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SMART Training comes to Owatonna

SMIF on 06/21/2016

Over 40 early childhood educators gathered for a three-day training last week in Owatonna for a SMART (Stimulating Maturity and Accelerated Readiness Training) workshop training series. This three day training, led by A Chance to Grow, was funded by a \$20,000 grant from SMIF. A Chance To Grow offers multiple programs and services to children and families with a diversity of needs, including the SMART curriculum, which is based on an understanding of brain development and stimulation. A Chance To Grow’s interventions all have the same goal: to help all those we serve achieve their highest possible potential.



Historically, much of the SMART Training had been metro-based. SMIF’s first grant to A Chance to Grow in 2013 helped them bring this training to SMIF’s 20-county region. A Chance To Grow to offer educators who work in pre-k, elementary, special education, physical education, adaptive physical education or occupational therapy to take a SMART session for a reduced cost.

Over 4,700 educators have implemented SMART at 250 schools both state and nationwide and, more recently, in countries across the globe. The SMART developers drew from the latest brain research and a variety of developmental programs and activities in order to create the purposeful, enriching environment you will see in the SMART program.

The SMART program resembles an obstacle course; it goes around a room, hallway, or any other space and has stations like the Alligator Crawl, the Overhead Ladder, and the Balance Beams. These activities stimulate and grow a child’s body awareness, hand-eye coordination, balance, and other areas. This kind of program gets the brain and body working together. Alicia Bauser, a preschool teacher in Lake Crystal, says there are “so many benefits from doing this program.” She uses SMART alongside her normal school curriculum to enhance the children’s learning. Bauser said, “SMART can be done anytime during the day so a lot of my transitions are filled with it. We have SMART right before we do our circle time so they get all of the moving and jitters out. Then [the students] sit like angels during circle time!”

At last week’s session, participating educators learned what the SMART program was, how to implement it in their own classrooms and building, and tips and tricks from others who have done this program before. Paulette Lee is the SMART facilitator for the Atwater Cosmos Grove City school district and has been doing this program for ten years. She says that with this program “[the children] are getting their body and brain working together and getting their brain ready for learning.” Others who have worked with the SMART program shared what worked and what didn’t in their own classrooms and were encouraged to try some of the new strategies learned at the training with the children they work with.

The SMART program has made huge leaps and bounds over the years. Thanks to SMIF and its grant, A Chance To Grow had the opportunity to help get more people informed about the SMART program. To learn more about A Chance To Grow and the SMART program visit their website at <http://actg.org/>.



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