

# News Release

## Dobbs Ferry High School Students Exchange Stories About French Terrorist Attacks with “Pen Pals” at School in France

**Dobbs Ferry, N.Y. February 9, 2015**— Dobbs Ferry High School IB French students were personally affected by the recent three-day terrorist attacks in Paris, France and its surrounding areas. The 11<sup>th</sup> graders in Michele Irvine’s foreign language class have been corresponding with French “pen pals” at the Laure Gatet School in Perigueux, France from the beginning of the school year, and since the Charlie Hebdo event have shown solidarity with their student counterparts abroad.

“The students in France (also 11<sup>th</sup> graders) have shared numerous emails and photos with their Dobbs Ferry High School pen pals showing them marching and displaying signs in support of ‘Je Suis Charlie,’” said Ms. Irvine. “They have expressed their feelings about living through this event and our students have responded with emails to them showing our concern and support.” Ms. Irvine has discussed the event with all of her French classes and has a picture on her whiteboard that one of her students received from his pen pal in the thick of a rally.

According to Ms. Irvine, the pen pal exchange began about three years ago. She had two students from France (Bardh and Ella Sokoli) who were in her class. When Bardh left to go back to school in France, she asked him for the name of his school and talked about the possibility of a pen pal exchange. Ms. Irvine contacted his English teacher at the French School and she was excited to have the international students connect.

“She initially sent me the email addresses of her students and I matched them up with ours, and the exchange began,” said Ms. Irvine. “It’s always been either 11th or 12th graders. I think that it has been very successful and the students have a great time exchanging emails with the French students. We share the emails in class and our students especially get a kick out of how the French students write in English.”

The students here and abroad look for each other on Facebook, and often communicate that way as well. There is no “snail mail.” The students have not yet skyped with each other, but both teachers have talked about it and would like to make it happen. There are some technology limitations in addition to the time difference factor. The website for the French school is [www.lauregatet.fr](http://www.lauregatet.fr)

France is emerging from one of its worst security crises in decades beginning with a massacre at the offices of satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo on January 7<sup>th</sup> and ending with a huge police operation and two sieges just two days later. The photo that Dobbs Ferry junior Masataka Nishiyama received from his pen pal Sebastiaan shows the young French student carrying a fellow student on his shoulders and the group holding a sign that reads “The pencil was their freedom and it’s also ours. Let’s fight against those who want to take it away from us.”

“Michele Irvine’s pen pal exchange with her IB Year 1 French students is an excellent example of ‘real world’ connections and is directly in line with IB,” said High School Principal John Falino. “This is hands-on learning with elements of political science, citizenship, technology and global studies all-in-one.”

**For more information, please contact:**

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