

PROGRESSIVE <b>388</b>	NATIONWIDE <b>430</b>
STATE FARM <b>USA</b>	AM. FAMILY <b>USA</b>

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PREVIOUS

Area students head back to school Tuesday



SPOTLIGHT

## Local educators get S.M.A.R.T.

By ANNA SEGNER [asegner@owatonna.com](mailto:asegner@owatonna.com) Jun 16, 2016



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Quinta Kase of Kasson-Mantorville School District, Trinity Nursery School educator Brenda DeNio, Chelsea Copeland of Lake Crystal School District, Karin Steffenson and Brenda Jensen of Trinity Nursery School experienced a S.M.A.R.T. program activity that they will likely apply in their own classrooms during the S.M.A.R.T. workshop on Thursday, June 16. (Anna Segner/People's Press)



OWATONNA — Early childhood educators from Owatonna and the greater southern Minnesota area found themselves jumping, rolling and hopping on the third day of the S.M.A.R.T. workshop on Thursday morning.

The workshop, held Tuesday through Thursday this week at the Owatonna Arts Center, was funded by grants from the Otto Bremer Foundation and the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation.

Forty-two early childhood educators from southern Minnesota participated in the S.M.A.R.T. workshop.

The S.M.A.R.T. program was created by the Minnesota Learning Resource Center (MLRC), a nationally recognized teacher-training institute affiliated with the Minneapolis-based non-profit organization called A Chance to Grow.

S.M.A.R.T. is an acronym that means “Stimulating Maturity through Accelerated Readiness Training.” The workshop educated teachers on multi-sensory approaches to learning.

The first day and a half of the workshop was focused on teaching teachers about how the brain learns. “We help make that connection between brain research and direct application in the classroom,” said workshop presenter Jessica McFarland.

On the second half of workshop day two, participating teachers were walked through the two program guides that they received as part of the workshop to use in their classrooms.

“We try very hard to be hands on,” McFarland said. “We want the educators to leave at the end of the workshop feeling confident not only with the knowledge but with the materials to implement right away.”

On day three, the educators actually experienced the activities in the program guides firsthand. These activities can make a big difference in a child’s educational development, says McFarland.

“The focus of S.M.A.R.T. pre-k is not necessarily teaching school readiness skills like shapes, numbers, colors and typical every-day lessons,” said McFarland. “S.M.A.R.T. pre-k focuses on building the foundation of what we call learning readiness skills that need to be in place for the brain and body to work together to handle learning.”

McFarland gave the example of sitting a child down to learn a lesson about numbers. If that child has not developed a sense of body awareness, their concentration may be so focused on sitting in the chair that they are unable to learn about numbers.

“It is a program that helps children’s brains and bodies get ready for that learning in kindergarten,” she said. “Sometimes there are children with gaps in their foundation. The activities in S.M.A.R.T. pre-k can help fill in the gaps.”

Early education educators Brenda Jensen, Brenda DeNio and Karin Steffenson of the Trinity Nursery School in Owatonna said that they could not wait to get back in the classroom to apply what they have learned in the workshop.

“They’ve encouraged us to apply these sensory stimulating activities in the classroom for 20 minutes a day,” said Steffenson. “And we can do that broken up between lessons or in the hallway as we are waiting for the bathroom.”

All three educators said that that they knew of a few students in particular who could benefit from these S.M.A.R.T. activities.

“I’m excited to get back to the classroom,” said DeNio. “I think that this is really going to make a difference in my helping to build those developmental skills necessary for learning in early elementary.”

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