

*Marjorie Tiven Remarks February 26, 2015, Meeting of Principals in Madrid*

Thank you Maria Mercedes Marin, Isabel Luengos Garcia, the Madrid Regional Ministry of Education Youth and Sport, and Deputy Director Sr. D.Pablo Hispan Iglesias de Ussel for convening this meeting. We are very appreciative. Thank you all for coming this morning. I always enjoy talking about global awareness education and Global Scholars. But I'm especially excited to do it in Madrid because six Madrid schools participate. With brio!

We developed Global Scholars to address the need for international learning in our increasingly polarized yet interdependent globe. Through an electronic classroom, students are connected in cities as far-flung as Accra, Buenos Aires, Istanbul, London, Jakarta, Manila, Melbourne, Moscow, Prague, Sao Paulo, St. Petersburg and Tblisi. Madrid has multiple sites. So do Medellin, New York, Taipei, Tel Aviv, Warsaw and Mumbai. Our newest partners are in Boston/Medford, Cape Town, and two cities in Kazakhstan.

One hundred and twenty-three classes from 32 cities in 19 countries on six continents are enrolled in Global Scholars. This is a truly international, peer-to-peer, global awareness initiative. The students are 10 to 13 years old, the optimum age for engagement. And the program is in English, an additional incentive for international students developing English language skills.

Global Scholars offers students and their teachers the opportunity to work directly with their peers, throughout the year, using the same project-based curriculum about an important global topic.

Global Scholars is operated by Global Cities, Inc. a program of Bloomberg Philanthropies. It was based on work from the administration of Mayor Michael Bloomberg in which I served as Commissioner of the Mayor's Office for International Affairs and developed international exchanges for 10 to 13 year old students on a digital platform.

Few children have the opportunity for international learning experiences, and this one targets public schools and after-school programs. There are no fees to the schools.

Each class is assigned to a group of about eight cities, selected from diverse geographic areas. We think that number works. About eight is small enough number for students to learn something about each other's cities, but large enough to assure there are always sufficient students actively posting in the classroom.

Using the shared curriculum— under the guidance of their teachers— they work on the same assignments at approximately the same time as their peers around the world. It is not in real time, although some classes do schedule live video chats so they have a “live” experience.

We provide the curriculum, access to the e-classroom and the professional development. The schools are responsible for providing the computers and Internet connection, a commitment of two hours per week minimum for Global Scholars work, and participation in professional development.

The big idea is that the shared curriculum makes it possible to have a conversation about an important topic and learn from one another. The topic gives kids something serious to talk about. So the topic is very carefully selected. It must be one that resonates with students who live in big cities; it must have

educational value; be largely non-controversial; stimulate interesting conversation; and keep teachers engaged.

This year classes have been communicating about water—specifically water scarcity, and water conservation. Last year’s topic was nutrition and food security. Next year it will be sustainable cities—how cities prepare for population growth and climate change.

Regardless of the topic, the curriculum is designed to emphasize specific technology skills, English literacy, digital communication, and how to consider the multiple perspectives, whereby students see things sometimes in the same way and sometimes differently.

The overall goal is to increase understanding across cultures by providing an actual experience with students their own age from other countries. Educators everywhere are trying to align what students learn in school with the skills they will need in the workplace. In our globalized world, we know today’s students will be communicating with people in many countries-- even if they never physically leave their community. They need to know how to work successfully with people from everywhere. That includes knowledge of different worldviews, the ability to read situations, and to communicate effectively with people from other cultures.

What does it mean to be a global citizen? Our initiative is informed by the work of The Asia Society and the Council of Chief State School Officers. They concluded that globally competent students need four primary capacities: to investigate the world; to recognize perspectives; to communicate ideas; and to take action. Global Scholars was conceptualized to focus exactly on these competencies. The curriculum is designed to be project-based, and research shows the effectiveness of project-based learning.

Global Scholars is unique among international digital exchanges in two ways. It provides direct contact with peers in other countries for a sustained period of time, the school year; and it focuses on the age group of 10-13 year olds.

Ten to 13 is an age range when the influence of peers is very strong, and the notion of direct contact with kids your age in other countries (even supervised by their teachers) is attractive. The community action project assignment at the end of the year has also proved to be exciting; it addresses their need to do something important.

Students are not the only beneficiaries. Global Scholars is an international learning opportunity for the teachers as well. They guide students through the curriculum with interesting assignments and share their classes’ work with others in the e-classroom. They meet one another live in the e-classroom teachers’ lounge and in professional development sessions. It’s always exhilarating to see these sessions— 8 or 10 teachers, each from a different city round the world, up there on the computer screen, connected by WebEx, discussing use of the curriculum content, pedagogy, operation of the digital classroom, and questions about particular technologies. The sessions are intense—full of enthusiasm and excitement. It’s really remarkable. And these conversations provide us with real-time feedback.

Here is what a teacher recently wrote to our education program managers. *“It was a pleasure for me to attend the webex meeting the day before yesterday. I appreciate a lot what you both are doing to guide us on the wonderful projects that Global Cities sponsors. I really think that you are very kind and lovely. And I can see that you are really interested on creating awareness about the environment as a global issue. At the beginning, I thought that the program would be a way to*

*practice English, but not only me, but also my students have learned many things, that I think, wouldn't be possible if we weren't enrolled in the program. My students are also learning to think critically, to Foster their love for their culture, their city and to improve their life styles. The curriculum and the sources you have for us are excellent, so I want to congratulate you for that."*

This teacher found that communicating with peers elsewhere resulted in an increased sensitivity to their own identity. This is remarkable.

From more than a decade of experience developing this programming, I knew anecdotally that it was popular with teachers and students. Now we also engage in formal evaluation. We are trying to answer some important questions. Can you teach 10 to 13 year old kids global awareness? What do global awareness and global citizenship actually mean? How does that help prepare students to be part of a global workforce?

I'm so pleased to be in this room with you because there is nothing like meeting in person. But we know this is a luxury, and one which most students won't have. Only a tiny percentage of American students study abroad, as little as 1.5 per cent (source: The Institute of International Education). Can virtual exchanges, without students actually traveling, develop global awareness? We believe it can and we want to hear what you think. Thank you.