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Fuller School wins Smartboard Grant from Walker Fund

Keene, NH ...Keene's John H. Fuller Elementary School has received a \$5,000 grant from the Walker Fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation. Cynthia Bunn, a first-grade teacher at the school, will use the gift to buy a mobile smartboard, computer, and library of digital learning materials to be shared among the school's first-grade classrooms.

A smartboard looks like – and is – a conventional whiteboard to write on. But it also is a computer screen that teachers can use to bring pages from the Internet and materials from CDs and DVDs into their classrooms. Smartboards also allow teachers and students to write with “digital ink” by using their fingers and to drag and drop images around the screen, which can be useful in learning fractions and percentages, for example.

“A smartboard removes our curriculum from the confines of textbooks and printed materials and opens it to the full resources of materials published on CDs, DVDs, and on the World Wide Web,” Bunn explains. “By using videos, interactive graphics, and other multimedia resources – as well as web pages that provide conventional written information – the smartboard engages students of all learning styles more effectively than conventional educational media can.”

The variety of lessons that would come alive for students using the new smartboard include the games and demonstrations of the school's “Everyday Mathematics” curriculum as well as math lessons about money, time, and other forms of measurement; social studies experiences, such as mock elections and virtual tours of other countries and of the White House and other historic sites; and science lessons about insects, weather, plants, animals, and astronomy, among other topics.

Animation, manipulatives, and interactive graphics can be especially helpful in enabling children to understand abstract concepts such as sentence structure, addition and subtraction, and a range of ideas in science. “The smartboard will improve learning success among students who learn best through means other than reading or hearing lectures,” Bunn adds.

Also, Fuller School houses the Keene School District's Communication Disorders Collaborative, which specializes in educating elementary-grade students with autism spectrum disorders. Conventional ways of teaching – teachers talking or students reading, for example – often do not reach these children. However, graphics, motion, and other technologically enabled forms of learning captivate these students as effectively as they do conventional learners.

Students who are unable to communicate verbally or in writing may be able
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to do so by drawing or manipulating graphic images. Smartboards give them the power to do this with ease and in ways that are personally meaningful to them. By using a smartboard, these students often are able to communicate with peers and teachers. "As a result, our new smartboard can become a means for these students to not only speed and enhance their learning, but also to begin to explore other, more conventional forms of communication and interaction," Bunn says.

Because the new smartboard is cart-mounted, it will be shared among Fuller School's three first-grade classrooms. This not only will help Fuller's teachers expand their skills and repertoire of teaching tools but also will help young students prepare for their futures in Keene schools. The new middle school being built on Maple Avenue will have a smartboard in every classroom.

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