2022 NSPRA National School Communication Awards
Publications and Digital Media Excellence Awards
Category — Excellence in Writing

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The article titled “Schools exchange cultures across DoDEA with ‘culture boxes’” was shared on DoDEA Connects — the Department of Defense Education Activity’s internal news portal.
A recent cross-cultural project started by DoDEA teachers is delivering culture to students — in a box.

Students at various DoDEA schools research their host nation country, collecting items reflective of that country. Then, with assistance from their teachers, they mail those items in a box to other DoDEA students in other countries. In exchange, they receive culture boxes helping them learn about other cultures while also connecting them with students across the DoDEA school system.

The idea started at a third grade team collaboration meeting at Netzaberg Elementary School in Germany when Margaret Ballinger, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher, discussed lessons to address an upcoming standard:
3.5. Communities share cultural similarities and differences across the world.  
3.5b. Communities around the world can be diverse in terms of their members, languages spoken, customs and traditions, and religious beliefs and practices. People in world communities celebrate various holidays and festivals.

► Students will gather, interpret, and use evidence to identify the characteristics of DoDEA-connected world communities.

“DoDEA’s third grade standards encourage students to learn about what makes up culture. So together, the team came up with the culture boxes project that engaged students in cultures from across the globe,” said Ballinger. “The teachers at Netzaberg Elementary were inventive and open to the idea making it a first time for such a project.”

Students created boxes with information that they researched from their host country that included famous landmarks, language, food, and holidays. Some families also got involved and contributed items.

This project initially connected five third grade classes from Netzaberg Elementary with exchange classes from other countries. Now, thanks to the assistance from the overseas District Offices and collaboration with DoDEA ESOL teachers worldwide (initiated by Ballinger), students from England, Germany, Japan, and Turkey are sharing in these experiences.

“We are very excited about how receiving and delivering ‘culture boxes’ is encouraging students to give and receive culture — all this while meeting the third-grade standards,” said Ballinger. “I also love the opportunity to collaborate and partner with other ESOL teachers within DoDEA.”

If your school or class is interested in participating in a culture box exchange, contact Margaret Ballinger for ideas on how to get started.