

# Thinking Globally: Alton High students part of a pilot program for global awareness

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**GODFREY** - Eight students in **Todd Fortschneider's** Honors U.S. History class volunteered their time to research international perspectives without the promise of credit.

The students were part of the Illinois Global Scholar pilot program. The pilot encourages students to embark on globally-focused course work to better understand the financial, social and political aspects of other nations and cultures. Fortschneider said 40 percent of the Illinois workforce exports products to global markets, so future workers in the state would require a knowledge of other cultures.

"I like it," Fortschneider said. "Kids have to come up with their own theses and ways to solve problems."

Fortschneider's volunteer students worked to solve the problem of voter turnout in the United States, especially among young voters. In order to get a more global understanding, each of the eight volunteers interviewed someone from a different country regarding how voting works in their nations. Representatives from Spain, Great Britain and Germany spoke with Alton High School students regarding their nation's voting patterns.

Each student offered a presentation regarding what they learned from their global partners in the school library in front of community members. During the presentation, each student offered possible solutions to the lack of interest in voting in America. The general consensus in each presentation was more awareness and education was required.

"Students in Spain are taught voting is important," **Illinois Global Scholar student Elizabeth Smith** said. "I would support national voter registration drives to encourage more voting among young people."

To remedy the lack of voting among their peers, Illinois Global Scholar students made public service announcements, which aired throughout the school, championing a voter registration vibe held in the school cafeteria. During that drive, 62 students were registered to vote.

Other policy changes offered by students included: lowering the voting age to 16, electronic voting and changing the day of Election Day to a weekend. The hurdles required to implement those measures, however, were too much, the students said. Changing election laws often requires a constitutional amendment.

Following the presentation, those in attendance were able to ask the students questions regarding what they researched. **Godfrey Mayor Mike McCormick** asked the students what could be done to better turnout in local elections. He said three trustees were elected from a voting body of 900 people, which he said was terrible in a village of more than 18,000.

"In my mind, that's pretty sad," he said. "That's really sad. People have to care."



Illinois Global Scholar student **Gage Steiner** took McCormick's question and admitted he did not know how trustees functioned in local government. He said he was unaware of how local government functioned on several levels and said the school system and culture did not put as high of a value on democracy as Germans, Spanish and British do.

A bill in the Illinois General Assembly would expand the Illinois Global Scholar program to all other state schools without costing taxpayers, Fortschneider said. House Bill 4983/Senate Bill 2469 is currently in the process of being passed in the Illinois General Assembly.