

## Debating Issues of International Importance

### Students Short on Cash To Attend Model U.N.

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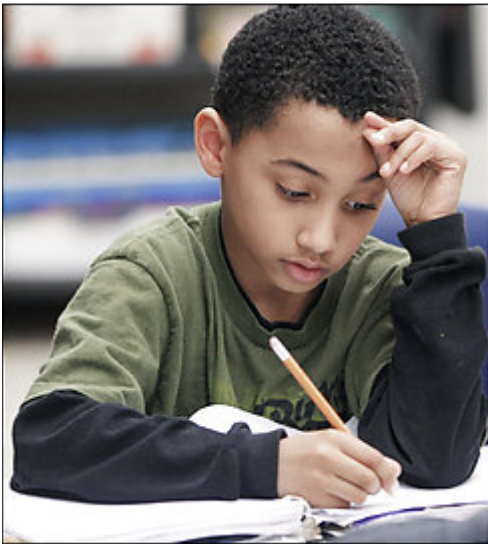
Michael Summers, father of two Robert Goddard Montessori students, works with members of the school's Model United Nations program. (Photos By Brenda Ahearn -- The Gazette)

Since November, students in Robert Goddard Montessori School's Model United Nations program have pulled out all the stops to raise money to attend a national conference in New York next month. But to get there, students at the Seabrook school might have to invoke the power of the organization they're modeled after, as they try to find nearly \$7,000 in just a few weeks. The 42 students in fourth through eighth grades plan to travel to the U.N. headquarters in New York on March 2-5 to participate in the Montessori Model U.N. Conference with 600 other students from around the world.

As of Feb. 11, the students were \$6,839.58 short of their \$25,000 goal, but they are planning at least three fundraisers before the conference, including a raffle and silent auction. If no other money is raised, each student will have to pay \$165 to attend. Donations are coming in from parents, businesses and community groups, including the Prince George's County alumnae chapter of Delta Sigma Theta sorority, which contributed \$500, said Candace Gunn, the school's parent liaison.

Robert Goddard is the only public Montessori school in Maryland with a Model U.N. program. Students in the program, which began in the fall, meet after school to debate, acting as ambassadors of U.N. member countries to develop resolutions about world issues that affect the countries.

At the conference, elementary and middle school students will learn about people, cultures and governments throughout the world, how the United Nations operates and its role as the world's largest peacekeeping and humanitarian organization. The students act as delegates of U.N. member nations to participate in debates. The Robert Goddard group has members acting as ambassadors from the United Kingdom, South Korea, Austria, Egypt, Norway, Bangladesh and Argentina. Sixth-grader Clara Beckert, 11, is assuming the role of a United Kingdom ambassador for the Security Council, debating the situation in Sudan. "I didn't know anything about it but learned about the people that were killed and displaced and about the refugee camp. It's important because so many people were killed, and it could have been prevented," she said. "I'm looking forward to testing my skills against the people there and see if I know as much as I think I know." Sixth-grader Makaela Jackson, 11, is also assuming the role of a United Kingdom ambassador for the Security Council. She will debate the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.



Goddard fourth-grader Thomas Staton is one of the school's 42 students planning to travel to the U.N. headquarters next month.

"I learned a lot about nuclear weapons that I didn't know," she said. "I now know the types of nuclear weapons that can start a war." Some of the Model U.N. students worked last week with coach Penelope Yorke, a Robert Goddard teacher, on drafting resolutions for their issues and on their speeches. Other students worked with Michael Summers, a parent of a pre-kindergartner and a second-grader at the school, on project displays, speeches and resolutions. Elementary students must memorize their speeches, which run 30 seconds to one minute. Middle school student speeches must be two to three minutes, with memorization optional.

To prepare for the conference, students traveled to the British and South Korean embassies in the District in the past month for two-hour meetings with public affairs representatives, Gunn said. Students presented their topics and resolutions to the representative, who gave them feedback. The group has stepped up its after-school meetings from once a week to four days a week. Summers commended the seventh- and eighth-graders last week on their hard work for the conference.