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## **IMSA teens go global with international Web conference**

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AURORA — What started as a small idea turned into an event of international proportions Monday morning as students from the Illinois Math and Science Academy in Aurora joined forces with teens in Singapore, Korea, Finland and China for the inaugural United Nations of Youth web conference.

The two-hour long interactive web conference featured founding United Nations of Youth delegates from the Korea Science Academy, the high school affiliated with Renmin University in China, the National Junior College in Singapore and Ressa Upper Secondary School in Finland.

The UNY's goal is for delegates to work together toward world peace, said UNY founder and advocate, state Rep. Linda Chapa LaVia of Aurora.

Chapa LaVia, along with UNY IMSA student spearheads Rahul Maheshwari of Crystal Lake and Johnny Duan of Peoria, hope the ongoing dialogue between the young people of the nations will lead to better ways of solving national problems, as well as creating global partnerships.

Two student delegates from each country will be chosen to represent the United Nations of Youth, Chapa LaVia said.

"Hopefully, when they age-out at 18 years old, these students will go on to become political leaders, activists and lobbyists," she said. "Students will learn first-hand that by coming together as a diverse and committed group, the resolutions created can have a positive and lasting effect on current and future generations"

So on Monday morning, as Maheshwari and Duan were beginning the school day, and students in China were ready to end the day altogether, the small group of teens logged on to meet each other for the first time. From across the globe, they giggled and waved as small web cameras projected foreign faces onto giant screens.

During the inaugural web conference, students gave short presentations about the educational system unique to their countries, focusing on curriculum, assessment, access, funding, organization, and both the strengths and challenges of the system.

"I thought the conference was very interesting," Duan said. "There's a lot that we can learn from systems of education in different countries."

In China, students lamented about the lack of educational focus on the humanities — speaking through thick accents, but in perfect English.

In Korea, where more than 80 percent of high school students go on to receive college-level educations, the highly competitive structure often leads to cheating, the delegates said.

Finnish students talked about quality of education in public and private schools as equal, and discussed

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the importance placed on secondary education.

The two-hour venture, however, was just the beginning.

“Each year, UNY will host a convention on various issues, allowing delegations from member nations to discuss solutions for the pressing needs of the world,” Chapa LaVia said. “Students will learn first-hand that by coming together as a diverse and committed group, the resolutions created can have a positive and lasting effect on current and future generations.”