

The International School building world citizens

SPECIAL REPORT

ED -international school

EDUCATION

Studying locally, living globally

MELINDA THOMPSON • PORTLAND FAMILY MAGAZINE

Portland school turns out world citizens

Ever wonder what it would be like to have your child immersed in a different culture? Wish he or she could be exposed to a second language before middle school? The International School on Portland's waterfront has been offering a full language immersion program for more than 15 years. What makes it unique is its staff of native speaking teachers — who not only share their language but their culture. Their love of teaching is, of course, a given.



"Language immersion" is a method of teaching in which the student is immersed in the target language for a significant period of time. Children start immersion at The International School in preschool or kindergarten, generally

students quickly understand and start to converse. The school teaches a regular American curriculum — math, science, geography etc — in Chinese, Japanese or Spanish. Students study English language arts starting in first grade, and equal or outperform their non-immersion peers on state standardized tests by third grade.

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Being immersed in another language and culture gives students deeper insights into themselves and other ways of thinking. Since The International School teaches Spanish, Japanese and Chinese programs, students experience three diverse cultures connecting constantly. Bonder credits this cultural interaction with creating world citizens who truly embrace diversity.



"It's important to us to create an environment where every family feels honored, respected and welcome," says Bonder. Students attend from all over greater Portland, and over 25 percent receive financial assistance.

Graduating students get to assess their own success on a fifth-grade Capstone trip to China, Spain or Japan. Trips like these enrich a child's education, and prove that their language and cultural

skills are ready for the real world. The students stay with local families, attend local schools, and do the local school homework.

On last year's Capstone trip to China, the students' made such an impression with their linguistic and cultural fluency they were featured in a nationally-televised documentary. They even visited Chinese officials and critiqued an actual Chinese government textbook — the same one used here in Portland.

"We have been immersing children in Chinese since 1997, and now the program is growing like wildfire," says Bonder. "More and more parents feel that knowing Chinese will help their child's future opportunities."

With classes averaging 13 students (19 max), the school is planning to expand into a new building. Support for the program is so strong that 100% of parents contributed to the

building campaign, along with large charitable foundations and many other community members.

Challenging, creative and academically accredited, the school is making great strides. This year the school is starting the process to become one of the first on the west coast to adopt the International

Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme, which is used in over 1500 schools in 128 countries and many Portland-area high schools.

The diverse environment and language immersion programs give The International School its roots; the students, staff

and plans for the future will keep it growing for years to come. To learn more, call 503-226-2496 or visit www.intschool.org.

