

Program gives students global perspective

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SPENCER — Beginning next fall, sophomores at David Prouty High School will take a global approach to education when they partner with students overseas.

The project is being coordinated by Larisa Schelkin, the president and founder of Global STEM Education Center, Inc. An engineer with a specialty in artificial intelligence, Schelkin has been a major driver of STEM partnerships between Massachusetts schools and their international counterparts.

SEBRSD officials are well aware that the majority of new jobs over the next decade will be STEM-related, and they are eager to provide their students with this unique opportunity. DPHS sophomores will collaborate with students overseas via videochat — a transcendent approach to education that is quickly gaining popularity across the state.

At the heart of the global collaboration model is the desire to have students solve a single problem. Students from both schools work together to research the given problem, brainstorm ideas, troubleshoot, and ultimately prepare a solution. SEBRSD Superintendent Tracy Crowe recently watched the program in action at Blackstone Valley Regional Technical High School, and she has been impressed with the results.

"It was really interesting to watch the kids take control of their own learning," Crowe said



Kevin Flanders photo

Larisa Schelkin, the president and founder of Global STEM Education Center, Inc., is working with SEBRSD officials to provide DPHS sophomores with a fascinating new program.

of the BVT electrical students, who are collaborating with Russian students who live on the Arctic Circle.

Today's technology allows students at opposite ends of the planet to engage. For DPHS teachers Sean Bastien and Brian Hamilton, the experience will provide their students with a brand new educational dynamic.

"In this model, there is a single problem for the students to solve, as opposed to information being conveyed from the top down," Crowe added. "Teachers become facilitators of learning rather

than directors of learning."

Added Schelkin, "The role of the teacher is extremely important in this partnership. It gives teachers and students more flexibility and encouragement for innovative thinking."

Schelkin has been thrilled to see students working together to find solutions. Countless medical, technological, and environmental problems affect nations throughout the world, and Schelkin hopes to see a stronger global partnership emerge.

"You don't even have to leave your classroom or office to work globally. A lot of these problems are so large that we can't solve them separately — it requires a collaborative effort," Schelkin said in an interview.

The language barrier between countries hasn't restricted collaboration, Schelkin discovered, as several students overseas are fluent in English and other languages. In fact, while many Americans only speak one language, it isn't uncommon to find European and Asian students speaking three to four languages.

The program also features an important cultural component, providing students with an opportunity to learn about their counterparts overseas. Students are often fascinated by their many commonalities, Schelkin said, and she hopes to eventually see the development of a workforce that thinks on a global level.

Looking ahead, Crowe and Schelkin plan to arrange a meeting between BVTHS and DPHS students to discuss the program and what to expect. Schelkin has been proud to see students in her model take a heightened responsibility for learning and contributing to the group. The program also provides important lessons in communication, teamwork, and leadership.

"I can't wait to start working with them," Schelkin said of next year's DPHS sophomores.

Schelkin has spent the last 10 years fostering partnerships between U.S. schools and those overseas. To learn more about her global STEM education model, visit www.globalSTEM-center.org.