

“Bonjour, Mes Amis!”

Middle Schoolers Connect with Classmates in Belgium

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“Quel temps fait-il?” “Il pleut! Il neige!”

“Avez-vous mangé du chocolat?” “Ah, oui! C’est magnifique!”

The students’ questions and answers came fast and furious in Robin McMahon’s French class. But this wasn’t an ordinary class day. Some of her students were in a room adjoining Smith Middle School and twenty-nine were in Brussels.

Their lively conversation occurred in a videoconference at the Carolina Center for Educational Excellence.

Amid the exuberance, McMahon’s students were focused on directed discussion of the European Union, which they had been studying all year. The students in Belgium described meetings with EU officials and a special visit to the EU Parliament, the first by American citizens. They were excited to share observations with their classmates about how the EU has made Europe a more unified region. Students can travel and study in schools abroad very easily, they pointed out. And borders seem almost nonexistent. “We went from France to Belgium and we didn’t have to show our passports!”

The student visit to Belgium was funded in part by a grant from the European Commission supporting education about the European Union for American citizens. McMahon learned of the grant when she took part in a curriculum workshop offered by World View and the European Union Center of Excellence at UNC at Chapel Hill. Since McMahon won the grant last year, she has introduced formal and informal study of the EU in her school and the community.

The videoconference was a high point of a long and eventful school year for the whole class. Thanks to Robin McMahon and to Björn Hennings, director of the Carolina Center for Educational Excellence, for their parts in creating true global connections for North Carolina students.



Smith seventh-grader Stefan Garval asks a question of classmates in Belgium (visible on screen behind him).

Photo courtesy of the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill