

# SMART Showcase School Profile

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## Extreme PD Makeover in the School District of New Berlin

By Jane Chamberlin Grove

When Kevin Messman talks about creating better lesson plans, he's really talking about transforming learning. Coordinator of instructional technology at the [School District of New Berlin](#) in Wisconsin, Messman organizes the district's annual [Technology Academy](#), a three-day professional development program that attracts up to 150 teachers. Teachers bring a lesson to the Academy and redesign it, using their new skills with SMART products. Messman then asks them to reflect on how the lesson can help transform learning at New Berlin. Is it an exploration? Are students producing something? Is it student centered? Are students using higher level thinking skills? "It's like an extreme lesson makeover," says Messman.

This is one makeover that isn't a superficial fix. At this district in suburban Milwaukee, technology staff and teachers are determined to transform learning in meaningful ways – and professional development (PD) is key to their plans. The SMART Board™ interactive whiteboard, along with SMART Notebook™ collaborative learning software, has the potential to assist in this transformation, according to Messman. Each of New Berlin's elementary school classrooms has a SMART Board interactive whiteboard, and 70 percent of the secondary schools are equipped with this product.

### Proficiency leads to transformation

Messman believes that professional development programs are required to realize the full potential of the interactive whiteboard. "We don't want teachers to use this tool as a glorified overhead – we challenge them to transform learning." To effect this transformation, Messman encourages teachers to take advantage of the many PD opportunities in the district. Together with 20 teacher-trainers, he coordinates programs that help teachers achieve a proficiency level with SMART products. Once this level is attained, Messman sees the technology boosting teachers' ability to elevate learning.

"Part of transforming learning is moving from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning – at a higher level," says Messman. "We want students to use the board and Notebook software to apply what they've learned in a new situation – to do analysis and create new knowledge."

These are substantial goals, and they require a commitment from teachers. "We didn't just put a board in a room and say, 'Here it is,'" says Messman. "We wanted teachers to be committed to the technology, and we wanted them to be committed to getting professional development."

### Teachers love to learn

Getting New Berlin teachers to embrace professional development required little effort. Teachers enthusiastically attend the wide variety of programs offered, from after-school tutorials and PD days to district in-service sessions and the Technology Academy. "They're always asking for more PD," says Messman.

The Academy, held every year in August, is particularly popular. Second-grade teacher and SMART Certified Trainer Carrie Boduch has attended as both participant and leader. "It's a great time to come together, interacting and collaborating with peers from other schools," she says.



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**Kevin Messman**

Coordinator of  
Instructional Technology  
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Fourth-grade teacher Laura McVann agrees. "The summer academy is absolutely invaluable. It's uninterrupted time – you don't have to worry about correcting papers, calling parents or getting grades done, so I can really focus. To me that's priceless."

### The Swiss cheese analogy

For teachers like McVann, who didn't grow up using computers, PD programs offer the extra confidence needed to incorporate technology like the SMART Board interactive whiteboard into lessons.

"I've always said that my computer skills are like Swiss cheese," she laughs. "Lots of holes in them. But attending workshops, having resources, just being able to go down to Carrie's room and say, 'Hey, I need help,' – that's really filling in those holes." And McVann is seeing concrete improvements in her teaching style – improvements that are indeed transformative. "My teaching now is much more interactive," she says. "Kids are much more engaged and more motivated by the SMART Board."

Fellow fourth-grade teacher Julie Zimmerman has seen similar changes in her teaching, and she credits them to the professional development she's received. "In the past, I stood up and directed the lesson," she says. "Now I'm facilitating students' learning and getting students involved. They're not just writing notes and listening but really jumping up and participating."

### A magical vascular tour

One of Zimmerman's [favorite lessons](#) was inspired by a Technology Academy session on embedding video clips in lessons. To teach the difference between vascular and nonvascular plants, she takes students on a virtual tour. "From Notebook, I can jump straight to a two-minute clip from Discovery Education Streaming. It looks like a camera has gone up inside the stem of a plant, and we talk about how water is absorbed through the roots to the rest of the plant. I freeze it and label the parts of a plant." The lesson helps Zimmerman convey a concept that students find hard to visualize. "Before the clip, students are sitting there with dazed looks and you can tell they don't get it. But when you put the clip on, it's like, 'Oh, now I get it!'"

Touring the inside of a vascular plant is a prime example of how professional development can help transform learning, according to Kevin Messman. "Now learning is visible and tactile," he says of Zimmerman's lesson. And it's this sort of compelling activity that proves the value of professional development.

"If teachers are committed to improving their skills with the SMART Board and using it to improve learning, then we've really gotten our return on investment." In other words, it's a lesson makeover that brings the real beauty of learning to students at New Berlin. [EC](#)

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