

**PRESS RELEASE 0607-15**  
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**CONTACT NANCY HUBBELL, ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT,**  
**INSTRUCTIONAL SERVICES**  
**(949) 497-7700 Ext. 200**

## **Thurston Middle School Spanish e-mail Exchange**

Prominently displayed on Dave Dixon's classroom wall is an Argentinean student drawing depicting the flag of Argentina side by side with the flag of the USA. Extending from the poles of the flags are clasped hands captioned with the word *Amigos*.

The illustration was one of many such gifts, cards, and letters that arrived from the 5th grade students at *Escuela Parroquial San Pablo Apostol*, the Parochial School of Saint Paul the Apostle, at Cordoba as a part of the e-mail exchange program with Mr. Dixon and the seventy students enrolled in his Spanish 1B classes.

Mr. Dixon began the extensive preparation last year with LBUSD Director of Technology Victor Guthrie. After considering several different Spanish-speaking schools, he chose the school in Argentina because their administrator, Mr. Guillermo Buitrago, matched Dixon's energetic enthusiasm for the unique educational experience.

In an October package sent by "snail mail" to the Argentinean students, Mr. Dixon assisted his class to prepare a short bio about themselves including their e-mail address, activities the TMS students enjoy, an American flag, Halloween information, and a sample of their favorite candy.

The return response was overwhelming! The Argentinean student artwork, letters, and photos dramatically narrowed the geographical and cultural gap between the two schools. The opportunity to become positive US ambassadors is an experience that attracted Spanish 1B students. Willy Robinson learned the grammatical differences between the two languages and how the students relate to our culture. Alex LeBon enjoyed learning what kinds of activities and sports the students enjoy. Bianca Sganga appreciated the exchange program, which has an added significance given the close border between California and Spanish-speaking Mexico.

Dr. Joanne Culverhouse, TMS Principal, echoes the educational benefits, "Mr. Dixon's e-mail exchange program has truly enriched the lives of the students. I have had the wonderful opportunity to read the e-mails and what a wonderful way to bridge the two cultures. The students are highly engaged and the written conversations are meaningful and abundant with fact and personal stories. Our students are fortunate to have a teacher like Mr. Dixon who is willing to think outside of the box to provide the enhancement to the curriculum."

With the aid of LBUSD's technology updates, Mr. Dixon's students are hoping to add a video conference to their e-mail exchange program this spring when the Argentinean students return from their summer break.

Victor Guthrie explains, "Videoconferencing is an exciting interactive communication tool. The visual interaction among participants helps to improve communication skills, increases the depth of learning, and creates a connection beyond the four walls of the classroom. In addition, the video conference will allow our students to build relationships in a way that telephone, e-mail, and other online chat systems cannot.

Through the School Board's approval of the high-speed networks capable of carrying large amounts of voice, video, and data, earlier this school year, we have been working to revamp the technological infrastructure to accommodate educational opportunities such as these. It is exciting to see the benefits of this work realized so soon."