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### Longview Students and Staff Share Expertise at AERO Conference

Schools Offering Real-World Education Work Together to Teach 21st Century Skills through Student Empowerment

Long Island, NY—Brewster private school, Longview School, brought two students and four staff to the Alternate Education Resource Organization (AERO) conference on the Post campus of Long Island University this weekend. This annual conference explores different aspects of alternative education, with a focus this year on democratic education. Although there are many types of democratic schools, a common characteristic is that they empower their students in school legislatures so that students are integrally involved in the running of their school.

Longview School empowers its students through its legislature, called School Meeting, a one-person, one-vote body which is comprised of all of the students and teachers and makes decisions regarding all aspects of the administration of the school. At Longview, students are also empowered through their Judicial Committee, which is a student-run court system that enforces all of the school rules. Having the community rather than just the adults enforce the rules results in closer relationships between teachers and students, and allows for greater connection and mutual understanding.

Although this approach seems startling to adults unfamiliar with schools that share power with their students, there is a long history of democratic education going back to Summerhill in England. Founded in 1921 by Alexander S. Neill, Summerhill continues to thrive to this day. One of the keynote speakers at this weekend's conference was Henry Readhead, the grandson of Mr. Neil and current Deputy Principal at Summerhill.

A focus of the international conference was to provide its attendees expert support and advice so that they could start their own democratic educational programs. Mark Jacobs, Longview's co-founder and current director, stated: "Starting a new school is an extremely difficult process. After all the work to get your school up and running, it takes years to figure out how to put your innovative ideas into practice in an effective way. After running Longview for almost 20 years, it is a pleasure to share my experience creating a school that not only teaches a rigorous academic curriculum, but also instills real-life skills through student involvement in running the school." In his talk to an auditorium with almost 100 conference attendees, Jacobs stressed the need for a panoply of educational options if schools are going to be able to inspire all kinds of students and to empower them to be successful young adults with the skills to direct their own lives.

Longview School Assistant Director and head of elementary school Carolin Trott also attended the conference. Trott affirmed: "During workshops I was able to share my knowledge about how the democratic process is infused into the classroom. Which topics are being taught in class is highly influenced by the students, which translates into more engagement and enthusiasm for learning. This has proven especially valuable in classes in which some students might feel less confident, such as math."

Ben Pousada, Longview School graduate and part-time Computer Science teacher at the school, had the opportunity to network with other innovators who are finding unique ways to integrate computer games into content-area classes. Most recently, Pousada was designing Minecraft challenges to teach both math content and social skills at the same time. Pousada shared: "It was exciting to be able to beta-test virtual reality [VR] programs that, instead of being geared towards shooting enemies, are focused on interactive teaching of areas such as logic. In one VR program I sampled at the conference, I learned about logical arguments from a virtual Lewis Carroll, who was not only known for writing Alice's Adventures in Wonderland but also for developing logic puzzles and riddles."

The final keynote speaker was world-renowned speaker, author and educator, Sir Ken Robinson. Robinson's TED talk "Do Schools Kill Creativity?" is a top TED presentation with over 14 million views.

The conference was run by Jerry Mintz, who founded AERO in 1989 to advance student-driven, learner-centered approaches to education. AERO is the primary hub of communication and support for educational alternatives around the world, and this weekend's conference reinforced AERO as the leader in this area.

Longview School is a non-profit private school located in the Village of Brewster, New York. For more information about their program, the school website is [www.longviewsschool.org](http://www.longviewsschool.org).