

S.M.A.R.T. training for teachers

District 88 hosts training for teachers from Minnesota, Wisconsin and ... Japan

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By Kremena Spengler - Staff Writer , The Journal

NEW ULM - District 88 is hosting S.M.A.R.T. training Tuesday through Thursday at the District Administrative Center, attended by teachers from New Ulm, Blue Earth, Mankato, Belle Plaine, St. Clair, St. James, LaSalle, LeCenter, Montgomery, Lake Benton, Eau Claire, Wis., and even Tokyo, Japan!

The workshops are led by Tim Greeley, Cindy Harvey and Karen Wojahn from the Minnesota Learning Resource Center in Minneapolis, which is part of group called A Chance To Grow.

S.M.A.R.T. stands for Stimulating Maturity Through Accelerated Readiness Training. The program is based on the idea that movement anchors learning, said presenter Tim Greeley. It pairs up academic skills with motor skills.



Cindy Harvey, a presenter from the Minnesota Learning Resource Center in Minneapolis, conducts S.M.A.R.T. training for teachers from Minnesota, Wisconsin and even Japan, at the District 88 Administrative Center. Staff photo by Kremena Spengler

S.M.A.R.T. is a multi-sensory approach to learning based on brain research, according to materials used in the workshop. The program develops physiological and neurological readiness skills essential to classroom success.

S.M.A.R.T. emphasizes stimulating the brain stem to promote richer connections among neurons. The brain stem controls the neurological capabilities for development of school

readiness skills.

S.M.A.R.T. integrates activities in the classroom, gym and playground and is compatible with any curriculum.

The program is related to language development, reading, math, writing, physiological awareness and coordination and attention.

S.M.A.R.T. sites report increased levels of academic achievement.

S.M.A.R.T. activities include: cross lateral (crawling, creeping, cross-pattern walking and skipping), balance/vestibular (walking on a balance beam, jumping on a rebounder, balance boards), vision (eye teaming, eye movements, focusing, visual discrimination), phonemic awareness (auditory discrimination, sound blending, auditory closure), fine motor (eye-hand coordination, rainbow tracing), etc.

Students are continuously challenged and stimulated by the activities that are incorporated into their daily academic routine.

The ongoing workshop sessions are structured to provide a comprehensive understanding of the program as well as thorough training in how to implement it and adapt it to specific situations. They cover topics such as brain basics, reflexes, sensation, wellness, auditory, vision and fine motor skills, as well as ideas for implementation (getting started, keeping it fun) and other aspects.

The training includes "make and take" sessions, in which the teachers create materials to use in their classrooms, with "ingredients" and tools provided by the presenters.

Some sessions involve "station rotation," giving the teachers a chance to try the same activities they will be doing with students.

Jefferson Elementary School of New Ulm has implemented the program for three full years, starting with some kindergarten sections, then expanding it to first and second grade.

(Because the program targets school readiness, schools that implement it tend to focus on the highest-impact, earliest grades, noted Greeley. But the brain is "really plastic," and the activities can be integrated into higher-grade curricula, he added.)

To Holly Syverson, who was among the Jefferson teachers pioneering the program, the ongoing workshop is an excellent "refresher."

In turn, local physical education teacher Tony Ortmann said he has often wanted to learn more about "the direct relationship" between

physical education and other academic subjects.

Ortmann and fellow phy ed teacher Todd McKeeth said they saw a chance, by attending, to learn additional techniques for integrating physical education with other areas of learning and to boost collaboration with colleagues.

The attendees include 15 teachers from New Ulm, 30 teachers from other districts in Minnesota and Wisconsin, and one from Tokyo, Japan. The local district is receiving the training free of charge because it invited, and is hosting, the visiting teachers and presenters.