



EAST HAMPTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

East Hampton, Connecticut

Superintendent's Update

Week of November 13, 2017



The vision of the East Hampton Public Schools: Preparing and inspiring our students to be innovative, responsible, contributing members of an ever-changing global society.

Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.

~ Winston Churchill

This week in our Schools

- **Monday, November 13 – World Kindness Day.** What one thing will you do on this day to spread kindness?



<https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/>

- **Monday, November 13-17 – The Annual Middle School Book Fair.** Book Fair hours include extended time to coincide with Parent Conferences on Wednesday, November 15 (until 5:30 PM) and Thursday, November 16 (until 7:30 PM).
- **Tuesday, November 14 – Project Graduation Butter Braid Fundraiser delivery date.**



Tuesday, November 14 – East Hampton High School Girls Varsity Soccer in the CIAC State Tournament Final Four vs Holy Cross at Windsor High School, 7:15 PM. This is the first time the Girls Soccer Team has made it to the semifinals. Come and cheer them on!

- **Wednesday, November 15 – Parent Conferences: **Half Day of School for Middle School only.****
- **Wednesday, November 15 – Connecticut Teacher of the Year Recognition at the Bushnell Theater in Hartford, 5:00 PM.** Our East Hampton Teacher of the Year, Kristen Keska (High School Social Studies) who was a semi-finalist for the State of Connecticut Teacher of the Year will be recognized with the Teachers of the Year from throughout the state.
- **Wednesday, November 15 – High School Fall Athletic Awards at East Hampton High School.** The evening begins with dinner at in the High School Cafeteria at 6:00 PM followed by the Awards Ceremony in the High School Auditorium at 6:45 PM.



Thursday, November 16 – Superintendent's Advisory Council at 94 Main Street, 9:00 AM. All parents and community members are welcome to attend any and all meetings. The November 16 meeting will feature the following: (1) update on election results and new members of the Board of Education and (2) a discussion and ranking of the budget requests made by the public at the November 6 Board of Education meeting.

- **Thursday, November 16 – Parent Conferences: **Half Day of School for Middle School only.****
- **Thursday, November 16 – High School Fall Concert in the East Hampton High School Auditorium, 7:00 PM.** Come and enjoy the sounds of the High School Instrumental and Vocal Ensembles under the direction of Mr. Andrew Groves and Mr. Ehren Brown. It's a great night of entertainment!
- **Saturday, November 18 – All Around the World Fest sponsored by the EHHS World Language Department at the High School, 1:00 – 5:00 PM.** <https://easthamptonct.wixsite.com/allaroundtheworld>

Students will have a chance to participate in cultural games, music, dance, global arts and crafts, language lessons, artifact guessing, cultural performances, international cooking, face painting, cultural storytelling, international film shorts, and more.





November/December Calendar

Get your event on this calendar!

