



Students from Görres Gymnasium in Germany attend class earlier this month at Chippewa Valley High School as part of the German American Partnership Program.

Photo by Alex Szwarc

German students engage in American culture, education

By: [Alex Szwarc](#) | C&G Newspapers | Published October 28, 2019



Görres Gymnasium teachers Daniela Barchet, left, and Michael Fleckenstein, right, pose with Chippewa Valley German language teacher Natalie Srbinovski.

Photo provided by Natalie Srbinovski



**Görres Gymnasium in Dusseldorf, Germany opened in 1545. Students from the school visited America for a couple of weeks in October, shadowing Chippewa Valley students.
Photo provided by Natalie Srbinovski**

CLINTON TOWNSHIP — For the past few years, German and American students have not only traveled abroad, enjoying the sights, sounds and tastes of another country, but have also experienced a different country’s educational system.

From Oct. 7 to Oct. 18, 10 students from Görres Gymnasium, a college preparatory school in Dusseldorf, Germany, attended class at Chippewa Valley High School as part of the German American Partnership Program, or GAPP. Gymnasium is the German word for high school. Görres Gymnasium was founded in 1545.

The partnership between the two schools began in the 2017-18 school year, and the plan is for Chippewa students to travel to Germany every other year, and vice versa. Chippewa students will visit Germany in June.

“We hosted kids from Germany for two weeks, and at the end of the school year, we return the visit,” said Natalie Srbinovski, Chippewa Valley High School German teacher.

Daniela Barchet and Michael Fleckenstein, Görres Gymnasium teachers, accompanied the students to America.

“Ms. Barchet gave a presentation with Americans from the last exchange in our school and I heard about it,” said Julia Horster, a German student. “About half a year later, it was brought up again, I thought it was cool and wanted to do it.”

Horster vacationed in Florida in 2017, but this visit marked her first time in Michigan.

She said a difference in the school day between Germany and America is the length of classes.

“Our lessons are about 45 minutes, not 60,” Horster said. “Our school day is a bit longer and we have different subjects. Our system is a bit more interactive and students interact more with the teachers during classes.”

German students arrived in Michigan Oct. 5. They landed in New York Oct. 1 and spent four days in New York City, visiting Rockefeller Center, the National September 11 Memorial & Museum, the American Museum of Natural History, and the Brooklyn Bridge. Once in Michigan, they visited Port Huron and Lexington, and also toured the Ford Rouge Factory, and took a field trip to Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village.

“They get to experience the American school system and truly the American way of life”, Srbinovski said. “The point is to live with a family, versus just going from one tourist place to another.”

Another goal of the program is for students to improve language skills.

“The Germans have had English for so many years, since first grade,” Srbinovski said. “Americans get only a couple years of foreign language.”

Ever since she began working at Chippewa Valley, Srbinovski wanted to participate in GAPP. On the American Association for Teachers of German website, people discuss GAPP, and Srbinovski was looking for a German teacher to partner with. A teacher who just ended a GAPP with another school recommended Barchet’s school.

“This program is so interesting because you get to experience everyday life, and not only be a tourist, but you also see all the similarities between teenagers and that we’re all human beings,” Barchet said. “It improves social skills, because you’re away from your parents and have to adjust to a different school and family situation.”

German student Julius Kirchmeyer said the program is a good way to learn new vocabulary and to expand his cultural view of America.

Barchet complimented the American education system, saying it offers a broad variety of subjects.

“There is something for everybody, and we’re always impressed by the school spirit found in American schools because of sports at school,” she said.

Chippewa Valley freshman Megan Jankowsky said one aspect of German education she’s learned about is that biology classes aren’t offered after eighth grade, unlike in America where it’s offered throughout high school.

Jankowsky and her sister, Brooke, will visit Germany in June.

Another difference in the school day that German students mentioned, was that in Germany, teachers don’t have their own classroom, rather, students spend half a day or longer in the same classroom.

For those curious about what Germans think of Frankenmuth, affectionately known as “Michigan’s Little Bavaria,” Barchet said the city is more stereotypical than the actual country.

“It’s more of a mix of Bavaria, Switzerland and Austria,” she said. “We don’t all eat pretzels all the time, or bake them.”

Annually, about 9,000 students go abroad with a GAPP exchange. GAPP’s belief is that when travel is paired with community, truly incredible things can happen.