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– Larry Lewis, Grade Eight Teacher

## At-Risk Students Find Success

Jennings School District is an at-risk district in a low-income area of Missouri, where 77 percent of students qualify for free and reduced-fee lunch programs. Students often come to the district two or three years behind their grade level, and for years the school was only partially accredited due to low test scores. Despite these socioeconomic issues, Jennings is now the only fully accredited at-risk school in Missouri, and district staff feel they've broken the achievement gap. The question is – how did they do it?

### Reaching the turning point

Dr. Terry Stewart, Jennings' former Superintendent of Schools, and his colleagues decided in 1997 it was time for a paradigm shift. Teachers from Jennings had just taken part in the MINTS (Multimedia Interactive Networked Technologies) project which put computers with Internet connections in Missouri classrooms and provided teachers with technology training. This project eventually became an initiative known as eMINTS (enhancing Missouri's Instructional Networked Teaching Strategies).

After seeing the positive effect technology had on the classroom environment, Dr. Stewart and his colleagues decided to create a new education plan. They focused on teacher training, inquiry-based learning and classroom technology like the SMART Board™ interactive whiteboard.

### Finding the funding

Although Dr. Stewart recognizes the financial challenges around buying technology, he believes the solution lies in taking a unique approach to budgeting for technology. "Some of the greatest budgetary hurdles are hurdles we create ourselves in schools. I think school leaders, school superintendents, people like myself, have to develop a different approach to integrating technology and to funding the technology into the schools."

Jennings' approach was to reallocate funds and apply for e-rate money. "One of the things we've done is take money that was previously used for textbooks – I wouldn't say all of it but a great deal of it – and use that for technology. Because the computer and a SMART Board interactive whiteboard function as a textbook, we just rerouted existing money," explains Dr. Stewart.

Jennings now has 52 classrooms equipped with SMART Board interactive whiteboards for students from grade three to grade twelve. Cindy Kicielinski, District Instructional Technology Specialist, says interactive whiteboards are in all core-subject classrooms, so all students are exposed to this type of learning at some point throughout the school day.

The district also has a two-to-one student-computer ratio and an in-house technology training program for teachers that runs year round.

### Challenge

Use technology to bring learning success to at-risk students

### SMART Solution

Fifty-two SMART Board interactive whiteboards

### Result

Students' test scores, attendance and behavior improve

*"The SMART Board interactive whiteboard definitely has improved the scores here at Jennings."*

# Jennings School District

Case Study, St. Louis, Missouri



Students at Jennings School District have improved their test scores with the help of the SMART Board interactive whiteboard.

## Learning a new way

With the addition of this technology, Jennings initiated a new inquiry-based approach to learning.

"I think the most powerful part of having a SMART Board interactive whiteboard in the classroom is the way in which students are able to present information they gather during the unit," says Kicielinski. "You'll see students in front of the room doing collaboration in teams, being able to talk effectively about the knowledge that they have and present it back in a way that everyone understands it. And that is a lifelong skill that will prepare them for the job market."

## Improving more than test scores

Dr. Stewart and his staff believe student performance should not be defined by test scores alone, but also by attendance levels, motivation and behavior. Since putting technology in the hands of properly trained staff, Jennings has noticed improvements in each of those areas. They have even noticed an increase in teachers' satisfaction levels.

"The SMART Board interactive whiteboard definitely has improved the scores here at Jennings," says Margaret Wagner, a third grade teacher at Fairview Elementary. "I've seen it in social studies. I had a class for two years and the scores went up 66 percent in the two years I had those students."

Wagner says, "The greatest benefit is to the students because they become so engaged. And when they're engaged, they learn a lot

faster than they would if you were just standing there in the room lecturing to them."

Larry Lewis, an eighth grade teacher at Jennings Junior High, has been teaching for 29 years. Lewis says the behavior problems he had in his traditional classrooms have disappeared now that he is teaching in a technology classroom with a SMART Board interactive whiteboard. Now, he is more excited to teach, and his students are more excited to learn.

"It has made a difference in student performance as well as student behavior. Because of technology, students come to class with a willingness to learn. And that's something I didn't see in most of my students as a traditional teacher," says Lewis.

## Creating life-long learners

Many of the students who were attending Jennings in 1997, when this technology shift began, are now getting ready to graduate from the district's high school. Staff say these students have become life-long learners. As Kicielinski explains, "Most of them are going on to college with scholarships and are very much excited about their future. They really do feel that technology has played an important role in helping them become better students."

Dr. Stewart and his colleagues believe this new approach to learning is eliminating the digital divide and equalizing opportunities for their students. They realize that Jennings students are not only equipped with skills that are vital to their future success in the classroom, but also in today's high-tech job market.

### About SMART

SMART is both the industry pioneer and global market leader in easy-to-use interactive whiteboards and other group collaboration tools. SMART products include the family of award-winning SMART Board interactive whiteboards, interactive pen displays, interactive digital signage and software.



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