Send additional events and dates to
psmith@easthamptonct.org.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
	<p>Middle School BOOK Fair Monday-Friday</p> <p>World Kindness Day!</p>	<p>Learning Walks-Memorial</p> <p>Project Graduation Butter Braid Delivery</p> <p>EHHS Girls Soccer in Final Four of CIAC State Tournemnet at Windsor HS 7:15 PM.</p>	<p>Half Day for Middle School Parent Conferences Middle School BOOK Fair Evening Hours until 5:00 PM</p> <p>Teacher of the Year Recognition Kristen Keska and state teachers honored.</p> <p>High School Fall Athletic Awards Dinner 6:00 PM Awards 6:45 PM</p>	<p>Superintendent's Advisory Council 94 Main St. 9:00-10:15 AM</p> <p>Half Day for Middle School Parent Conferences Middle School BOOK Fair Evening Hours until 7:30 PM</p> <p>High School Concert EHHS Auditorium 7:00 PM</p>		<p>East Hampton High School presents All Around the World Fest 1:00-5:00 PM Students \$5.00 No fee for parents who accompnay children</p>
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
	<p>Board of Education Meeting - EHHS T-Bell, 6:30 PM NEW MEMBERS First Meeting!</p>	<p>High School Senior Class Dinner Glastonbury Hills Country Club 6:30-9:30 PM</p>	<p>Coffee & Chat With the Superintendent 94 Main St. 7:30-9:00 AM</p> <p>Half Day Thanksgiving Recess</p>	<p>No School Thanksgiving</p>	<p>No School</p>	
26	27	28	29	30	December 1	2
		<p>Half Day for Memorial & Center School Parent Conferences</p>		<p>Half Day for Memorial & Center School Parent Conferences</p>	<p>Learning Walks-High</p> <p>Poium Players 7:00 PM High School</p>	<p>Poium Players 2:00 PM & 7:00 PM High School</p>
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<p>Poium Players 2:00 PM High School</p>	<p>Learning Walks-Middle</p> <p>Board of Education Meeting - EHHS T-Bell, 6:30 PM Life Changer of the Year</p>	<p>Elementary PTO Holiday Shopping Night Memorial School 4:30-7:30 PM Vendor Fair & Student Holiday Shop</p>	<p>Elementary PTO Center School 6:00 PM</p> <p>Project Graduation High School Library 6:00 PM</p>	<p>Visit to East Hampton Public Schools by 20 Chinese Principals from the Guandong Province</p>	<p>Coffee & Chat With the Superintendent 94 Main St. 7:30-9:00 AM</p> <p>Memorial School Fundraiser for CCMC</p>	
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
	<p>Learning Walks-Memorial</p>		<p>Middle School PTO Middle School Library 6:00 PM</p>	<p>Sandy Hook PROMISE MAKE THE PROMISE</p>	<p>National Cupcake Day</p>	

Notes



East Hampton Board of Education Highlights (11/6/17)

Visit East Hampton

YouTube

You can view this meeting and past meetings at:

<http://www.easthamptonps.org/2017-2018-boe-meetings>

Scroll down the page and click on "VIDEO" of the date you wish to view.

- The Board thanked and honored three Board members whose terms were completed as of the election: Tania Sones, Debra Devin, and Carol Williams.
- The Board appointed Frank Rizzuto, current Associate Principal of South Windsor High School, as the next Principal of East Hampton High School replacing Nancy Briere, Interim Principal.
- The Board was shown the new Graduation gown for East Hampton High School selected by the administration, teachers, and students. The gown is Bellringer Blue with White trim with an embroidered copy of the "BELL" Core Values.
- The Board held a Public Forum, during which members of the audience including staff and parents made budget requests for the upcoming school budget (2018-19).
- The Superintendent of Schools reviewed the timeline for the Budget and outlined potential changes in Education Cost Share (ECS) funds based on the approved biennial State Budget.
- The Board approved Version 4.0 of the school district's Emergency Operation Plans recently edited and reviewed by the East Hampton Police, Fire Marshal, Fire Department, and Ambulance Department.
- The Board of Education approved the School Calendar for 2018-19.
 - The start date for students is **Tuesday, September 4** (after Labor Day on Monday, September 3).
 - Teachers and certified staff will report prior to Labor Day for Convocation and Professional Learning on Tuesday-Thursday, August 28-30.
 - The 2 "Late Start" mornings for Professional Learning have been replaced by 2 "Early Release" afternoons for Professional Learning.
 - Good Friday falls during the April Vacation in 2019.
 - The Winter Weekend in February includes a Friday, February Professional Learning Day for teachers, making the weekend longer for students and families.
- The Board approved the following policies:
 - 1312 Public Complaints
 - 6140 Curriculum
 - 6141 Curriculum Design
 - 6146.2 State Examination

All district policies are online:

[Click here](#)

Welcome new Board of Education members!



Though the Board has said farewell to three Board members who are not returning to the Board: **Debra Devin, Tania Sones, and Carol Williams**, the Board welcomes newly elected returning members: **Christopher Goff and Jeffrey Carlson** as well as newly elected members new to the Board of Education: **Amanda Amtmanis, Lori Caldwell, and Marc Lambert**.

Their first meeting as a new Board will occur on Monday, November 20 at 6:30 PM in the High School T-Bell.

United Way – East Hampton Public Schools ups contributions by 50%!



Congratulations and heartfelt thanks to the teachers and staff of the East Hampton Public Schools who increased their contributions to the Middlesex United Way by **over 50%** this year.

Our community and area directly benefit from these contributions! **We are certainly Making Kindness and Caring Common!**

Thank you!

