

Teachers travel abroad to bring lessons back home

By [Alejandra Matos](#) September 25

Maya Cunningham wants her music students at J.C. Nalle Elementary School to experience sounds and culture not traditionally found in the school's Marshall Heights neighborhood.

So she is headed to Botswana.

Cunningham will spend three months researching the music of the African country and plans to return to Washington and write a new curriculum for her music classes, aimed at expanding her students' global perspectives.

Local Headlines newsletter

[Sign up](#)

Daily headlines about the Washington region.

"This neighborhood can feel isolated," Cunningham said. "In Botswana, it's a completely different culture. I want them to hear the sounds of the market, taste the food. I thought it would be a rich experience for my students."

Cunningham was selected to travel to Botswana as part of the U.S. State Department's Fulbright program, aimed at giving teachers an opportunity to explore other countries to improve their teaching methods. She and Jennifer Pierson, another D.C. Public Schools teacher, are part of a group of 44 teachers selected to participate in the program this year.

Cunningham, who has taught music since 2001, will be looking at ways that teachers in Botswana use music to help children foster a sense of pride and national identity.

"Music is a terrific platform to share the world with students," she said. "What better way to do that than to get firsthand information through these experiences?"

Jennifer Pierson, an early-childhood education teacher at Bruce-Monroe Elementary School, will spend her spring semester in the Netherlands learning how to incorporate more play into her daily lessons.

Pierson teaches prekindergarten, and she said parents of former students sometimes come to her concerned about how academic kindergarten is compared with her class.

“At the pre-K level, they get to play, but in kindergarten they are stressed from the expectation that they need to start reading, and students are sitting down for much longer periods,” Pierson said.

Pierson already uses games and other play activities to teach students language skills. Her students go around the classroom playing a version of hide-and-seek during which they search for materials with magnifying glasses. It’s a strategy used to boost their vocabulary.

But Pierson wants to learn from other educators in the Netherlands, a country that has embraced play in everyday instruction. Upon her return in May, Pierson wants to develop a pilot program that will use more play with kindergartners who are struggling with learning English.

“Children have fewer opportunities to play,” Pierson said. “Students are going to be less motivated if school isn’t fun.”

The Post Recommends

Melania Trump’s demand for a retraction by People magazine is simply amazing

Her beef with the magazine has nothing to do with a reporter's assault claim against Donald Trump.

The story behind President Obama’s half brother Malik, whom Trump invited to tonight’s debate

He and Trump share something essential: a deep love for the limelight.

Jailed 96 days on bogus charge: It is no one’s fault?

Pulled over for traffic violations, Jessica Jauch was held for 96 days in a Mississippi jail without seeing a judge, getting a lawyer or having a chance to make bail. She was charged with a felony based on a secretly recorded video that prosecutors finally acknowledged showed her committing no crime.