



TrekNorth's McKeon chosen to deliver Chinese education address

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BEMIDJI – Dan McKeon, executive director of TrekNorth Junior & Senior High School, has been selected to deliver a keynote address at the China National Education Conference later this month.

“It’s a huge honor for me, an opportunity to be able to present internationally,” he said.

McKeon was contacted by Volunteers of America, TrekNorth’s authorizer, asking if he would be interested in speaking in China on education in America. He will be part of a three-person team. Stephanie Olsen, senior manager with Volunteers of America-Minnesota, will discuss charter schools and educational choice while Cam Hedlund, director of Lakes International Language Academy, a K-6 Spanish and Chinese immersion language school in the Twin Cities, will discuss elementary education. McKeon will discuss junior and senior high schools.

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Together, the three will deliver a three-hour keynote address; McKeon's portion will span about 75 minutes. TrekNorth, which serves about 160 students in grades 7-12, has been recognized by the College Board and Minnesota Department of Education

for its Advanced Placement programs and performance. It also is ranked by the U.S. News & World Report as the eighth-best high school in Minnesota for 2012.

"What I've learned is that they (the Chinese) are most interested in hearing about how we cultivate leadership and high academic performance for all of our students," he said.

In China, he said, students are identified very early in their schooling and put on a specific educational track dictating their futures.

At TrekNorth, McKeon said, the school aims to prepare all of its students for post-secondary institutions and lifelong success.

"That's the charge for me, to develop a presentation that shows how we do that," he said.

McKeon, who does not speak Chinese, said interpreters will be provided, but wondered how his PowerPoint presentation would translate to the hundreds of conference attendees. Will they pick up on his satire or humor? Will they understand figurative language? "There's a risk that stuff will be lost in translation," he said.

He leaves Friday and returns Oct. 31. In addition to attending and speaking at the conference, his group will travel through Beijing, Chengdu, and Shanghai to meet with education officials and professors from throughout China.

"We will see three different cities and stay in people's homes, see how they live," he said. "This is going to be a very authentic visit."



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Once he returns, McKeon said he will share with TrekNorth staff what he saw and learned.

“I’m honored to have been asked, humbled,” he said, noting that all of TrekNorth’s staff is responsible for the school’s success.

McKeon has traveled extensively within the U.S. – he has been to 46 of the 50 states – but has never before been overseas.

“This will be a very different experience for me,” he said. “I’m excited.”

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