■ Life Changer of the Year!



Congratulations Meghan Ryczek!

The East Hampton Public Schools is pleased to share that **Meghan Ryczek, Kindergarten Teacher at East Hampton Memorial School** has been nominated as a **2017-18 Life Changer of the Year**. The Life Changer of the Year program recognizes and rewards K-12 school educators and employees who make a positive difference in the lives of students all across the country.

Meghan's nomination includes the following:



Mrs. Ryczek's talents and skills as a teacher are beyond her years of experience because she makes every student feel special and loved. She has a natural connection with her kindergarten students and instills a sense of wonder and joy in them as learners. She creates a loving and supportive community where her students can choose to be anything they desire to be.

Those who know Mrs. Ryczek are most impressed by her commitment to her students through her parent communication. After every school day, she emails the parents of her students to share the experiences of that day. She shares academic content, social skills, photos, daily adventures, and student progress. Mrs. Ryczek wants to make her students and families feel important and connected at all times.

This is an opportunity to take pride in all of East Hampton's educators and what they are doing for our future generation. Please take a moment to view Meghan's Life Changer nominee profile on the Life Changer of the Year website and leave a supportive comment on her profile page. This process contributes to her selection as a finalist.

Profiles available at:

http://app.lifechangeroftheyear.com/nomination_detail.cfm?NominationID=769&NominationYear=2017&SchoolState=CT

and

www.LifeChangeroftheYear.com

■ Preliminary Budget Requests – Your input needed!



**EAST HAMPTON
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**
Budget 2018-19

Last week the Budget Requests that were made at the Board of Education Budget Forum on November 6, 2017 were shared via email with the school community and the community. All teachers, staff, students, parents, and community members are urged to share their thoughts in the important process of determining priorities for the 2018-19 Budget!



1. Identify budget priorities among the items included on the Budget Request lists.
2. Make your thoughts known to the Superintendent of Schools, Paul K. Smith - psmith@easthamptonct.org. Indicate your preferences for inclusion.
3. Items will be placed in tiers indicating their priority for inclusion in the budget.
4. Attend the Superintendent's Advisory Council Meeting on Thursday, November 16 at 9:00 PM at 94 Mains Street and the Board of Education budget public forum workshops in January & February 2018.

December 8 – PJ Fundraiser Day for Memorial School

Attention: Memorial School Students!

Wear your pajamas to school Friday, December 8th in support of patients at Connecticut Children's Medical Center!!

Students and staff of *Memorial School* are invited to wear their PJ's to school in honor of kids at Connecticut Children's Medical Center.

Thousands of children each year spend days, weeks or longer in PJ's at the hospital while receiving care. *PJ Day for the Kids* will help us show our support for these brave kids!



Wear your PJs to school and make an *optional* donation of \$1 or more.

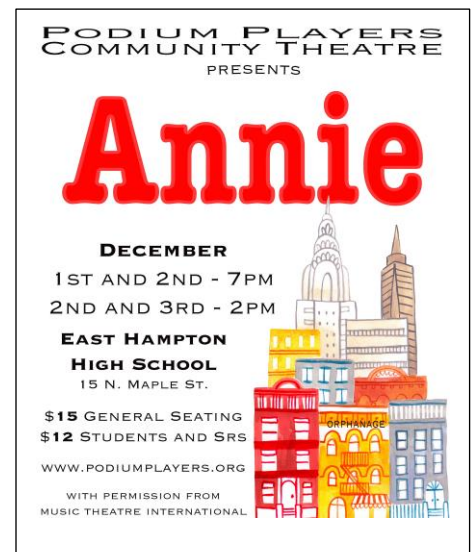
Donations will be collected at school on Friday, December 8. For more information and to locate the Memorial School online to make a gift visit: <http://give.connecticutchildrens.org/pjday>. Checks can be made to **Connecticut Children's Medical Center Foundation**. All proceeds benefit The Center for Cancer and Blood Disorders at Connecticut Children's Medical Center.

Coming soon to EHHS Auditorium – *Annie, the Musical*

Don't miss this musical production perfect for the whole family! It's local talent performing one of Broadway's best family musicals. You'll be amazed by the talent in our area towns!

