

Romania trip highlights education differences

By Eric Serbus
Guest Commentary

This past March, I had the opportunity to travel to Romania with 11 other teachers from around the United States to study the changing economy and education system in Romania. The 10-day trip was sponsored by the National Council of Economic Education (NCEE) and was paid for by the U.S. Department of Education in cooperation with the U.S. State Department.



Eric Serbus

The annual study tour is part of a larger NCEE international program that attempts to establish relationships between economic teachers in the United States and abroad. Romania serves as a perfect case study because it is still transitioning from its old Communist system to a new capitalist system.

It takes endless work and extreme patience to weather the storm caused by such an enormous change.

One of the primary goals of our study tour was to investigate how the transition process has impacted Romania's economy and education system. Each place we visited and every person we talked with seemed to provide a piece to the larger puzzle of Romania's past and present. I came away with a wealth of knowledge and experiences that will help me bring world history and economics to life at Prior Lake High School.

A large part of the study tour focused on the Romanian education system. While visiting schools and interacting with students, I quickly realized that education is highly valued in Romania. Students' performance in school directly impacts the opportunities they will have after high school. Their scores

from the comprehensive high school exit exam, known as the Bacalaureate test, determine which universities they are eligible to attend. Universities, in turn, specialize in education for specific career paths.

For example, a student wishing to become a pharmacist must score high enough to be accepted into the University of Medicine and Pharmacy. Since universities are so specialized, the competition to get in is very stiff. As a result, students must work extremely hard in the classroom to set themselves apart from their competition.

The demands of Romanian education come at a cost to Romanian students. They have very limited opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities. On occasion, schools may have a sports team or music club, but the few extra-curricular activities available are done independently from the school. Likewise, Romanian students do not have part-time jobs. Most students in Romania are so busy with academics that they don't have time to work.

Students in Romania acknowledged the social trade-offs they are forced to make. Some parents I spoke with thought their kids were being over-educated at the expense of being under-socialized. Not all students in Romania invest heavily in their academics. Like in the United States, there is a large continuum of student abilities and motivation. Students who don't make the grade in school are generally put on a remedial or vocational education track. Generally, students who follow such a track are not presented with the same financial opportunities as their counterparts who attend a university.

Romania has undergone some tremendous changes in the last 20 years. Romanians appear to be very optimistic about their future, and rightly so. Their institutions are modernizing, their

economy is booming, and they just recently became the latest member of European Union.

I am grateful for the opportunity to visit Romania. Although my study tour was brief, I came home with a different appreciation for the U.S. education system. I believe we do many things well. Our system emphasizes independent critical thinking in addition to general content. Our teachers are trained to meet the needs of all types of learners. And our students are encouraged to study a variety of subjects and participate in a multitude of activities.

While the U.S. education system may earn high marks in some areas, it is struggling in others. Students in Romania, and Europe in general, are much more proficient in foreign languages. Most of the students in Romania are bilingual, and many of them can speak three or four languages fluently. Granted, foreign-language skills are an absolute necessity for people living at the crossroads of so many diverse cultures. But just because U.S. students are relatively isolated in North America does not mean foreign languages are not important. As globalization continues to increase competition for what used to be domestic jobs, U.S. students might find themselves losing out to more linguistically qualified candidates.

Needless to say, our education system is not perfect, but neither are any of the other education systems around the globe. And I think now more than ever, countries are beginning to realize that a new challenge in education has arrived, namely how to best prepare students to be responsible members of a global community in addition to being productive citizens of individual countries.

Eric Serbus is a social studies teacher and assistant football and wrestling coach at Prior Lake High School.

'Go bananas' with library program

"Go bananas" this summer with the Scott County Library's Summer Reading Program at all seven branches June 11 through Aug. 11.

The libraries will offer the free reading incentive program for kids of all ages, separated into three groups:

Preschool
For kids who haven't yet been to kindergarten. Receive a reading record and color in a circle for each library book read. Bring completed record to library to receive a sticker for every five

books read and a prize for each completed record (up to three).

School-age
For kids who have finished kindergarten through fifth grade. Receive a reading record and color in one clock for every hour of reading library materials. Bring reading record back to the library for prizes. After completing 20 hours, keep reading for a chance to win more prizes.

Teen
For kids who have finished sixth grade and up. Receive a mood pen upon signing up. Earn

rewards for every five hours read (up to 20). Enter prize drawings by writing quickie reviews.

Sign up for the programs starting June 11.

Along with prizes for reading, each library will have free programs and performances, including book clubs, live animal programs, magicians and book parties.

