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Where K-12 Education and Technology Meet

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## Classroom Instruction:

ACTIVboard system fills lessons with action--and interaction

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In 2001, the Escambia County public school district in Florida's Panhandle made the decision to combine its two smaller elementary schools--Molino and Barrineau Park--into one larger school called Molino Park Elementary.

With the opening of the new facility came the desire to assemble the most sophisticated educational technology in each classroom. Chalkboards, whiteboards, and overhead projectors were the norm at the two previous schools. But the joint administrative and teaching staff of the new school wanted more. More action. More interaction.

"The teachers wanted their classrooms to come alive. They were determined to find a means to exhibit more creativity in their lessons so as to spark student interest and encourage hands-on participation," said Alice Woodward, interim principal of Molino Park Elementary.

So Woodward took on the assignment to review and research the latest, groundbreaking educational technologies for the new school. Her research led her to take a comprehensive look at interactive whiteboards.

Woodward decided that interactive whiteboard technology could expand upon the school's current technologies because of its ability to create a dynamic learning environment. Financially, it was an attractive solution, because it met the stringent requirements of the district's budget. From a resource-management perspective, the school could make better use of its current technologies, not replacing them but enhancing them.

In January 2002, Woodward attended the Florida Educational Technology Conference in Orlando. The conference gave her the opportunity to meet personally with a multitude of companies--each touting their respective

interactive whiteboard systems.

"When I saw the various interactive whiteboards, I was excited about this innovative teaching tool," said Woodward. "After I participated in a hands-on demonstration of the ACTIVboard Collaborative Classroom System from Promethean Inc., it was clear to me that the ACTIVboard was not really in the same league as the other systems. It is the only solution I know of that provides a complete, integrated teaching system created especially for the education market."

The ACTIVboard system includes an electronic whiteboard, ACTIVstudio software, and student peripherals. A peripheral device called the ACTIVslate promotes real-time interaction by allowing students to direct and control the whiteboard from their seats. Another device, called ACTIVote, is a wireless handheld device that provides teachers with instant student feedback on various subject matters. All these pieces are designed to work together--not just bolted or added on after the initial purchase.

When Woodward presented her findings to the faculty, "they also began dreaming of the new possibilities for its use in the classroom," she said. "They realized immediately that while most whiteboards simply drive existing applications like PowerPoint or note taking, the ACTIVboard system is a catalyst for change, changing the way teachers can present concepts, engage the students, get them to really interact, and--through the ACTIVotes--get immediate feedback on comprehension. This system creates a win-win solution for everyone."

## **Implementation**

Molino Park Elementary began using the ACTIVboard system at the beginning of the 2003-04 school year. The district initially purchased 26 boards along with six sets of ACTIVotes. Today, there is one mobile ACTIVboard in every classroom and in the library.

According to Woodward, the ACTIVboard system wholly integrates with the existing technology of laptop computers, DVDs, VCRs, projectors, digital cameras, and document scanners currently found in each classroom. The system also is highly durable--a necessity in an elementary-school environment.

Of course, as with any new technology, teacher and student acceptance was critical. Woodward expected some reservations. But that was not the case at all.

"My students are totally captivated," said Sharon Smith, a fourth-grade teacher at Molino Park. "I've been a teacher for 31 years, and I have never felt this connected to my students. They are more interested in learning and eager to participate. The ACTIVboard system has opened the floodgates for teachers and students to actively engage their creative minds."

Besides the ability to go online and call up instructional material, teachers like Smith find the one-of-a-kind backgrounds and image libraries that number into the thousands and come standard with the ACTIVstudio software also help to extend their current lessons. In math, for example, Smith regularly incorporates the graph-paper background for plotting x- and y-axes, a 100s chart for addition and subtraction, and she often creates her own flipcharts with pictures for word problems.

Before using the ACTIVboard, Smith and other teachers at Molino Park used the traditional "drill and practice" style of teaching or had students follow along in their textbooks. Now, Smith brings her language-arts instruction alive with her flipcharts of adjectives, verbs, and nouns. Students eagerly come to the ACTIVboard and interact with their classmates as they identify parts of speech, manipulate the key components of a sentence, or fill in the blank of a question. Additionally, she may incorporate the ACTIVotes, the handheld voting devices that provide teachers with instant student feedback.

"Using the ACTIVotes with the ACTIVboard system has given me and the other teachers an effective and immediate way to assess student understanding of lessons, concepts, and facts, while easily individualizing learning for students who require additional instruction," said Smith. "Previously, we had to wait until test time to assess knowledge gain--and by then we had already moved on to the next topic."

Smith's class has a set of 32 ACTIVotes, which students pick up on the way to their desks. Then, at any time during class, no matter what subject she is teaching, she can use the ACTIVotes to solicit answers to problems or host a quiz

or test.

"This gives me an immediate measurement of how well my students understand the material," she said.

At a recent open house, Smith used the unique game-show template that is not found on any other interactive whiteboard system and created a "Grinch Quiz," asking a series of questions about the story "How the Grinch Stole Christmas." "Parents were fascinated," said Woodward. "They were curious at first, then they really got in to it and didn't want to leave!"

"The ACTIVboard system has made me a better teacher," said Smith. "Now when the bell rings I'm ready to inspire, motivate, and explore--and I've also got the internet at my fingertips."


Links:

Molino Park Elementary

<http://www.escambiaschools.com/schscnts/mpark>

ACTIVboard Collaborative Classroom System

<http://www.activboard.com>



**Tim Lauer**  
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