Tickets available online:

<http://podiumplayers.wpengine.com/current-events/>.



Resources for East Hampton Families

Did you know that East Hampton Youth and Family offers free family counseling?



East Hampton Youth and Family Services has as one of its goals to empower families by promoting resiliency and assist in building strong and healthy relationships. Counseling is designed to help with everyday concerns, like improving relationships at home, stress and anger management, parenting, life transitions, and grief and loss issues.

East Hampton Youth and Family services invites you to call us at 860-267-7300 for more information or to schedule an appointment.

Thoughts



Changing the lives of our students, just be changing teaching strategies.

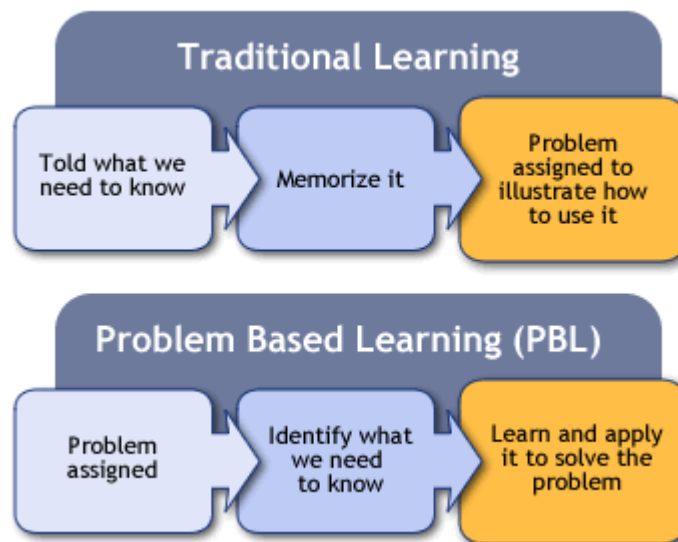
Problem Based Learning (PBL) not only promotes actively engaged students and involvement in their own learning, it has the ability to lead our students in a career direction based on their passions. Through PBL activities teachers help our students discover their passion, something that can occur at any grade level. And, for that reason alone, it is worth the time to explore.

A PBL activity has the potential to include everything we value in learning. Students have the opportunity of choice of problem to solve. Students must reflect on their own objectives and are given a voice in designing their own learning opportunities. The problems, as real world problems, require creative and critical thinking in an authentic setting. And, potentially, the classroom uncovers talents and interests that may end up directing a student's passion in life.

It's not always an easy activity, but then again the problems faced by our world are not easy to solve. And, all of us who work with children know that we should not shortchange their ideas or underestimate their ability to tackle complex issues and come up with ways to solve them. Even if students do not ultimately solve a problem, the thinking required is worth the effort; the actions pursued are unmatched opportunities for classroom engagement.

Content and learning experiences now serve the project instead of existing in complete isolation. The classroom becomes a workshop for problem solving and higher order thinking.

Why not turn our students loose and give them a chance?



How Making an Impact on the World Motivates Students Katrina Schwartz in MindShift

Many schools are moving to project-based learning as a way to help students make meaning about content in deeper and more lasting ways than a lecture can provide. While those goals are clear to educators, and inspiring examples of schools successfully implementing the pedagogy exist, it can still be a challenging shift for many teachers. It is difficult to design projects that both help students learn required content and that genuinely interest them. Some educators are finding that connecting projects to a global community is a powerful way to make a project feel meaningful to students.

"I'm very much interested in how we can encourage young people to be active, engaged members of community," said Mike Gwaltney during a presentation on project-based learning and global citizenship at the [International Society for Technology in Education \(ISTE\)](#). Gwaltney is now the principal of Rocky Hill School in Rhode Island and has been teaching for 25 years. His specialty is history, but he doesn't think that should mean teaching the Gadsden Purchase anymore.

“We ought to be teaching stuff that has real meaning for people,” Gwaltney said. He believes students are more keyed into global issues and current events than many adults know. The young people he has worked with care about what’s happening in the world around them. When teachers tap into that passion, students are capable of producing work that impacts the world beyond school. In 2014, Gwaltney was teaching at the Oregon Episcopal School in Portland when a shooting took place near the school. He knew that one way to handle the issue would have been to facilitate a discussion about the shooting with his class. But he wanted to localize the bigger issue of gun violence for his students.

