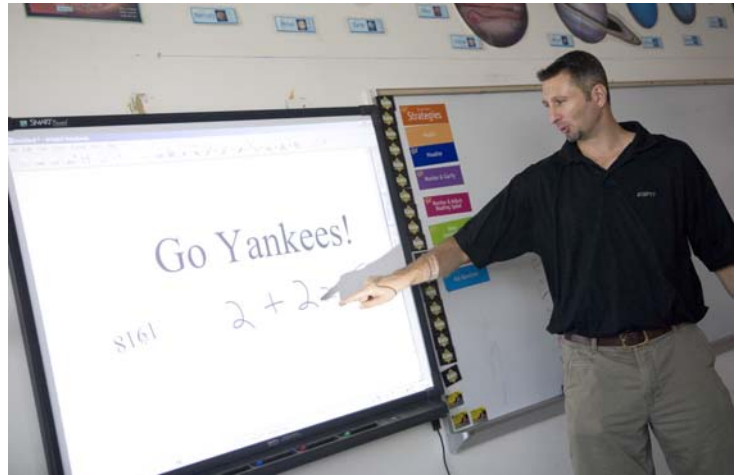


High-tech board engages students, city teacher says

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NORWALK - Brookside Elementary School fifth-grade teacher Keith Morey used his favorite teaching tool to keep his pupils' rapt attention during a recent class, but he wasn't teaching fifth-graders.



Keith Morey, a fifth-grade teacher at Brookside Elementary School in Norwalk, demonstrates the Smart Board ...

Morey demonstrated his classroom's Smart Board interactive whiteboard for 11 elementary, middle and high school teachers Wednesday in a class offered by the Norwalk Education Foundation's Teacher Technology Training Institute.

The class was designed to introduce teachers to the technology, a sort of hybrid of the overhead projector and blackboard that sends those teaching tools the way of the abacus, slide rule and mimeograph.

The boards consist of a large touch-sensitive screen connected to a computer through a USB cable and a projector that beams whatever is on the computer onto the screen, where special stylus pens can be used to digitally draw on the images. The entire setup is supplemented by software downloaded to the computer, which allows teachers to come up with interactive lesson plans that can be saved and updated.

More boards are being phased into district classrooms through a pilot program, school district technology director Ralph Valenzisi said.

Last week, the Common Council approved Valenzisi's request for \$85,385 to purchase 14 of the 77-inch brand-name Smart Boards, plus the interactive software, a multimedia gooseneck projector, a small speaker system and

DVD player packages for each. The purchase was part of the district's \$875,000 capital budget.

Brien McMahon and Norwalk high schools will each get two of the new Smart Boards, and Walter C. Briggs High School will receive one. Each middle school will receive one board and five will be distributed in the elementary schools.

Using its own funding, the Center for Global Studies at Brien McMahon will have one board set up in every classroom for the start of school.

Due to construction projects at other schools, it may take up to a month to install the boards, but they will be up and running this fall, Valenzisi said.

Brookside, Jefferson and Rowayton elementary schools all have at least one Smart Board, funded through principals' building budgets or outside grants.

The interactive whiteboard is not just technology for the sake of technology, Morey said. Smart Boards are valuable because students are engaged by them, he said.

"Getting their attention is half the battle," he said. "Once you start talking or reading out of a book, they're gone. I know I was staring out of a window in elementary school."

Anything that can be done on a computer - access the Internet, watch a video, set up an Excel document, show a PowerPoint presentation - can be done on a Smart Board, he told teachers Wednesday.

"Basically, you have your laptop up here," Morey said, pointing to the 77-inch screen mounted on the wall next to a more traditional wipe-able marker board.

The only difference is that you can interact with it, he said. Morey demonstrated a lesson in 3-D geometry by zooming in on a satellite view of downtown Manhattan using Google Maps and identifying shapes found in the skyscrapers' designs. The special stylus pen marks up the touch-sensitive screen to illustrate a point.

"Your finger basically becomes a mouse," Morey said. "It's like writing on the board but (the students) think this is cooler."

Fox Run Elementary School music teacher Marge Kelley was delighted with the board's interactive music capabilities.

"What a great thing that is. Wow. You can do a lot of lessons with that," Kelley said as she watched Morey demonstrate instruments that would play their sound when pressed.

Valenzisi encouraged teachers to apply for the five new Smart Boards available to elementary schools this year. Administrators could help teachers find funding resources, he said.

Sounding more like one of her sixth-grade students, Nathan Hale Middle School math teacher Kathy Healy was awestruck by the board.

"That's so cool. I want one," she said.

Morey said he presents preplanned lessons and powers the Smart Board up for spontaneous "teachable moments."

"If we're talking about something and a question pops up about the Great Wall of China, I can go online and show it," he said.

It's all part of a paradigm shift in education, Morey said.

"The days of having a lecture-style classroom are pretty much over," Morey said. "Kids don't learn that way, you have to be hands on."

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