

## Teachers team up to bring 21st century learning to Berkshire

BY MARY BETH ALMOND  
*C & G Staff Writer*

BIRMINGHAM — Technology, in one way or another, has become a major part of life for most students, whether they spend hours checking their e-mail, surfing the Internet, playing with iPods or sending text messages.

The challenge for schools these days is to find ways to shift from traditional ways of teaching to a world of interactive education where students can better apply the skills they've learned in the real world.

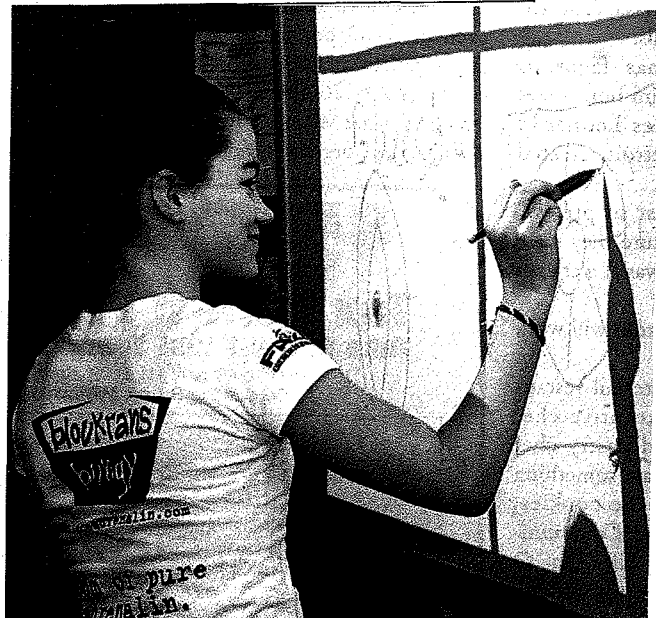
For Berkshire Middle School

sixth-grade social studies teachers Adrienne Fazzolara, Rebecca Goldberg and Jim Stearns, the journey into a new frontier of education starts with updated technology.

"(Students) are living with iPods and things, and we were still teaching them on a white (dry-erase) board and chalkboard, which was just getting ridiculous," Fazzolara said.

If students are to succeed in today's economy, the three teachers believe, they need to know more than just English, math, science, and history. They also need to learn 21st

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**Berkshire sixth-grader Meredith Hawkins, 11, draws a picture of Mecca on the interactive Promethean board during a lesson on the symbols of Islam.**

Photos by Donna Agusti

## Berkshire

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century skills, like how to think critically and creatively, work collaboratively, use the Internet to do research, communicate clearly and effectively, be responsible and accountable, and be up on current events.

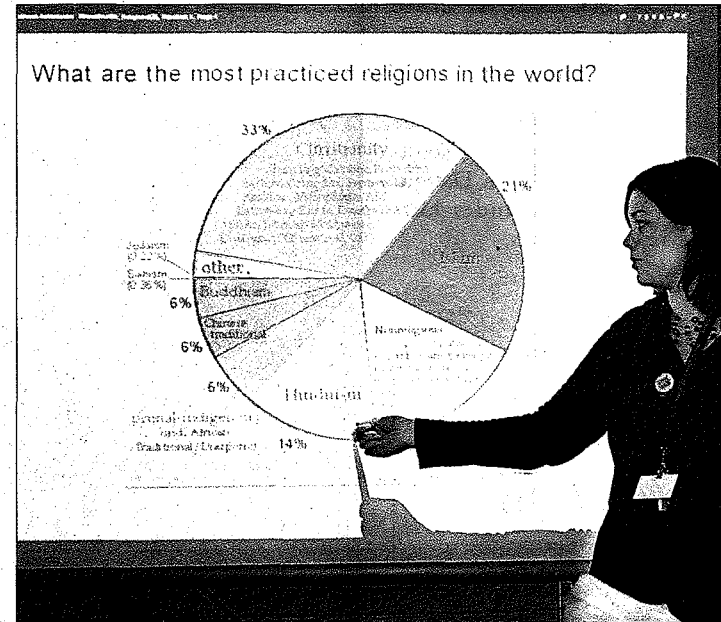
Hoping to bring 21st century learning to the forefront of their classrooms, the teachers decided to apply for a grant from the Birmingham Education Foundation to purchase computerized interactive Promethean whiteboards, digital imaging readers and teacher notebook computers.

Fazzolara said frustrations with the hodge-podge of technology they were receiving from the media center sparked the idea for the grant.

"The equipment wouldn't always work together well, so it was becoming more frustrating to use than it was being helpful, but yet we knew we needed to bring the technology in front of the kids. They need to see it, they need to see how it works, and they need to start using it, because they are the ones who have to come up with the next set of technology," she said.

In order to fund the project, the district agreed to match the foundation's investment of \$14,400, and the equipment was installed in early fall.

Through the use of the new Promethean boards, which the teachers say give students the opportunity to learn the same way they think, classrooms are trans-



**Berkshire Social Studies teacher Rebecca Goldberg uses the Promethean board to review the most practiced religions in the world with her students.**

formed into collaborative learning environments. Interactive whiteboards allow anything that can be seen or done on a computer screen to be projected onto a whiteboard, on which both the teacher and the students can write. Teachers have the ability to hide, reveal or highlight text and images to stimulate discussion, encourage active participation through interactive rulers or protractors, engage senses with sounds, colors and videos, and much more. As a bonus, anything written on the screen can be printed off and given to each student to keep.

Goldberg said it has become second nature to the kids to touch the boards, whereas adults are a little bit more hesitant, worried they might break them.

"The second we turn them on, the kids all get excited. It's the hands-on interactive learning that they just absolutely love. ... I don't think I could teach without it now," said Goldberg.

The three sixth-grade social studies classrooms are only the beginning of the 21st century learning community that's growing at the school, according to Berkshire Principal Jim Moll. The sixth-grade math classrooms have already begun to use the technology and Moll hopes to expand the computerized whiteboards to the sixth-grade language arts classrooms next year, if the funds are available.

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