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# Park Christian S.M.A.R.T. program designed to boost students' learning

By [Helmut Schmidt](#) on Oct 15, 2016 at 2:59 p.m.



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MOORHEAD — Learning can be child's play.

Just ask Sophia Johnson.

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The 7-year-old was sporting a big smile after a 40-minute stint in Park Christian School's S.M.A.R.T. room Friday, Oct. 14., with the rest of her first-grade class.

"It's really fun. It gets your brain and your eyes ready to learn," Johnson said, taking a break from crawling on a map and alternating between touching numbers and her ears.

Her favorite exercise is swinging rung to rung on the overhead ladder, which is similar to monkey bars. "Five times!" in three minutes, she said proudly.

Ellen Koslowsky, 6, is also a fan of the overhead bars. It's one of the best exercises because it's "about helping your body get smarter," she said.

S.M.A.R.T., or Stimulating Maturity through Accelerated Readiness Training, is a system that uses a series of exercises — including bouncing, balancing, crawling, rolling and swinging around on that overhead ladder — to give students a better sense of their bodies and teach them motor skills that will help make them better learners.

Jenny Browning has overseen the S.M.A.R.T program at Park Christian for the last four of her seven years at the school.

But this is the first year in which she has a room dedicated solely to S.M.A.R.T. for the school's kindergartners and first-graders. The room was added this summer on the north side of the commons as part of a larger addition and renovation project.

"Everything they do has a purpose," Browning said. "It's a multisensory approach to learning."

"They're working on their spelling. They're working on their numbers. They're working on their colors," she said. "Everything they're doing is making connections in their brain. Every activity has a purpose. There's something going on that's helping them get ready to learn."

For example, according to the Minnesota Learning Resource Center, walking on a balance beam helps a child develop balance and body awareness. Body awareness helps children sit still and remain seated. It also helps a child understand left from right, which helps when learning to read from left to right.

The overhead ladder helps a child with eye teaming — using both eyes to see a single image — as they grab each rung to make their way across the ladder. Eye-teaming is important for reading. Children who have trouble with eye teaming may tire easily and show a decline in reading comprehension and even avoid schoolwork.

Auditory activities help children understand distinct units of sound (phonemes), blend of sounds to form words, and develop the brain's ability to organize and make sense of language sounds (auditory discrimination).

It doesn't hurt that all the crawling, creeping, spinning, balancing, rolling and hanging from bars is not only fun, but improves students' physical fitness, strength, coordination and their ability to pay attention.

Before the creation of the S.M.A.R.T. room, Browning would hold the classes in the school's halls.

Next up, she will teach the school's second-grade teachers how they can use the S.M.A.R.T. principals in their classrooms.

"It's a neat program," Browning said. "It's just another tool in our cart to help these kids succeed."

## PCS celebration Oct. 24

Park Christian School will celebrate additions and renovations to the school with a ribbon-cutting and dedication ceremony starting at 4 p.m. Monday, Oct. 24, in the commons.

The additions made this past summer include new classrooms, renovation of other classrooms, new halls and storage on the southwest side of the school, extending air conditioning throughout the building, and creating a S.M.A.R.T. (Stimulating Maturity through Accelerated Readiness Training) room on the north side of the commons.

The work cost about \$1 million and was paid for with cash in hand, said Teresa Nickel, director of admissions and marketing.

#### **Helmut Schmidt**

Helmut Schmidt was born in Germany, but grew up in the Twin Cities area, graduating from Park High School of Cottage Grove. After serving a tour in the U.S. Army, he attended the University of St. Thomas in St Paul, Minn., graduating in 1984 with a degree in journalism. He then worked at the Albert Lea (Minn.) Tribune and served as managing editor there for three years. He joined The Forum in October 1989, working as a copy editor until 2000. Since then, he has worked as a reporter on several beats, including education, Fargo city government, business and military affairs. He is currently The Forum's K-12 education reporter.

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