

How the Sampson G. Smith School Became a Model of Innovation in Technology Driven Education – All on a Tight Budget

by Steve Fox



Using technology as an educational tool is nothing new and using interactive white boards have also become commonplace in schools around the country. Even so, revolutionizing the way children learn in a middle school in today's fiscally tight budgetary environment is indeed a feat worth noting. For the Sampson G. Smith School in Somerset County, NJ, their success was not only an inspiration to its students and faculty but to their entire school district.

Focusing on Students

The process of raising the level of student participation and attentiveness was originally at the recommendation of the State of New Jersey through their CAPA program which evaluates schools and gives guidance as how to improve their effectiveness. According to Liade Belo Osagi, Vice Principal at the Sampson G. Smith School, and a leading proponent of the technology transformation, "the students in our district were not at the levels they should have been and as a former special education teacher, I knew that we must engage them to increase their attentiveness. Technology was the answer". Mr. Belo Osagi was no new-comer to technology driven education having worked at the district's Franklin Park Elementary School where they started using assistive technology to increase reading levels. When he arrived at the Sampson G. Smith School along with Principal Eileen Brett, they worked together with the state to secure funding for their technology wish list.

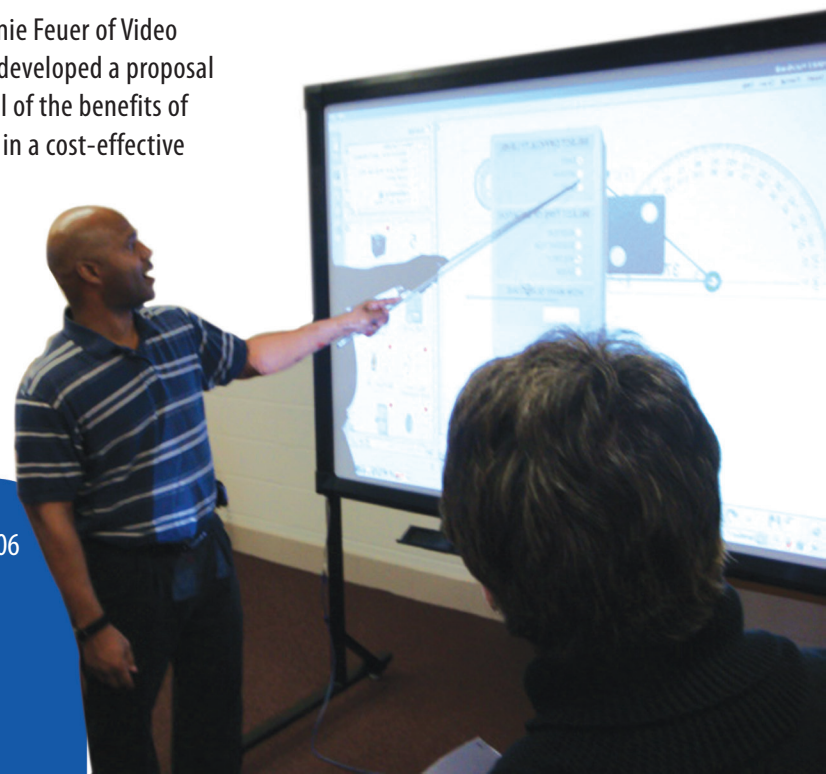
COW – Computers on Wheels

Since they were operating on a tight budget, the school purchased laptops and AV carts that can be moved between classrooms. Students were given laptops to do research and the lessons became interactive. "The concept of media sharing was a good way to get everyone involved," added Mr Belo Osagi. When it came to taking this initiative to the next level, he turned to Jeff Golden of South Hackensack based Video Marketing Systems, who he met at a New Jersey Education Association Convention (NJEA).

Interactive Lyteboards™ Making a Difference

Jeff Golden and Bernie Feuer of Video Marketing Systems developed a proposal to give the school all of the benefits of interactive learning in a cost-effective

manner. They designed a system around the Buhl Lyteboard Interactive Whiteboard that could be shared across many classrooms as needs change. A live demonstration of the Buhl Lyteboard received an enthusiastic response which led to SGS moving forward with a full solution which packaged the equipment with the installation and training needed to let the faculty hit the ground running. The technology push in the school so impressed parents and teachers that when the school wanted to get interactive boards in the school, the PTO (Parent-Teacher Organization) helped raise part of the funds, and the administration secured state money for the balance.



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According to Sam Shiffman, Educational Media Specialist at the school and the one primarily responsible with helping the other teachers incorporate technology into their lessons, “we went out to bid and found that the Buhl Lyteboard gave us the best for our money.” The school then purchased 9 complete systems from Video Marketing Systems built around the Buhl Lyteboard Interactive Whiteboard in conjunction with a Buhl Multimedia Cart and an LCD Projector. Each system is driven by an existing laptop using Buhl Draw software as well as Eduware for testing and classroom response. All 9 systems are on wheels to facilitate easy sharing throughout the school. In addition, Buhl supplied document cameras that can help teachers show the class other student’s work by simply projecting the images on the Lyteboard.

Amazing Results

According to Danny Rogers, a math teacher at the school, “We use the boards every day. The students can touch the screen and see a Y axis flipping which gives them a much better understanding of the mathematical components. Kids

are visual learners and they grew up in a computer generation. We are touching on where the kids learn best.” Along with other faculty members, Danny has witnessed major progress since the initiative began. “We have seen great improvement especially in the lower and mid range students”, he added. “It has become a part of their daily school life”.

Spreading the Word

The success of the Sampson G Smith School’s technology initiative led to a **SGS Technology Circus** which featured representatives from Buhl, Dell, Idea Paint and Apple. According to Richard Kurtzer, Brand Manager for Hamilton Buhl, “We are thrilled to see how SGS students and faculty have embraced technology in their school with the help of one of our premier dealers, Video Marketing Systems. We hope that their success in bringing useful interactive technology to their students will spread to the rest of their district as well as others in the state.” Kurtzer also introduced Hamilton-Buhl’s new VP-SCOPE Digital Microscope Camera which offers science classes a new dimension of learning. Most impor-

tantly, the Fair was attended by teachers and department heads from all of the other schools in the district. Sam Shiffman, SGS’s Educational Media Specialist, led the event and showed the audience all of the innovative technologies that his school had implemented and offered to help the other schools do the same. Teachers from various departments, some of whom were admitted technophobes, explained how easy it was to learn to use products like the document cameras and the Lyteboards. More notably, they expressed what an important impact it had on their students. The district was also represented by Dr. John Roberts who encouraged the others to look carefully at the technology exhibited at the Fair and see which ones they would like to incorporate into their classrooms, “Everyone needs these tools”, he told the audience. It was now up to them to make a wish list and for the district and administrators to find the funding. If the success of SGS’s initiative is any indication, students across Franklin Township Public Schools will be active participants in the interactive learning revolution that will propel their learning and better prepare them to succeed in their higher education.

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