



In late July, a group of nineteen rising ninth graders, representing over ten schools in the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), and three educator leaders, called "Travel Ambassadors," returned from a fully funded service learning trip to the Dominican Republic. The students applied and were accepted to participate in free global travel through an innovative program called DCPS Study Abroad, managed by DCPS' Global Education team (learn more at dcpsglobaled.org). Launched in 2016, DCPS Study Abroad makes global travel accessible and inclusive of students who have traditionally lacked the opportunity to engage in travel experiences. Previously funded through philanthropy, this year Mayor Bowser fully funded DCPS Study Abroad in the city's Fiscal Year 2018 budget. To date, over 1,400 students and educators have benefitted from the program, traveling to 18 countries on five continents.

Most of the students on this trip to the Dominican Republic were first-time travelers, making their DCPS Study Abroad adventure their first trip outside of the USA. The focal point of their travel experience was a service project with the community of La Jagua in Jarabacoa. Jarabacoa is a mountainous region with a tropical rainforest climate. The group spent two-and-a half days constructing a four-hundred-meter aqueduct to connect a mountain community of thirty-two homes to water. The residents of the community will now have access to water for cooking and personal needs.

First, the students used shovels and pickaxes to dig out a trench. Next, they laid down PVC pipe. Then, they connected and sealed the pipes together. The students made sure to cover the trench with dirt, because it was important to protect each section of pipe against rain and motor vehicle traffic. Students quickly learned how to use the tools most effectively to dig out the trench and how to work as a team to build the aqueduct. They were impressed with the strength and stamina of the locals who worked alongside them and asked for tips on how to make better use of the tools. Some students spoke Spanish well enough to practice their language skills in real time.

Finally, it was time to test the aqueduct and turn the water on. The students and community members gathered together at the very end of the aqueduct and watched anxiously as a community leader put his ear to the pipe to listen for the water. The water swiftly made its way down the completed aqueduct and flowed out of the pipe! The students and local community members cheered and danced in the clean, flowing water.

This experience through the DCPS Study Abroad program was transformative for the students and educators involved. Students expressed gratitude, a desire to participate in future service activities, and a thankfulness for the new friends they made with one another and among the community members in Jarabacoa. The educators saw firsthand how impactful travel experiences are for adolescents and young adults. Global education programs like DCPS Study Abroad are important because of the opportunities provided to the students to grow as individuals and global citizens.