

Let's Be 友達

(Friends)

Students in the Japanese class get together after school to skype with students in Japan taking English classes.



Does India and
in common?
Curry,"
ny Simmons,
12



the "No-Arm-
re it goes like
ck, Knock, not
Suzy,"
lda Rangel,
12



w does NASA
nize a party?
hey 'Planet',
a Berlanga,
12



ked Alyssa',
ended up as
te then never',
of 'Better late
than never,'
n Wright, 11



Mihoko Yamamura's AP and Pre-AP Japanese Language students sat in two rows at the back of her classroom in front of a Toshiba laptop. They eagerly waited for a Google Hangout call from a group of students from Chosei High School, a Japanese school located in the city of Chiba Prefecture.

"Sensei, we're getting a call," the students yelled.

Yamamura accepted the call, and a young Japanese woman appeared on the projector.

"Let me introduce myself very quickly," Kizuna Global Classmate coordinator Tomomi Tobe said. "Hello Richardson High School students, this is Tomomi Tobe, and I am currently located in Washington D.C. I am a KGC coordinator, and I have been monitoring your exchanges to ensure things are going well. Today is the day you can actually see and talk to your friends overseas. Are you excited?"

Yamamura said she applied to KGC, which fosters friendship between American and Japanese students through an educational exchange website. Tobe helped match Richardson with Chosei, mediating between the two schools.

A few seconds later a swarm of Japanese students appeared on the screen. The smiling students each stood up and took turns introducing themselves in English. A student in the back pulled out a guitar and began to play the song "Hanawasaku" which translates into "flowers will bloom." Richardson students pulled out white sheets

of printed lyrics and began to sing along to the strums of the guitar.

As the song concluded, Richardson students lined up to ask the Chosei students questions.

"I asked 'Who was the first African American President?'" junior Tryton Shelp said. "They all shouted Obama."

Shelp is currently taking his third year of Japanese and is apart of the Japanese club.

"I enjoyed getting to laugh and talk with them face to face," Shelp said. "I find [the Japanese culture] interesting to learn about. I think seeing the Japanese students was important."

Yamamura said the students are hoping to do another Google Hangout call with Chosei at some point during next semester, but the 15-hour time difference poses challenges. Some students said they plan to take a trip to Japan this July.

"We are going to visit [Chosei High School] in their home state, then we are going to visit some big cities, and then travel to my home state and stay at my mothers place, and then end in Tokyo," Yamamura said.

Yamamura said that it's always good to talk with native speakers to experience the culture in real life.

"We could just watch a video, but this is more exciting," Yamamura said. "Seeing is better than hearing it or reading it - if you see it, you really understand."