



**highschoolNGOconnect.org™**

*...where high school students meet global change makers  
in nongovernmental humanitarian relief organizations (NGOs)*

## **World Association of Non-Governmental Organizations Hosts *highschoolNGOconnect* Pre-launch Orientation**

*United Nations Plaza offices furnish historic backdrop for pilot project that transports  
high school classrooms to the front lines of humanitarian relief*

December 21 — With pilot project classes set to begin on January 17, **highschoolNGOconnect.org** conducted a pre-launch review of curriculum, mission and core values. The agenda featured a Skype interview with the director of an NGO in Ecuador, a dry run for long distance interactions between students and NGO professionals.

All systems are go, said **highschoolNGOconnect.org** executive director Steven Mintz. “We have able students, a skills-oriented curriculum, robust school board support, NGO leaders eager to meet our students and a teacher who is committed to global-minded academic enrichment.”

To open the session, Mr. Taj Hamad, secretary general of the World Association of NGOs (WANGO), framed priorities in the NGO sector, top among them engaging a new generation in vital humanitarian initiatives.

Ms. Kathy Esquiche, department chair and cultural liaison director at International High School in Paterson, will teach the pilot program. She reported that students vied for six places awarded to juniors with outstanding grade point averages. “They can talk about this program during college interviews,” Ms. Esquiche said.

Via Skype, project director Clay Plager-Unger represented Eco Ecuador, an NGO arm of Planet Drum Foundation, a San Francisco-based nonprofit started in 1973 by Judy Goldhaft and the late ecological visionary Peter Berg. To engage local and visiting teenagers, said Mr. Plager-Unger, Eco Ecuador connects humanitarian needs to environmental goals under the banner of bioregionalism.

Ms. Sandra Sirota shared updates on the rigorous curriculum she developed for **highschoolNGOconnect.org**. A doctoral candidate at Columbia University Teachers College in the International and Comparative Education Program, Ms Sirota has conducted research, created curricula, and advised on NGO program development in

the fields of human rights, social justice, education, and social services. From 2007 to 2015, Ms Sirota served on the steering committee of Human Rights Educators USA from 2012 to 2014. Fine tuning the curriculum centered on integrating live interviews, informational videos and recorded personal responses to students' questions where time zones make live interactions impractical.

Ursula Wolz, Ph.D., the CEO of RiverSound Solutions, described ways for students to tap into computer learning networks arising from their online research into NGOs. Market researcher Katie Johnston outlined regional growth prospects in New Jersey and surrounding Pennsylvania and New York counties. Ms. Johnston identified 68 schools that meet the threshold for **highschoolNGOconnect.org**: more than half of students eligible for free or subsidized lunches.

Representing **highschoolNGOconnect.org**, Steven Mintz and Board Member Lou Dodge, a high school guidance counselor until his recent retirement, underscored the pressing need for skills development in concert with encouraging global citizenship.

**Background:** Launched in 2016, **highschoolNGOconnect.org**, offers nonprofit, global-minded academic enrichment to urban, suburban and rural high schools where more than half of the students are eligible for free or subsidized meals. After-school classes adhere to a rigorous curriculum taught by local teachers with special preparation from **highschoolNGOconnect.org**. The core skills-building mission 1) connects students via Skype to inspirational change-makers in worldwide non-governmental humanitarian relief organizations (NGOs), 2) equips compassionate students to champion humanitarian goals, and 3) spurs bold nonprofit leadership that eases local social problems. The program is poised to expand in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware and New York State high schools. **HighschoolNGOconnect.org** is offered by the High School Network for Global Philanthropy, Inc., in Montclair, New Jersey

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