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John Stanford International School in Seattle

by Michele Anciaux Aoki and Sue Ranney

The Vision

When Superintendent John Stanford, the inspirational leader of Seattle Public Schools from 1995 to 1998, arrived in Seattle, he quickly observed that one of the District's biggest challenges was potentially one of its greatest assets: the presence of dozens of languages spoken by children and families in the Seattle Public Schools. As he thought about how to create a world-class public school system, he envisioned an international school focusing on language and culture that would prepare students for success at school, in their communities, and in the world. In such a school, each child would have the opportunity to learn more than one language and culture.

When John unexpectedly died of leukemia in 1998, the school was just in the planning stages. But under the leadership of principal Karen Kodama, and with the support of the Seattle School Board, the new superintendent, Joseph Olchefske, the Latona school community, committed members of the planning team, and a federal magnet grant, John's dream became a reality. In fall, 2000, the John Stanford International School at Latona Campus opened in a newly remodeled building, becoming the first international school in Seattle Public Schools.

Language Immersion

At the core of the international school is the content-based partial immersion language program. Currently, kindergarten and first grade children spend half of each school day learning math and science in Spanish. In fall, 2001, Japanese half-day immersion will be added so that one class of kindergartners will learn in Spanish and one in Japanese. Each year, the immersion program will extend into the next grade until partial immersion is offered to all children grades K-5.

(Note: Current students in grades 2-5 receive about 30-40 minutes of Spanish instruction (FLES - Foreign Language in Elementary School) each day. The FLES program will be phased out as the language immersion program expands.)

The school also serves as one of the Seattle School District's Bilingual Orientation Centers (BOC) and acts as a bilingual center for English as a Second Language (ESL) students. The presence of children who are native speakers of languages other than English enriches the entire school community. At the same time, these children share with the children in the Spanish immersion program the experience of being immersed in learning a new language.

A great deal of thought and preparation went into launching the language immersion program. The language planning team had many questions: Is it better to do full-day or half-day (partial) immersion? What is the impact of immersion on mastering English language arts? Is it really possible for a child to learn content like math and science in a language that they don't even speak yet?

We found the answers to these questions by visiting other international schools and schools with language immersion programs, including Portland International and Richmond Elementary in Portland, OR; Sheridan Elementary in Tacoma, WA; Key Elementary in Arlington, VA; and Burnt Mills Elementary in Maryland, to name a few. We also brought out one of the leading Spanish language immersion teachers in the country, Regla Armengol from Fairfax County, VA, to work directly with our teachers and conduct a language immersion "boot camp" in August, 2000.

In May 2001, the school plans to bring out a team from the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) in Washington, DC, to administer an early language learning oral proficiency assessment for the K-1 immersion students. This will provide valuable data on how the children are acquiring the language and what we need to do to continue to improve the program. The video interviews will be a treasured souvenir for the children and their families of the first year of language acquisition and an invaluable tool for training future immersion teachers at the school.

An important goal of early language learning experiences is to foster in children the capacity--skill and desire--to learn a new language. We observed this first hand a few weeks ago when we brought in the Japanese teacher applicants to present a sample lesson in the K-1 classrooms. As one candidate presented a lesson on magnetism to the 1st graders, the interview committee watched in amazement. The children were simply riveted, totally attentive to what was being presented to them even though it was all in Japanese. Within a few minutes they were answering "yes" and "no" in Spanish (since that is the second language they knew already). A few minutes later they were beginning to repeat the Japanese phrases for "it attracts" or "it repels." They were fearless and totally engaged. After the lesson, their English teacher asked them about what they had learned. She was delighted to see how much science they had learned, and also Japanese. This is the promise of early language learning in an immersion setting.

International Education

The goal of international education at the school is to help children gain a "global perspective" in three areas:

- **Global Challenges:** Examine and evaluate global issues, problems, and challenges
- **Culture and World Areas:** Study and experience human differences and commonalities
- **Global Connections:** Recognize and analyze the connections between the United States and the World

The school has adopted the Tahoma Integrated World Communities curriculum. Each grade level studies certain areas of the world in depth, such as Australia, South America, or Asia, sharing what they have learned with the rest of the school.

The arts have proven to be a powerful vehicle for studying culture and global connections. Through a partnership with the Seattle International Children's Festival, the John Stanford International School, together with Hamilton International Middle School, formed an International Arts Consortium to apply for a grant from the Washington State Arts Commission's Community Consortia Program. The Consortium includes artists and art organizations, curriculum specialists, and local businesses who have helped fund the project.

During the first semester, the Consortium focused on Indian folk arts; a concentration chosen to complement special resources and a performance available through the Seattle International Children's Festival. During the second semester, the focus is shifting to Hispanic arts, to complement the school's Spanish language curriculum. K-1 students will sing folk songs from Hispanic culture (all instruction in Spanish); grades 2-3 students will construct Mexican masks; grades 4-5 students will choreograph and dance with an Ecuadorian dance artist and director. In May, all Stanford school students will attend performances at the Seattle International Children's Festival by two international companies, Kunjban and the Shiv Shakti Dance Party from India and Juan-Carlos Formell from Cuba. Grammy nominee Formell will also do workshops at Hamilton Middle School (a project funded by the Seattle Arts Commission) and is scheduled to perform on May 11th at a joint community event.

