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Fourth-grade students in Heather Bloodworth's class are serving as study buddies for students learning English at Grace English School in Chimaltenango, Guatemala. Here, Bloodworth facilitates the first online session between her class and someone studying English at the Guatemalan school.

CCES shares education with Guatemalan peers

By ALLISON EVANS
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Two weeks ago, students in Heather Bloodworth's fourth-grade class would have had a hard time pronouncing Chimaltenango, Guatemala, or finding it on a world map. Today, the Crittenden County students are making friends there and fulfilling a state curriculum requirement.

Bloodworth's students are serving as Study Buddies through a pilot program linking local children via FaceTime with Guatemalan students learning English as a second language at Grace English School in Chimaltenango.

It's a win-win for students in both countries. For the Guatemalan students, it provides time to practice conversational English they are learning in their Central American school. For the American students, it fulfills a key component to the state's Global Competency and World Language curriculum by providing opportunities to learn Spanish from native speakers.

Through the Study Buddies pilot program, Bloodworth sets aside 30 minutes a week for her students to connect face-to-face via the Internet with students at Grace English School, which was established by Bill Minihan and his wife Sara, who manage the Badgett Playhouse in Grand Rivers.

Bill and retired Lyon County teacher Denise Johnson shared information about the needs of Guatemalan students and the importance of them learning English during a visit to Bloodworth's class last week. By the end of their visit, Bloodworth's fourth-graders had their first Study Buddy experience with students in Chimaltenango.

Grace English School is a private school with 43 students who attend after their normal school day with the sole intent of improving their knowledge of the English language. Their English instruction is provided by a native Guatemalan who studied in the United States and returned home.

Learning Spanish and Central American culture has been part of CCES' recently-implemented World Language and Global Competency requirement. This is the first year teachers are required to incorporate the mandate into their curriculum. Next year, World Language and Global Competency will be part of the school's accountability testing, just like practical living, arts and humanities and writing is today.

"Our primary language focus is Spanish due to the high school requirements our students have and the area's increasing Hispanic population," Bloodworth explained. "With my Spanish language background and the proficiency expectations of World Language program review, we are engaging all students at CCES in Spanish language lessons weekly."

"My students have really taken interest in learning the language, therefore, when the opportunity for the Study Buddies program came up, I knew it would be

incomparable."

Bloodworth said learning English makes Guatemalan teens more marketable, more employable in Latin American resorts or places like Antigua in the Caribbean. Knowing English can help them avoid the cycle of poverty and other serious social ills, the educators say.



Minihan

Bill Minihan explains that the road to Bloodworth's classroom involved a series of twists and turns. In fact, a day trip he and his wife took to Guatemala while on a cruise in 2009 began paving the road for the partnership between the local elementary school and Grace English School.

"We went into Guatemala and couldn't believe what we were seeing; it overwhelmed me emotionally," said Minihan, who has used Badgett Playhouse as a platform to promote Guatemalan missions, which have included construction projects in several communities — all of which ultimately focused on education.

To date, the Minihans, who recently established ProjectGuat, have raised \$150,000 to support projects in Guatemala.

The organization is still in its infancy, but just since CCES began the Study Buddy program, new opportunities are developing for ProjectGuat. His goal is for the Grace English School to become a full-time private school in 2017 with a Christian-based curriculum focused on English. Today, the project relies entirely on private U.S. donations; however, Minihan hopes it will become self-sustaining based on tuition from students.

Denise Johnson, who accompanied Minihan on a recent trip to Guatemala, connected with Bloodworth's students last week by showing them a slide show of her mission team's trip to help build a two-room school in Chutinamit in central Guatemala.

The students hung onto Johnson's every word as she described a two-room school in Chutinamit where older students assist younger ones and half-day attendance allows students to go home and work.

They stared in awe as they heard about the town "president," or mayor, having keys to all the village's houses and how students keep toothbrushes and their own face towels on hooks at their school so they can practice good hygiene.

The project Johnson participated in included building 22 one-room houses out of concrete blocks for families who had lived three years in government-issued plastic tents on a soccer field after a hurricane devastated their village.

"The project was coordinated through a company from Guatemala known as ConstruCasa," said Minihan, who made several trips to assist with the construction.

Through ConstruCasa and ProjectGuat, Bloodworth's students are expanding their knowledge of the Guatemalan culture while also doing their part to help expand a small group of Guatemalan children's knowledge of the English language.

More information about the initiatives with which Minihan is involved can be found at BadgettPlayhouse.com, [Facebook.com/GraceEnglishSchoolGuatemala](https://www.facebook.com/GraceEnglishSchoolGuatemala) and ConstruCasa.com.