For the most current and complete listing of performance times and locations, visit www.scott.lib.mn.us and click "Summer Reading Program."

Recreation department has lots on tap

Prior Lake's recreation department has the following activities planned for this summer:

■ Public beaches open Saturday, June 9. Life-guarded beaches will be open at Sand Point Beach, 14349 Crest Ave., and Watzl's Beach, 5000 Kop Parkway, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Sunday throughout the summer. There is a \$5 per-car parking fee at Sand Point Beach.

■ The skate park at Lakefront Park will be open seven days a week starting Saturday, June 9. Hours are noon to 8 p.m. seven days a week and 10 a.m. to noon for ages 12 and under on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Admission is free, but participants under 18 are not admitted without a parent-signed waiver

and safety equipment.

■ The "Big Beach Party" is set for 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Friday, July 6 at Sand Point Beach. The event includes activities, games and free parking. Concessions are available. No registration is required.

■ There are still openings in the Tot Lot (3- to 5-year-olds) and Playground (6- to 11-year-olds) programs and sports camps including lacrosse, multi-sport and 3rd Lair Skate Camp.

■ Friday recreation trips include:

Como Zoo and mini golf, Friday June 22, ages 6 to 11, \$10 (resident) \$15 (non-resident).

Cascade Bay, Friday, June 29, ages 6 to 14, \$25 (resident) \$30 (non-resident).

Valleyfair, Friday, July 13,

ages 8 to 15, \$30 (residents) or \$35 (non-residents).

Apple Valley Aquatic Center; ages 6 to 14, \$20 (resident) \$25 (non-resident).

Deadlines are one week prior to the trip. Limited space is available.

■ Join the Prior Lake and Savage recreation departments for a trip to the Arboretum on Wednesday, June 20 from 11 a.m. to approximately 4 p.m. Enjoy a flower pot lunch in a private room with garden views and a guided tour of the gardens by motorized tram. The cost is \$32 (residents) or \$35 (non-residents).

To register for programs or for more information, call (952) 447-9820 or visit www.cityofpriorlake.com.

Planning Commission agenda

The Prior Lake Planning Commission meeting scheduled for Monday, June 11 will not be held since there are no items to be considered.

The commissioners and staff will conduct a workshop on zoning ordinance revisions at 6 p.m. that evening in the Parkview Community Room at City Hall, 4646 Dakota St. The next Planning Commission meeting is scheduled for Monday, June 25.

For more information, call the Prior Lake planning department at (952) 447-9810.

"Model Home Furniture"
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"I wanted to lose weight"

The Fairview Southdale Weight Loss Surgery program invites you to learn more about surgical options at a FREE seminar at Fairview Southdale Hospital.

Tuesday, June 12, 6 - 7:30 p.m.
Friday, June 22, 1 - 2:30 p.m.
Tuesday, June 26, 6 - 7:30 p.m.

Reservations are required.
Call 952-915-8626.
southdale.fairview.org/weightloss

Cathryn,
weight loss patient

FAIRVIEW SOUTHDALE HOSPITAL

Weight Loss Surgery

Old Website.

New Website.

Saturday, August 4, 2007 • Clear Lake Regional Park

Dakotah!
SPORT AND FITNESS

Fee:
\$60.00 pre-registration (Registered by June 17, 2007)
\$75.00 after June 17, 2007
(Registration closes July 20, 2007)

Event limited to 400 participants

Register: Online at www.Active.com

Race Information

6:30 a.m. - 7:15 a.m.
Packet Pick-Up
Packet pick-up also available on Friday, August 3rd; 5 a.m. to 11 p.m. at Dakotah! Sport and Fitness.
Highly Recommended!

8:00 a.m. Race Start

Swim: Clear Lake Beach 1/4 mile swim.
Wetsuits allowed unless water temperature reaches 78 degrees or above.

Bike: 16.5 mile loop through city and county roads.
Helmet required, ANSI Regulations.

Run: 3.4 mile run through Clear Lake Regional Park. No city roads.

11:30 a.m. Awards Ceremony (Following event or as results become available)
Participation medals to all finishers. Awards will be presented to the top 3 overall male and female finishers and the first place finisher in each of the men's and women's age group categories.

Participants will be distributed into 12 waves by age category, or as needed.
Headphones, radios, and tracking devices are not permitted on the course.
Timing by Pickle Events

Age Categories:
14-19 20-29 30-39 40-49 50-59 60-69 70+

Clear Lake Regional Park • 18106 Texas Avenue, • Prior Lake, MN 55372

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