

For immediate release

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Birmingham Education Foundation seeds 21st Century technology in local schools

Birmingham, Michigan – A grassroots revolution has begun at Berkshire Middle School. Led by a team of sixth grade social studies teachers, the revolution in teaching employs new technology that sidelines the “sage on the stage” method and brings student collaboration to the fore.

Last spring, Jim Stearns, Adrienne Fazzolara and Rebecca Goldberg requested a \$14,400 grant from the Birmingham Education Foundation to get the revolution off the ground. As the largest grant request they received last year, the Foundation trustees deliberated carefully and consulted with Birmingham Public Schools administration before approving the grant request.



“The grant request was a strong contender from the beginning,” said Paul Keller, President of the BEF Board of Trustees. “Not only did it dovetail with the school district’s strategic plan to bring 21st Century learning into our schools, but the teachers who brought us the grant were so clearly passionate about this project.”

The Foundation’s investment was matched by the school district in order to fund the project, which required the purchases of computerized white boards, digital imaging readers, training and teacher notebook computers for each of the three sixth grade social studies classrooms.



By early fall, the computerized white boards were installed and the teachers began using them to deliver elements of the district’s curriculum. Each white board is essentially like a giant touch screen computer on which both teacher and students can write. Unlike a regular chalkboard, however, what’s written on the screen can be printed off and given to each student to keep.

Like a computer, these white boards can pull information from the Internet for class discussions

and students can upload reports and videos. But what's truly revolutionary here are the 21st Century learning techniques that come into play and the way teachers become facilitators and students take center stage.

“We were studying ancient Mesopotamia and the assignment was to choose two problems and illustrate how the societies solved them,” said Fazzolara. Each team of four students had to divide up the tasks necessary to complete the assignment. “The teams shared their illustrations with the class on the white boards and the class gave them feedback. They were able to edit their work on the spot and they learned from each other.”



Students aren't the only ones collaborating as a result of the computerized white boards. “When one of us learns a new way to use the boards, we share it with each other,” said Goldberg of her team of three. “That way we build on each other's knowledge.”

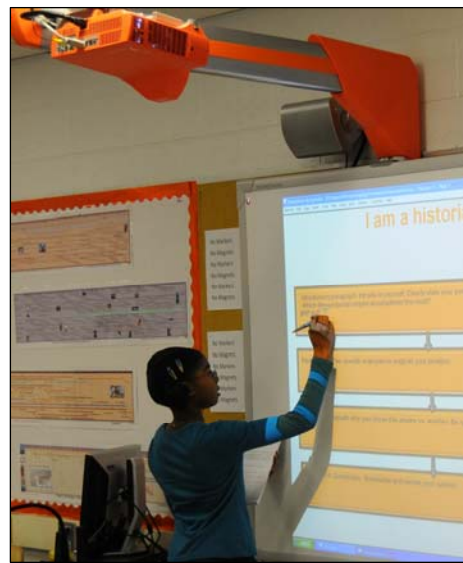
According to Stearns and Berkshire Principal Jim Moll, the three social studies classrooms are only the beginning of the 21st Century learning community that's growing at the school.

“The math classes are already using this technology, so next year we're hoping to expand the [computerized white] boards to 6th grade language arts as well,” said Moll. “Eventually we hope that all Berkshire students will be using this technology in all four core academic areas.”

Making those plans a reality depends on whether or not funds are available to purchase additional computerized white boards. With the current school funding issues, it's not clear if the district will be able to shoulder that burden alone.

The Derby Math Department is also keen on the new white board technology. Derby math teachers, Redi Abazi and Tom Warnica, were the catalysts in bringing 21st Century Learning to their department. The BEF offered assistance to the Derby PTSA when costs ran a little higher than their fund raising goal. With BEF collaboration, Derby has been able to provide electronic white boards for each math classroom that did not already have one.

“Technology tools like the computerized white boards will be key in helping our kids prepare for college and beyond,” said Keller. “It's up to community members and organizations like the BEF to step up and fund these vital resources for our classrooms.”



The BEF Board of Trustees has made technology a focus of fundraising projects for the future. To facilitate continued support of technology in district schools, donors can now designate that their contribution go directly to support Technology projects.

For more information about the BEF, visit www.supportbef.org.

The Birmingham Education Foundation is a 501(c)3 organization with a mission to enhance learning for all students in the Birmingham Public Schools. Since its inception in 1993, the Foundation has provided privately raised funds to support innovation and excellence in the areas of Academics, Arts, Athletics and now Technology.