

Comal Independent School District

NEWS RELEASE

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CHS students videoconference with Ghana, Africa

In today's society, most American students can learn just about anything they want to know about African countries by clicking on Google.

On Wikipedia, for example, you can discover the western coast country Ghana is one of the world's top gold producers, has a population of 23.9 million, a labor force of 11.5 million, and that more than 250 languages and dialects are spoken in a land that declared independence from the United Kingdom in 1957.

Students in Ana Ruiz's Spanish II class at Canyon High had a much more unique learning experience about the culture in Ghana.

Ruiz's class, along with a classroom full of students in South Dakota, Pennsylvania, and Louisiana, were able to link up to high school students in Ghana via videoconference for a question and answer session on Sept. 23.

"This gives our students a different learning perspective," said Sandra Shelton, Comal ISD Director for Accountability and Instructional Services. "It's not a letter or e-mail from a pen pal, or reading from a book or computer screen. This is interacting with students halfway around the world. Our students are having the kind of individual reaction and the kinds of feelings you just don't get to express every day in the classroom."

Questions from students in the U.S. ranged from asking about President Obama's visit to Ghana in July to what sports they play.

High school students in Ghana play many of the same sports their U.S. contemporaries do including soccer, tennis and volleyball, and they compete against teams from other regions.

Students in the U.S. also heard about Ghana's 50 percent rise in inflation over the past few years.

"The global economy has hit everyone hard, but especially in Africa," one Ghana student said. "The majority of the families in Ghana spend more than 80

percent of their income on food. Sometimes students will only have one plantain (a small fruit resembling a banana) for lunch, and that can be pretty tough.”

A Ghana student in graduate school explained while her country is improving in some aspects, there are still many in need.

“A lot of people think Africans can’t help or feed themselves, and we don’t think this is a fair stereotype,” she said. “But in many areas, the rich are getting richer and the poor are staying poor. We’re working hard to bridge that gap, but it’s a slow process. On the positive side, we have more young people than ever graduating from universities, so we feel the future will be bright in Ghana.”

Canyon High sophomore Shelby Bergren, who asked a question about teen pregnancy in Ghana and answered one about the war in Iraq, said she looks at this as an invaluable experience.

“When you get to speak with people from other cultures, you learn not only about them but about yourself,” Bergren said. “I feel so lucky we were able to do something like this.”

The videoconference, which lasted just over an hour, ended when students from Higgins High in Metairie, La. were asked to sing the National Anthem, and students from Ghana in turn sang their national song.

Videoconference technology is now available in every Comal ISD school.

“This is something that extends outside a classroom’s four walls,” said Jennifer Wivagg, Comal ISD Instructional Media Specialist. “With this technology, we can take our students anywhere in the world.”

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IN PHTOS:

Canyon High sophomore Shelby Bergren answers a question posed by a high school student in Ghana during a videoconference on Sept. 23. Students from four high schools around the U.S. participated in this unique Q&A event.

Students from Ghana sing their national song via videoconference to students from four high schools across the United States. Students from Canyon High (pictured upper right-hand corner as they look on) said they felt lucky to be a part of this exceptional learning experience.