“Project-based learning is about doing something; it’s about active learning,” Gwaltney said. “It’s about getting involved in the subject. It’s not learning about math or about government, but how can I be someone in those fields.” After the shooting it became clear his students didn’t just want to talk about the pros and cons of gun control — they wanted to do something to make their local community safer. So they wrote legislation and introduced it to the Portland City Council. When it failed, and various adults patted them on the back before sending them on their way, the students were indignant.

Instead of giving up the idea, they partnered with other interest groups to sponsor and testify in support of a bill in the state legislature that would require background checks on private gun sales and close a loophole in Oregon state law. The bill passed; the governor signed it into law, and those students learned an indelible lesson about how government works. Their work had an impact; and along the way they came to understand it takes persistence to see results. They practiced less tangible skills like effective communication and collaboration with outside groups. And, perhaps most importantly, they also began to empathize with responsible gun owners through conversations with citizens and lobbyists testifying on the other side of the issue.

“Wherever I go, I see the desire for opportunities to build citizenship,” said Suzie Boss, a journalist and project-based learning advocate who has worked with educators around the world on globally connected projects. “That’s one of the universals. How can we change the world together?” She sees many opportunities for this type of important work because there are so many thorny problems affecting every person on the globe.

“My bottom line when you think about designing PBL, with global competency as one of the goals you want to get to, there needs to be passion,” Boss said. “You need to activate that passion in them by opening their eyes to issues they may not be aware of, or by listening to them about what they care about.” She said good projects usually start with an entry event that helps activate that passion and curiosity in students. After that, the second most important element is that the problem be actionable.

“If we teach kids about the problems of the world without giving them a recipe for doing something, that’s just a recipe for depression,” Boss said. The problems need to be big enough to matter, but actionable enough that students feel they can make a difference. One of her favorite examples of this type of teaching has developed around the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. These are big, lofty goals, like eliminating poverty that will affect the future of the world. Crucially, they are works in progress — the global community has not yet been able to solve these problems, which means there’s an opportunity for students’ work to make a difference.

“These are [opportunities for] project-based learning for the world,” Boss said. She’s found that working with the Sustainable Development Goals has helped even the most content-first teachers she knows to embrace project-based learning. Boss worked with Jason Welker, an economics teacher who at the time worked for a rigorous private school. He didn’t want to do project-based learning because he didn’t think he could fit all the content he needed to cover into the short school year. Finally, he decided to give PBL a try in his environmental economics class.

“He challenged his students in an economics class to pick one of those [U.N. Sustainable Development] goals that they care about and propose an action project using economic theory,” Boss said. One group got interested in climate action, researching carbon offsets as an economic mechanism to help solve the problem of climate change. Their theory of action was so well researched that their school ended up investing in their proposal.

MONUMENTS PROJECT

Tom Neville had a hunch that taking his eighth-graders to the cemetery would spark some powerful history learning, but he had no idea that what started as an effort to offer his students at the American School of Paris (ASP) an authentic project-based learning experience on World War I would take off the way it did.

“The introduction to the project was folks from the American Battle Monuments Commission saying, ‘Look, we have all these folks buried here and we don’t know anything about them and we think you can help us with that,’ Neville said. Students broke into groups, each taking the names of several American soldiers who fought in Europe, died and were

buried in Suresnes American Cemetery. They began trying to figure out the back stories of the soldiers, intending to build an app for the cemetery so visitors could learn about who was buried there.

Neville was lucky to have the support of administrators at ASP who were looking to push the school's pedagogy toward these types of projects. Soon the **Monuments Project** was much more than history. Theater students were writing and directing plays based on the research; French students were helping translate documents students found in local archives; and students wrote about their research in English class.*

As the project was getting off the ground, Neville read an article about two teachers on Lopez Island whose students had developed a gamified history app about sites around Washington state. Neville recognized a kindred spirit and reached out to Anthony Rovente and Tim Fry to see if they'd like to partner on the Monuments Project. Soon, Neville's students in Paris were working with the Lopez Island students in the U.S. to find out what had happened to the 23 Washingtonians buried at Suresnes.

