



# Expanding horizons for at-risk students

By Stacy Kindopp

When Dr. Sara Cook, a [SMART Exemplary Educator](#), became the principal at [Speas Elementary School](#) in 2009, the school was undergoing a renovation project and as part of the project funds had been allocated for classroom technology.

“Some of our classrooms already had [SMART Board interactive whiteboards](#) and the teachers led the decision-making and expressed their eagerness to continue down the SMART path,” explains Cook.

Now, every classroom space at Speas Elementary has a SMART Board interactive whiteboard, a [SMART Slate™ wireless slate](#), a [SMART Response interactive response system](#) and the [SMART Audio™ classroom amplification system](#). Teachers also use [SMART Notebook collaborative learning software](#) to create and deliver lessons.

Located in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Speas Elementary is a Title I school with a high population of at-risk students. “SMART products help us bring the outside world in and build background knowledge that our children may not know,” says Cook.

“For example, even though we are only a few hours from the ocean a lot of our children have never seen the beach. Using the interactive whiteboard, we can bring the beach to them. They can touch the virtual water, explore

where the seashells are – it gives us an opportunity to create experiences for them that build vocabulary and knowledge that they’re missing,” describes Cook.

Speas Elementary became a [SMART Showcase School](#) in the 2011-2012 school year. To keep leading the way with technology, they make training and professional development a regular focus through user groups and teacher mentorship.

This summer the school hosted [SMARTcon12](#), a two-day workshop for educators who wanted to learn how to effectively use SMART Notebook collaborative learning software as a tool for creating engaging and effective classroom lesson content. “It was a great conference with a wide selection of presentations. Teachers could learn basic skills or dig into the advanced features in SMART Notebook software to find out how to create interactive, collaborative lessons,” says Cook.

Last year the school hosted a showcase night and invited principals from other districts, the community, parents and students to check out the school’s technology. “The students gave the demonstrations and that made a big impact,” says Cook. “I wish I would have taken pictures of the parents’ reactions. They really enjoyed watching their children show them how to use the technology and were amazed by their ability to manipulate content so easily.”

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-- Dr. Sara Cook, Principal, Speas Elementary,  
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

### Gauging the understanding of struggling learners

Elizabeth SabbaghRabaiotti teaches a fourth- and fifth-grade special needs classroom at Speas Elementary. “My students learn differently and can become highly frustrated,” she explains, “They’re not highly motivated learners, but with SMART Notebook lessons I can easily integrate games, activities and links to websites that keep the students involved and focused on learning.”

“I use SMART Response frequently in my classroom. The student responses give me instant feedback and I can immediately see who gets it. I don’t have to rush and grade papers over lunch to find out which classroom material needs to be reviewed,” says SabbaghRabaiotti.

She explains that often it only takes two or three SMART Response questions to gain insight into student understanding. “When I see that 70 percent of my students don’t understand a concept, I know that I need to teach it again in a different way to reach their learning style,” says SabbaghRabaiotti.

Many of SabbaghRabaiotti’s students have trouble reading or feel stressed when taking a traditional paper and pencil test. “For many of my students, a paper test is a trigger for them. They immediately feel that it’s bad and they’re going to fail. SMART Response questions appeal to these learners. It’s amazing how comfortable they are and how quickly they know how to use the clickers,” says SabbaghRabaiotti.

“Frequently, I’ve had students refuse to take a paper quiz. Or they won’t put any effort into the test and write ‘I don’t know’ or randomly circle multiple-choice answers. With SMART Response, my students are motivated and



always willing to answer questions. None of them have ever refused to take a quiz on SMART Response,” says SabbaghRabaiotti.

This year, SabbaghRabaiotti is working together with the other fourth-grade teachers in her school to create common SMART Response question sets for math and vocabulary. They work together to review the assessment results to see how different classes are understanding concepts.

“If we notice that one of the classes understands a concept really well and the other classes don’t, we’ll share ideas to find out how the teacher taught the concept so that the rest of us can enhance our own teaching methods to better reach the children in our classroom. Or if we notice that a few students in each classroom are struggling with a concept, we’ll pull them together as a group for additional review,” explains SabbaghRabaiotti.

SabbaghRabaiotti sees the tremendous impact that SMART products are making in her classroom. This year she is mentoring other teachers to help them incorporate SMART Response into their classrooms. She says, “There is so much potential. Teachers are often fearful of using something new and they need to know they’re not going to break it! It’s easy, engaging and the more you use it, it just becomes second nature.”



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.](#)