

# The Oregonian

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### DOWNTOWN

#### International School marks 20th year

More than 500 students and staff members lined up on the street outside the International School one recent morning for hugs and handshakes to kick off the school's 20th anniversary celebration.

"My hand's a little tired, but what a great ceremony," Principal Maria Abad said after the 45-minute event Sept. 17.

Children and staff members embraced, laughed and offered greetings in Chinese, Japanese and Spanish to symbolize the cultural diversity and multilingual approach to teaching at the private school.

Starting as young as age 3, students are plunged into a full-day immersion program. School officials hold to the philosophy that children can learn a new language quickly if they start early.



JOE FITZGIBBON/SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

**Staff members at Portland's International School line up Sept. 17 to give students hugs and handshakes, an annual event that this year also celebrated the school's 20th anniversary.**

The International School is also the state's first elementary approved for the rigorous International Baccalaureate program, which calls on students to maintain high academic standards in a challenging, in-

quiry-based curriculum.

"We were teaching IB a full two years before we received final approval," said Alfonso Orsini, school director. "Parents and students have gotten solidly behind the program,

and it's really making a difference in the way we approach class work."

After fifth-grade students complete their final year of studies, they travel as a group to China, Japan, Mexico or Spain to spend two weeks practicing their language skills and experiencing their adopted culture firsthand.

"I'm excited 'cause I get to go to Spain where I will live with a family for a week," said 10-year-old Cat Marcus, as she prepared to join her classmates for the annual handshake. Before charging outside, she said, "I tell the little kids that shaking hands helps them get to know all of the teachers in the school."

The International School is at 25 S.W. Sherman St. Tuition runs about \$12,300 a year, and about 25 percent of students receive some degree of financial aid, Orsini said.

— Joe Fitzgibbon,  
Special to The Oregonian