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An excerpt from
TIS News - May 2012

Fifth graders research & present cultural comparisons



Fifth graders Harlee and Hazel found that their classmates in Japan eat a lot of dairy, while Natalie and August discovered that their Mexican host families buy less dairy than people in Portland. These were just some of the students' findings from their International Baccalaureate (IB) Exhibition projects and their Capstone trips abroad.

For this year's Capstone program, TIS fifth graders traveled to Japan, China or Mexico for two weeks in March. The students spent one week living with host families and attending a local school, and a second week visiting cultural and historical sites that they had studied in class.

The trip was part of an IB unit about how "Shared beliefs and values influence people's everyday lives." The unit is an inquiry into different societal beliefs and values, how culture influences their expression in everyday life, and similarities and differences across cultures.

Students focused their inquiry on an area of personal interest such as transportation, food, or music. They created questionnaires in English and in their track language, and then gathered data on their trip abroad and at home in Portland. The students presented their results to the school community using pictures, graphs, essays and other visual aids at the school's fair-style IB exhibition on

April 27.

Every research team discovered cultural differences that had a direct meaning for them. Ben learned that kids in Merida like to watch TV before doing their homework because their school ends early. Kaia and Lilly discovered that musical groups in Merida usually dress elegantly while in America bands wear every day clothes. ("In Merida, maybe if you look like a homeless person people won't listen to your music.")

Yet as with most IB lessons, the data gathered was only part of the benefit. Che Che learned how hard it was to create graphs from open-ended questions in a survey. August liked writing her exhibition essay on food. "It was fun to write an essay, thinking about the differences between the two places as I was writing." Claire and Clara worked together to compare performing arts in China and the US, and divided the tasks according to their strengths. "I'm doing all the computer stuff which I really like," Claire said, "and Clara is doing more of the art parts because she's good at that."

Overall, most students agreed with Natalie, that working toward such a big deadline was "stressful at moments." But still a good experience? "Yes, definitely!"

