

## Hartley teachers learn to be SMART by being active

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Hartley kindergarten teachers Gwen Krueger, left, Kari Zafft, Karen Wilker, Erica Lorenz, Becky Ferch, Kris Butterfield and Megan Barta create Learning Ladders and Domino Dot cards at the S.M.A.R.T. workshop held at Farmamerica.

By RUTH ANN HAGER  
Staff Writer

WASECA — It turns out that keeping kids physically active increases their ability to learn.

That's the idea behind a multi-sensory approach to learning called SMART - Stimulating Maturity through Accelerated Readiness Training.

“Students do not learn sitting in a desk doing a worksheet,” said Hartley Elementary School principal Michelle Krell who learned about SMART at a leadership conference a year ago.

This week Minnesota Learning Resource Center instructors led a four-day SMART workshop at Farmamerica attended by 90 educators — 30 from Hartley and 60 from schools across Minnesota, South Dakota and Iowa.

Josh Orpen, the Learning Resource Center's communication coordinator and Americorps intern, said 3,000 teachers in 225 schools and 55,000 children across the nation now use the SMART program, with 241 teachers trained since June.

The Waseca workshop was the largest training session the resource center has completed, and his first.

“Now everything makes sense,” he said about the program.

A \$4,000 Waseca Area Foundation grant and federal stimulus money covered the workshop, the Waseca teachers' tuition and construction of a SMART classroom at Hartley. The school is now a Designated Learning Site to be visited by educators who want to see the program in action.

What they will see at Hartley could be anything from the way students move through the hall, how their feet use a big rubber band stretched across the front legs of their chairs, or how they learn the ABCs while tossing a bean bag. In the SMART room, there are 10-12 stations where students will develop physical skills.



“It's one more strategy, one more tool we can use to promote learning,” said Krell.

Six of next year's seven Hartley kindergarten teachers, Gwen Krueger, Kari Zafft, Karen Wilker, Erica Lorenz, Becky Ferch, Kris Butterfield and Megan Barta, said SMART was introduced in their classrooms in the spring of 2009. This



year the program will be in place when classes start in September.

Kindergarten and first grade students will spend one-half hour each school day in the SMART room but the activities will also be integrated with every curriculum area in every grade.

Gwen Krueger said the program integrates movement with literacy, language and math and helps kids to better remember what they learn.

“Kids learn by moving,” said Karen Wilker.

And the movements are developmentally appropriate to their age, according to Becky Ferch.

The teachers say they saw a lot of improvement after implementing SMART last year in their classrooms. This year, they expect to see even more changes and look forward to tracking the kids who begin using the program in kindergarten.

And while they were already familiar with the program, the workshop provided them with the “why” behind the SMART

It’s about the maturity of reflexes, Kris Butterfield said.

Now more than ever, according to Krell, educators cannot assume students are starting school with the skills they need.

“Society has changed so much; kids aren’t playing outside like they used to, they’re playing video games, watching television and sitting at computers. They’re not ready to be learners,” she said.

The idea behind SMART is that visual, tactile and auditory activities stimulate the brain and, therefore, increase learning.

“It’s rejuvenating and exciting and the kids are going to love it,” said Krell.

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