"There is an excitement in the sense of scale," Neville said. "Anytime we are engaged in something bigger than ourselves we feel that sense of camaraderie." The U.S. students were emailing and calling local archives in Washington state while students in Paris were plumbing the French archives. Both classes shared their research and contributed to the app. In some cases, the students' efforts prompted local archives to digitize their content for the first time. In others, family members of soldiers buried far away shared their personal memories, records and mementos with the students. And students collaborated with historians and archivists in many parts of the world to learn research tips and how to navigate archives.

"The level of energy and investment I saw was really powerful," Neville said. "You just want to bottle it." He was impressed that his students persisted in their search, even when they made no progress for several weeks. But, Neville's careful to point out that he had prepared his students for this type of uncertainty, a lesson he learned early in his efforts to do big real-world history projects.

"It's really more about developing a mindset and a culture within that learning space," Neville said. He always starts the year using Eleanor Duckworth's concept of Critical Exploration. The exercise forces them to accept uncertainty and to back up what they think they know with evidence, and gets them thinking like real historians. **"Without that mindset you'll have different reactions from kids who are hitting walls,"** Neville said. He uses Critical Exploration as a touchstone for students when they get frustrated, reminding them that valuable learning is happening even if they're stuck.

Despite the success of the Monuments Project, it was messy and logistically challenging. The nine-hour time difference between Paris and Lopez Island made global collaboration difficult. Partway through the project a teacher at Stuyvesant High School in New York City wanted to join, further complicating matters. But as interest about the program grew among educators in the U.S., Neville decided to try to scale the project. He's now working with an old co-worker, Patrick Cronin, to create a nonprofit that can support social studies teachers to do similar projects based on the soldiers in their local cemeteries.

"The goal of finding out how to scale this effectively is not just to expand the Monument Project, but to expand the pedagogy," Neville said. He knows not all teachers work in environments as supportive of global projects as APS — he's even worked in some — but he's convinced when teachers experience the level of engagement and quality of work he saw in his students, they'll be excited to jump on board. And, he can't think of a better way to instill the importance of history in students than by introducing them to the tools real historians rely on to discover untold stories that resonate beyond the classroom.

Student reflections on the process and the power of adding to the world's knowledge are a bit motivator for Neville. In a blog post for the Monuments Project a Stuyvesant student, Dawei Huang, writes: "Simply said, the experiences of individual soldiers are often overlooked by historians, and Stuyvesant students were now helping do the work. For myself, I feel like there is great significance and satisfaction lifting the lives of soldiers reserved for the footnotes of history to the forefront of our attention and appreciation."

LESS CONSUMING GLOBAL PROJECTS

Tammy Dunbar has been connecting her fifth-grade students at Lincoln School, a public K-8 in Manteca, California, with international classrooms for years now. It's become a standard part of her teaching. She got interested in collaborating across continents through her own global community of peers and brought that enthusiasm to her class.

For example, an educator friend in Belgium told her about his plan to do a big project on gender equality. Around that time, Dunbar was hearing a lot of anxiety from her students about President Trump's campaign promise to build a wall between Mexico and the U.S. Dunbar's students, about 70 percent of whom are Latino, were worried about what would happen to their families. The two teachers joined their themes in the [Human Differences project](#) where they explored the visible and invisible walls that humans put up. Eventually, classrooms all around the world joined the project, sharing the walls that characterize their countries and cultures.

In week one of the project, students explored the various kinds of walls they notice in their communities, both physical and invisible. They researched and discussed with their classes, but then made videos to share on the Human Differences site that other classes could watch. The second week focused on gender equality, a topic Dunbar's students didn't think was a problem at first. Then they watched the videos uploaded by partner classes in China and India.

"It kind of opened their eyes to what's going on in the world," Dunbar said. Those videos prompted students to think more critically about gender equity in their own homes and communities, leading to a good discussion. In the third week, classes discussed real walls. They studied the Berlin Wall and the Great Wall of China. Dunbar's fifth-graders talked about what makes a wall good or bad, and they talked about the wall President Trump wants to build, as well as what their class might do about it.

