

THE SOUTHWEST COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Three local students pass Chinese fluency test

Three Southwest fifth grade students recently joined the ranks of almost a billion other people in the world. They proved they can speak fluent Chinese.

International School students Kyle Armstrong, Wil Edwards and Jade McKanna were three of 11 students to pass a Chinese government proficiency test normally administered to adults.

"We are very impressed with these results," said Zhang Jie, Director of the China Language Office in Beijing. "The kids have done a great job."

The test, called HSK for its Chinese initials, serves as a requirement to enter university in China as an undergraduate student, and it is used by employers in China for positions requiring basic competence in the language.

"Our students use the same textbooks as their peers in China," said

Yafei Liu, lead Chinese teacher and 10-year veteran of the program at The International School. "I am extremely proud of them, though I am not surprised."

Armstrong, Edwards, McKanna and their classmates are 10- and 11-year-old native English speakers who have been attending the International School's Chinese immersion program since preschool, according to Bruce Bayliss, head of school. They study an American curriculum with all of their subjects — math, science, social studies, etc. — taught in Chinese by native Chinese speakers.

In October, the fifth grade students spent two weeks in China attending a local school and visiting important historical sites.

"At the boarding school in China, the kids in my class didn't speak any English," McKanna said. "I made new friends there and learned more

Chinese."

The Chinese Language Office has only administered the test twice to such young students, both times at the International School, according to Yang Shen, Chief Education Consul at the Chinese Consulate General in San Francisco.

"These results show that a complete immersion program started at a young age can really prepare children for exchanges in other languages and cultures," said Bayliss.

The International School provides a multicultural environment where children are immersed in Chinese, Spanish or Japanese from preschool through the fifth grade. The International School was founded in 1990 and today has more than 350 students. The school is located downtown at 025 S.W. Sherman St. For more information, please call 503-226-2496 or visit www.intlschool.org.