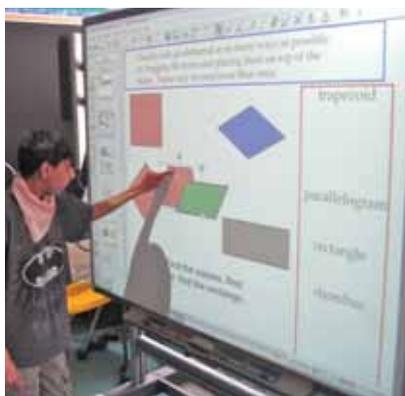


Upper Canada District School Board

Engaging students with special needs through SMART solutions



Tyler actively participates in class using the SMART Board™ interactive whiteboard.

“The SMART Board is a critical piece in the Universal Design for Learning toolkit, because it allows for whole group instruction by increasing communication and collaboration.”

Alex Dunn, UCDSB
Speech-language Pathologist

Nichola Bond says she can't imagine life without her SMART Board interactive whiteboard, which serves as the anchor for her lessons in both her grade-six morning class and her grade-five-six split in the afternoon.

“I use it for everything,” says the teacher from Rockland Public School in Rockland, Ontario. “I use it to showcase student work using the SMART Document Camera. I use it instead of handouts so the kids can interact with the notes. I use the interactive tools like the dice and the protractor.”

What Bond likes best about the SMART Board interactive whiteboard is how it helps her engage all the students in her classes, many of whom have special

learning needs. In fact, 21 out of 27 students in her morning class and 11 out of 27 in her afternoon class are on Individual Educational Plans (IEPs).

With the SMART Board interactive whiteboard, “they’re not tuning you out,” Bond explains. “When I have 27 hands go up when I ask who wants to show me something on the SMART Board, I know they’re learning.”

One of the students in her class is Tyler (not his real name). This 12-year-old boy is nonverbal and communicates using gestures, pictures and some words. He also has fine motor issues that make writing difficult. Tyler uses assistive technology, which, combined with SMART products, has helped him to become a full and active participant in the classroom.

“If I’m doing a math lesson, I’ll call on volunteers to come to the SMART Board and interact with the lesson,” says Bond. “What I do for Tyler is, on one side of the SMART Board, I have pictures of different shapes. So as some kids are coming up and sorting quadrilaterals into groups, Tyler is identifying shapes. He’s always part of the lesson, but may be doing a task differently. It’s just part of our routine.”

This approach to Tyler’s education didn’t happen by accident. This classroom in the Upper Canada District School Board (UCDSB) is 1 of 12 to be included in a pilot project called Smart Inclusion, undertaken in 2008–09.

The project, which has expanded since the pilot, seeks to boost the inclusion and participation of students with severe communication challenges in the classroom by pairing SMART technology

products such as the SMART Board interactive whiteboard and SMART Document Camera™ with assistive technology and critical pedagogy. As a result, true Universal Design for Learning is made possible through multiple means of representation, expression and engagement, giving all students equal access to an education.

“I’m very passionate about Universal Design for Learning and the Participation Model,” explains Alex Dunn, a UCDSB speech-language pathologist who is part of the Smart Inclusion project. “I consider tools such as the SMART Board to be the missing piece – a part of the toolkit which augments and assists not only communication, but meaningful education and social participation in the classroom setting for all students, including those with severe disabilities.”

It isn’t only the SMART Board interactive whiteboard that’s being used in this project. Some classrooms in the district, depending on the needs of students, are using other products like the SMART Response™ interactive response system, the SMART Table™ interactive learning center and SMART Sync™ classroom management software. All classes involved in Smart Inclusion, however, use the SMART Board interactive whiteboard as a foundation.

“The SMART Board is a critical piece in the Universal Design for Learning toolkit, because it allows for whole group instruction by increasing communication and collaboration,” says Dunn.

The results of the pilot project are impressive. Not only did students with special needs engage with peers more often during class time, but they also met their IEP goals faster.



Students collaborate on the SMART Table interactive learning center.

Negative behaviors decreased, and social participation increased.

Additionally, survey results completed at Smart Inclusion schools indicate whole classes were reportedly more engaged as a result of the classroom technology being used. Since the pilot, Smart Inclusion has now spread to over 70 schools in this district. Other school boards across Canada and some in the United States are also adopting this approach.

For teachers like Pamela Adamson who are looking for creative ways to address the needs of their students – including those with learning challenges – the SMART Board interactive whiteboard is an important addition to the classroom.

“The kids are able to take turns tracing upper and lowercase letters on the SMART Board before they go and work in their workbooks,” says Adamson, a kindergarten teacher at Oxford-on-Rideau, a Smart Inclusion school in Oxford Mills, Ontario.

“For kids that have fine-motor-skill challenges, I give them a ball or a stuffed toy, whatever they need to trace with on the SMART Board instead of a pencil,” she explains. “You’re able to incorporate all the different types of learning – kinesthetic, visual and auditory.”

Dean Fournier, principal at R. Tait McKenzie Public School in Almonte, Ontario, has been instrumental in getting Smart Inclusion up and running in his school and at Glen Tay Public School where he previously worked as principal.

“Engagement is off the charts. It’s night and day,” he says. “The students are more focused and more engaged in the learning. It doesn’t take long on a walkabout to see the difference, not just with special needs students, but with all the students.”

This represents a huge change from the kind of instruction students with special needs used to receive.

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“Years ago, special needs students were instructed at the back of the classroom and were not even part of the lesson,” explains Fournier. “Now we see them front and center, taking part and using the technology to help them get their point across and receive the point of the teacher.”

Nichola Bond says, “Tyler is our success story. He is so fully included in this classroom and socially accepted. Academically he has come miles. I’ve seen where he started and it’s just amazing where he is now, thanks to the technology and the people that work with him.”

Tyler and other students in Smart Inclusion are proof that combining differentiated instruction with SMART products can help students experience learning in a more meaningful way. As fully engaged, active participants, students with special needs – alongside their peers – can find real success in the classroom.