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GRIN AND BEAR IT. *International School students (L-R) Jade McKanna, Halle Williams, Meianna Oeser, and Amy Sandberg enjoy the bears at the Wolong Giant Panda Preserve in Sichuan Province, China. (Photo courtesy of the International School)*

Fifth graders pass Chinese government language test

Eleven students from Portland's International School recently passed a Chinese government proficiency test normally given to adults. The test, called the HSK, is required for admission to universities in China and is used by Chinese employers for positions requiring basic competence in Chinese.

The 10- and 11-year-old native English speakers have attended the International School's Chinese immersion program since preschool, said Bruce Bayliss, Head of School. They study an American curriculum with all of the subjects taught in Chinese by native speakers.

As part of their fifth grade curriculum, the students spent two weeks in China last October, attending a Chinese boarding school and visiting important Chinese sites.

"I learned even more Chinese on the trip since the kids in my class at the boarding school didn't speak any English," said Jade

McKanna, one of the young scholars who passed the test.

"At the boarding school we had to speak Chinese — it wasn't like being in a hotel where people want to speak English to you," said Collin Yu, another student who went to China and passed the test.

Children who passed the HSK included: Sydney Bright, Halle Williams, Kyle Armstrong, Wil Edwards, Elizabeth Kisch, Jade McKanna, Amy Sandberg, Meianna Oeser, Molly Smoll, and Katie Stern-Stillinger, all of Portland, and Collin Yu of Lake Oswego, Oregon.

"The children use the same textbooks as their peers in China," said Yafei Liu, lead Chinese teacher at the International School. "I am extremely proud of my kids, though I am not surprised."

The International School is located at 025 S.W. Sherman Street in Portland. To learn more, call (503) 226-2496 or visit www.intlschool.org.