When they shared their reflections on physical walls with other classrooms around the world, they learned that the leaders of countries in Latin America live in houses walled off from the people. Dunbar's students were sympathetic to their faraway peers, and felt validated in their own concerns about a wall along the border.

In week four, classes explored the idea of bridges and how people can build bridges instead of walls. Dunbar's class Skyped with students in Canada and Nigeria to learn about their lives.

"The teachers really took the questions and ran with them because every country has their issue and things that are happening," Dunbar said. "This gives them a platform to talk about it with their kids." The project was flexible, but still provided contact with students in other parts of the world with different worldviews and realities. Along the way, Dunbar knows her students were honing skills like respectful listening, questioning, communication, presenting, research, writing and critical thinking.

"If we want kids to be 21st century learners, then they have to think globally; everything is connected," Dunbar said. "I like to think that by doing this we're building the bridges that make people more tolerant, more willing to accept more people."

This year, Dunbar is kicking off the school year by reading Lois Lowry's book "Number the Stars" with her class and her friend Emma Naas' class in Sweden. The two classes have different perspectives on the story based on their geography and history, but are [learning a lot from one another by reading together](#).

LEVEL UP VILLAGE

Many of the teachers doing the most elaborate globally connected projects are anomalies in their schools. They are individually invested in helping students develop global competencies and have taken on the extra work of connecting with international educators interested in Skyping or finding education-based programs that include a global dimension. Not all teachers have the inclination or time to do that legwork.

There are several organizations working to smooth the way for schools that value global projects. One such company, [Level Up Village](#), focuses on providing science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) content through an online platform that also connects U.S. classrooms to those abroad. The founder and CEO, Amy McCooe, realized that kids in Kenya were learning about electricity at the same time as kids in the U.S. She saw the curricular connection as an opportunity to create connections between U.S. students and international students.

Kids are partnered up and each week they upload videos talking about the issues in their own communities. They start off by sharing personal details, but eventually end up communicating about what they're learning and how it is connected to issues in their local communities. In the model, the U.S. schools pay \$55 per student for the service, and part of that fee goes to the partner school to pay for the technology and curriculum there.

The Level Up Village program intentionally includes introductory online courses for teachers to help them increase their own global competency before being asked to teach it to students. The course talks about equity and empathy, emphasizing that respect is conveyed differently in different cultures. They talk about how important it is for students to learn to say their partners' names correctly and how different body language cues might be misunderstood.

Carrie Brown teaches English and History to sixth-graders at Girls Academic Leadership Academy (GALA), an all-girls STEM school in Los Angeles Unified School District. When her principal said they would be using Level Up Village, she was initially skeptical. As a 27-year veteran teacher she doesn't like being told how to run her class, but she checked it out with an open mind and decided it was worth a try.

"I did not expect to love it as much as I did," Brown said. She doesn't feel particularly tech-savvy, but found the three hours of introductory work provided by the program sufficiently prepared her. She can't imagine doing all the work to find a partner class in Kenya, ensure the quality of the videos, enlist translation services and make sure the experience drives toward academic goals.

"I liked that [my students] were very independent," Brown said. "I loved the interactions. I liked the self-directed projects." She liked that the curriculum was flexible enough that she could spend a lot or a little time on it each week. Like many teachers, she's careful what she spends class time on, but found the conversations, revelations and enthusiasm of this international partnership to be well worth the time investment.

While many Level Up Village courses focus on STEM, they also have a course on leadership taught through Malala Yousafzai's autobiography "I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban." Reading the book and talking about it with girls in Kenya upended some of the preconceived notions students held — like the assumption that everyone gets to go to school for free.

One student's partner didn't upload a video by the deadline. When Brown inquired, she found out that the girl was no longer in school because her parents couldn't pay the school fees. That prompted an important discussion in Brown's class. And students took the experience home to their families as well. Brown says it's the first time in her career that she got emails from parents about the engaging, lively discussions they were having over dinner about school.

While teachers continue to discern the most impactful ways to use technology in classrooms, one fact is inarguable: Technology makes the world smaller. Teachers can find inspiration in the work of colleagues across the world and students can learn together. That powerful capacity can bring new dimensions to classroom learning when leveraged by a skillful teacher.

Are your students excited to come to class every day?



Paul K. Smith



26 Miles of Hope