

# Motivation is the challenge



Time: The SMART program gives Lyndsay Dusek a longer block of time to work on her art.

## SMART 1 (9:14-9:44 a.m.)

Students with a hankering for art careers sit in a darkened classroom, watching a video about what's available in that field at the University of Pittsburgh. They're waiting for a guest speaker, said FHS art teacher Gail Piepenburg.

Piepenburg said there are "pros and cons" to SMART sessions in general, but that the challenge is there for students to motivate themselves. She sees self-motivation as less of a problem in her SMART sessions, because kids who sign up already have interest in that subject.

"I think, particularly in art," Piepenburg said, "it's real valuable because we do have serious kids that need to spend more time on their projects. But if they want to pursue something else, or if they get creative ideas, this is a chance to try different mediums."

Motivated students have an upper hand as far as preparing themselves for the future — be it college or career.

"They're going to learn more if they do their own research, if they take the responsibility to teach themselves," Piepenburg said. "But I think that's true for all of us."

"And I try to communicate that to kids. Motivating them is always the challenge because there are those who'd rather be spoon-fed. It's one of the choices, to take charge of our future ... or sit back and watch the world go by."

## Taste of SMART

Around the corner, students work on a variety of activities in the SMART session of Spanish teacher Jennifer Fitzgerald, who also happens to be coach of the FHS pompon squad. Some kids complete journals for Spanish 4 class, make pompon posters and do makeup quizzes or homework. Junior Meghan Ostach chose to use the session for an unrelated project (thus not receiving credit).

"Meghan has real good SMART credits, so she can afford to use one of her SMART sessions to do her own individual work," Fitzgerald explained.

For the Thursday sessions, students would bring in salsa recipes (researched via the Internet) and make them in class.

"What we find on the block schedule is we don't have as much time to do the fun, cultural-type things, just because of the (rigorous) curriculum," she said. "So what we do is offer some of the fun, cultural stuff in SMART sessions."

One negative at the outset of block was concern about loss of daily instruction in foreign language, math and music classes. But Fitzgerald said early fears are subsiding.

"Sure, I'd love to see my (students) every day, but there are new techniques ... If teachers are willing to make it work, it can."

## It's a kick

Thanks to SMART, students now participate in nontraditional physical education activities such as Tae-bo, which combines kick boxing and aerobics.

About 15 kids, mostly females, were getting their kicks in the wrestling room, instructed by teacher Mary Sheltroun.

Among those in the session, which extended into the second half hour (SMART 2, 9:49-10:19 a.m.), was freshman Rita Portney.

"I heard it was fun, and it's a good workout," Rita said.

Tae-bo, competitive Frisbee and Rollerblading are just a few of the activities Sheltroun leads, in keeping with the district's quest for a more-modern and relevant physical education program.

"As with anything, with time things change," Sheltroun said. "And since the emphasis here is on individual fitness throughout life, we have to change ... (to match) what kids are interested in, the trends."

And SMART provides the perfect platform to augment the new direction.

"Most students take good advantage of SMART time," Sheltroun said. "... This is a good chance for students to incorporate a lot of activities they might be interested in and look at fields they never thought they'd be interested in. They can dive into hobbies of their own, too."



Activities: Students Lisa Kaster, Missy Ellis, Rita Portney and Katie Ellis get a workout using Tae-bo, a blend of Tae Kwon Do, kick boxing, and other aerobic and anaerobic exercises. The session ran for both halves of SMART.

## SMART gives homework time

### SMART 2 (9:49-10:19 a.m.)

In the media center, it was a full house in the computer lab. Every kid was at work on an assignment. Freshman Ann Frances Buisson did an immigration report for civics class, junior Katie Martin was "looking for articles on metal alloys and relevancy to every day life," Danielle D'Orre, a junior, completed a "Chemistry in the Community" paper and senior Vicki Pittman did research for college scholarships.

Katie said she really likes SMART, because she can do homework assignments during the regular school day, and not need to do them after school. "I can get help from teachers during school."

### BLOCK scheduling



Of course, students get SMART credit in the media center if they work on class-related assignments, or projects previously discussed with teachers, said media specialist Cindy Clement. "Now, if they're checking their e-mail or just horsing around, no."

The goal of SMART is becoming more understood with each year, Clement explained. "It's really interesting. We've come a long way. There's a much better understanding of how to use time (than when the program began)."

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Monitoring: As SMART time winds down, teacher Paula Rohn takes her turn as a hall monitor.

## Here is how SMART works:

Student Managed Academic Resource Time goes from 9:14-10:38 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays at Farmington High School. It is comprised of half-hour sessions on Tuesdays (SMART 1, 2) AND Thursdays (SMART 3, 4) concluding with

14-minute core group time.

Master schedules are collaborated on by faculty so that duplication of offerings and use of space does not occur, said teacher (and SMART hall monitor) Paula Rohn.

## SMART doesn't always meet needs

BY TIM SMITH  
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Efforts are under way to help some Farmington High School students maximize their use of Student Managed Academic Resource Time.

The high school wants students, parents and teachers to team up to "encourage" good decisions pertaining to how the 84-minute twice-weekly block are used, said principal John Barrett.

According to an evaluation of the first two years of SMART, by Susan Axelrad-Lentz of Green-

tree Research and Development Service, having options and wide-open time doesn't always meet the needs of top students and those with less motivation.

Still, officials are encouraged that kids and faculty are catching on to the morning sessions, used for a combination of student enrichment, academic assistance and self-help.

"One of the things we're doing," said Barrett, "is sending a letter home to all parents who had one or more failing grades (in the first semester), saying 'I hope you know SMART class is



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