

KELLER CITIZEN AUGUST 2, 2016 3:10 PM

## Westlake Academy hosts symposium for educators from around the world



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BY ADRIAN MCCANDLESS  
*Special to Star-Telegram*

WESTLAKE — Educators from around the globe gathered at Westlake Academy last week for the Second Annual International Mindedness Educator Symposium.

The event, held July 28-30, involved participants from Argentina, Canada, China, Costa Rica, Oman, Mexico, and U.S. attendees from Washington D.C., North Carolina and Texas including graduate students from Texas Tech.

Participation more than tripled from last year, said Mechelle Bryson, Westlake Academy executive principal and director of education.

“Our goal was to get over 50 participants and we surpassed that,” she said adding that the numbers grew from 23 to 63 participants.

The goal of the symposium is to meet other educators dedicated to collaborating and planning activities, such as Skyping with other students around the globe, to give students genuine international learning experiences.

“We are an international school and preparatory,” Bryson said. “We already promote international studies. What was missing was global collaboration.”

To fill that void, the idea to host a symposium was born.

“I had the thought ‘I need to bring the international educators to us’ and help our teachers make those connections,” Bryson said.

The experience helps get kids out of their “bubble” and broaden their thinking, said Tonja Taylor, a fourth-grade teacher at Westlake Academy.

“It makes them globally aware,” she said. “They have empathy for others now, but they got to see that they are also the same.”

The event included keynote speakers Linda A. Cook, the K-12 director of science for the Coppell Independent School District; Bhavani Parpia, founder and president of ConnecTeach, an international nonprofit that is committed to breaking the cycle of poverty; and Mona Nashman-Smith, who has held senior educational leadership positions in schools in North America, Europe and the Middle East.

Last year’s event, which included educators from Costa Rica, Mexico, and Argentina, as well as educators from surrounding areas in Texas, spurred collaborations such as “global handshakes” via Skype sessions allowing students to connect and interact with other children from different countries.

Last year’s event also started the momentum for the LIMBS International campaign, in which students raised more than \$5,000 to buy prosthetics for amputees.

Joy Martin, fourth-grade teacher at Westlake Academy, said that effort amazed her.

“I loved that they came together for a common cause,” she said. “They were driven.”



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