Literacy has provided another focus for making international connections with children in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. In the Mexico Literacy Project, spearheaded by Andrea Leary and Valerie Vogel, in conjunction with the Seattle Children's Museum, children at the Stanford School are creating books, in English and Spanish, to give to the children at schools in Puerto Vallarta. The possibilities for the project continue to grow, with the establishment of a fund for donations to help the Mexican schools acquire technology to support

email exchanges between the two countries.

With the aid of technology at the Stanford school, we are making electronic connections with schools in Mexico, South Africa, Viet Nam, Scotland, Australia, Ecuador, plus schools around the U.S. Students in grades 4-5 are producing an electronic newsletter that they exchange with schools around the world.

High Academic Standards

At the John Stanford International School, learning a second language and gaining a global perspective are centerpieces of the educational system. However, we are committed to helping our students achieve academic excellence in all the traditional skills, such as reading, writing, and communication, as well as disciplines, such as math, social studies, science, health and fitness, and the arts. Language and culture are not an "add-ons" at this school, but, rather, part of the path to achieving high academic standards in all areas.

To guide us, we have the benefit of articulated content standards and benchmarks from our Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements and the Seattle School District Standards. In the area of world languages, our state and district do not currently have any standards defined. Therefore, we have been guided by the National Standards for Foreign Language and the excellent Foreign/World Language Frameworks defined by states, such as Nebraska and New Jersey.

Partnership with the University of Washington

In 1999, University of Washington President Dick McCormick identified the John Stanford International School as one of the UW's five K-12 initiatives. He appointed faculty and staff members to a new International School Committee of the International Faculty Council. Six goals were identified for the partnership:

- Design imaginative new curricula with an international focus
- Link to Internet2 (new super-fast version of the Internet)
- Provide educational opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students
- Create an educational laboratory for faculty and student researchers
- Extend international curricula into middle and high schools
- Identify school partners around the world

It has been a new experience for a K-5 school to work so closely with

university faculty, staff, and students. Already two UW grad students are working on proposals for research into language acquisition in the immersion program. The University's U-Wired program is providing training in technology for the Stanford teachers and consultation on implementing technology at the school. As part of our School-to-Career emphasis, we offer a Mentoring program, supervised by Andrea Leary, Community Liaison, that links UW students to service learning opportunities with individual students and classrooms at the Stanford School. The UW students may come as interns or from Work Study, America Reads, or other programs. For example, students from third year Spanish classes at the UW are obtaining service learning credits by volunteering in the Spanish immersion classrooms.

The Language Learning Center, which provides technological and pedagogical resources, information, and services to the University of Washington community for the teaching, learning, and researching of languages and cultures, has provided valuable guidance to the school in developing the language immersion program. The Language Learning Center is also working with the school to address issues of multilingual computing (such as typing in Japanese).

The University of Washington Speaker's Bureau provides speakers on a wide variety of topics, from community-based projects in Mexico to Japanese politics and indigenous textiles in Guatemala. Over the past year and a half, the web team has worked to develop a searchable database to help teachers at the school match their needs with the skills and interests of UW faculty and staff.

Partnerships with Families and Community

Parents and families are an integral part of the school. The John Stanford International School made an early to commitment to working with families as partners in their children's education by joining the National Network of Partnership Schools under the direction of Dr. Joyce Epstein at Johns Hopkins University. Dr. Epstein is one of the nation's leading researchers in bringing together schools, families, and communities. She has taken a personal interest in how Washington State moves forward as a state member of the National Network. The John Stanford International School is the first Seattle public school to join the National Network.

As a member of the National Network, the school has access to valuable training and information about how to partner effectively with families and the community. This year, the school established an Action Team for School-Family-Community Partnerships, whose purpose is to develop and enhance partnerships between the school, families, and the community to help achieve our school's goals.

The Action Team works with the Leadership Team (led by the Principal) and the PTSA to ensure that our school's strategic goals tap into the resources of effective school-family-community partnerships. The Action Team is guided by the six keys to involvement:

- **Parenting:** Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.
- **Communicating:** Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.
- **Volunteering:** Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs.
- **Learning at Home:** Involve families with their children in learning at home, including homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions.
- **Decision-Making:** Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, and other parent organizations.
- **Collaborating with the Community:** Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community.

Recently, the Action Team and PTSA cosponsored a "Celebrate Literacy at Home" event at the school. A primary goal of the event was to attract non-English speaking parents of children in the Bilingual Orientation Center, parents who often do not make it to school events. The school was well-prepared with lots of activities for the kids, demonstrations in Spanish (the main language spoken by families in the BOC) of how to make reading interesting for children, books in Spanish from the Seattle Public Library (as well as application forms in Spanish for getting a library card), School-Home Links from the U.S. Department of Education Compact for Reading in Spanish, and even a "Cozy Hot Cocoa Corner."

"Do What You Say You Will Do"

In spring, 2000, it was hard to imagine that the school would be in full operation in just a few months. (It wasn't even clear that the building would be ready!) Throughout, we have been guided by John Stanford's favorite phrase: "Do what you say you will do." Another guiding principle has been "Expect more, get more." Indeed, the more we've expected of ourselves, our community, and our students, the more we have gotten.

References

For further information, visit these websites:

John Stanford International School

Languages at the John Stanford International School:
Dec. 2000 issue (pdf documents)

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Mexico Literacy project:
Mexican Consulate Office in Seattle
Jalisco State Association
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