

Winchester students ask the world: 'Show me your school'

By Taryn Plumb | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JANUARY 30, 2014



WENDY MAEDA/GLOBE STAFF

Olivia Valcourt photographs (from left) Lila Griffin, Mya Salyards, Mia Legere, and Isabella Greene.

Trying to stay whisper-quiet, the two kindergartners sat on the floor of their school library, flipping through hardcover picture books of trucks and firefighters that filled their laps.

A few feet away, fifth-grader Patrick Fortin framed them in the viewfinder of a point-and-click camera, a neatly stacked bookshelf serving as a backdrop.

“Say cheese!” he prompted.

“Cheese!”

It was a simple, everyday moment in their everyday school lives. Which was exactly what they set out to capture.

Students at [Ambrose Elementary School](#) are participants in a global project facilitated by the Winchester-based nonprofit, [Live Learn Act](#). “Show me your school” encourages students around the world to document their day-to-day activities – from lunch to free time to transportation – and share it with other children through the universal language of photography.

“It’s good to know what kids in other countries are doing,” Fortin said on a recent morning as he snapped photos of Jeremiah McCarthy and P.J. Maher in Ambrose’s library. “It’s our only way to stay in touch.”

Live Learn Act launched the project earlier this month with a goal to connect children in as many as 11 countries through their commonality of school. Students are given more than a dozen questions – including “What tools do you use to learn?” “What does your classroom look like?” “What does your meal/snack look like?” – that they represent through digital images.



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Sofia Arnet photographed Olivia Wiley and Anika Ruedlinger at the Ambrose School.

“It allows them to interpret their learning environment,” said Live Learn Act cofounder and president Stephanie Smith. “We expect numerous interpretations of the questions.”

The nonprofit was founded in 2011 as a means to educate children about the world, link them on a global scale with their peers, and ultimately encourage the local participants to become philanthropic and “international citizens,” Smith explained. As part of this mission, Live Learn Act has helped to establish two learning centers in rural India for girls age 5 to 12. The children in Winchester are able to interact – using their hands and feet – with the world through the use of large [National Geographic Giant Traveling Maps](#) of Asia and Europe.

Most notably, the nonprofit embarked on The Happiness Project, through which more than 1,900 children in 11 countries answered the question, “What makes you happy?” with their own drawings. That effort is chronicled in the book [“Everywhere Happiness: A Global](#)

Lesson."

"The goal is to excite them about learning about other cultures and kids their own age across the world," said Smith.

It has ignited that passion, with students in Winchester selling flowers, setting up lemonade stands, and offering donations in lieu of birthday gifts to help with their Indian sister schools.

"Show me your school" is used as a "mechanism to teach about other cultures," she added, with the camera being their ultimate "ticket around the globe."

The project is in the early stages, with partnerships still being formed, according to executive director Christine Kowalczyk; the wish list of participating countries includes India, China, Italy, Ghana, Colombia, Mexico, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Brazil, and Canada. Eventually, the photos will be displayed in local and online exhibits, and, ideally, in a book.

"It's tangible, hands-on — put yourself in their shoes, have them in your shoes," said Kowalczyk.

On a recent morning, 120 Ambrose students — fifth-graders paired with kindergartners and parent volunteers — fanned out in a cyclone of movement, toting cameras and question sheets.

Some took pictures of multiple angles of the front door to answer, "Where do you enter your school?" while others put on their boots, coats, and book bags and hurried outside to illustrate "What do you look like when you come to school?"

To answer a question about the sports they play, fifth-grader Caroline McCarthy kicked a tiny soccer ball to kindergartner Lily O'Hagan, whose silver-sparkly shoes darted back and forth.

"I want to see how similar we really are," McCarthy said as the group made its way back to class.

"Or the differences," added her classmate, Amanda O'Brien.

Meanwhile, in another part of the school, a different group gathered containers of paint, glue, pencils, and crayons to show how they create art, and what materials they use.



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Brady (left) and Ryan Martin played soccer.

“I hope to see some of the same stuff that we do — maybe a connection,” said fifth-grader Tia Fiorentino. “We all like art, so hopefully we have some of the same interests.”

As she escorted different groups in their errands, parent volunteer Azurae Hood said, “It’s really cool, especially because sometimes children don’t have the perspective of the bigger picture. They see what they see every day, and that’s it. This allows them to broaden their perspective.

“And it’s fun.”

Taryn Plumb can be reached at tarynplumb1@gmail.com.

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