM instruction in classrooms. And it seems to be working. In addition to being designated a SMART Showcase Elite School, Preston was selected as a [2011 Intel® Middle School of Distinction](#) for science. With so many technology companies headquartered in Fort Collins, becoming a STEM school was a natural fit for this Poudre School District school. Martino says it has led to an intentional and all-encompassing focus on technology skills in all content areas, but especially STEM.

"Preston students are engaged in activities and investigations in the STEM areas that really allow them to critically think and problem solve," says Martino. "Our teaching and learning is geared toward preparing our students so they can understand their place in the world and how it works. We do this by using current technology that enhances both teacher and student learning."

The SMART products at the school include 33 [SMART Board interactive whiteboards](#) – 3 of which are [SMART Board 885ix interactive whiteboard system](#) with four-touch interactivity – 15 [SMART Document Cameras™](#) with Mixed Reality Tools, 10 [SMART Slate™ wireless slates](#) and 10 [SMART Response interactive response systems](#). The sixth-grade 1:1 learning

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Media Specialist
Preston Middle School
Fort Collins, Colorado

environments also include [SMART Sync™ classroom management software](#).

For Mary Barela, a sixth-grade teacher, SMART Sync software helps her easily push content-rich websites out to students in a controlled fashion. It also “raises the personal accountability of each student” because students know she is closely and continually monitoring their work. For her math students, Barela uses the SMART Response system to differentiate instruction. “With SMART Response, I can get immediate feedback and determine which students are ready for enrichment, which students are ready for an intervention and which ones are on target. I am able to fully address the needs of all my students,” Barela explains.

Increased engagement

Perhaps the most important aspect of the daily, intentional and fully supported use of technology products is the marked increase in student engagement at Preston Middle School. According to Winey, the overarching culture of the school is one of deep questioning and exploration, usually centered

around authentic, real-world problems. For example, a group of Preston students is involved in a project with students in the Philippines and, together with industry mentors and outside experts, are delving into the problem of deforestation in that country. Such projects and the resulting process mean both teachers and students are more involved and enthusiastic.

“I am definitely more engaged in the learning,” agrees Martino. “When I learn something new on the technology front, I can’t wait to share it with my students. And I find they all want to try it, so they are more engaged. Subsequently, I’m more engaged and we’re all learning because of it.”

A potential and welcome effect of this increased engagement, says Winey, is decreased discipline referrals. She says that although it’s tough to quantify the real reason for the decrease, the Preston teachers believe it’s because students are excited about learning – they come to school with a learning mindset, ready to take on the world, and the result is fewer discipline problems.

Winey says SMART products are helping Preston teachers and students make a difference. “We take pride in the fact that we can differentiate instruction for our students so well and we can challenge them with real-world problems. One of our mottos at Preston is ‘How will we make the world a better place?’ And through our use of SMART [products], our kids are doing that every day – and that’s exciting.”



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 about the benefits of implementing SMART products. [Learn more](#).