

Global Connections

the newsletter of the Ottawa-Carleton Education Network

Volume X Issue I

Spring 2021

This past semester OCENET and OCDSB schools hosted international students from **47** countries around the world...with international students attending **22** high schools and **38** elementary schools throughout the OCDSB.

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The Divisions of OCENET

OCENET refreshes its website with new look and features

OCENET is pleased to announce a major facelift and refresh of its website. OCENET staff member Minsook Kang (Marketing & Communications) has worked hard for the past several months to make the new website not only more “clean” and contemporary in appearance, but also providing access to many more resources for international students, their parents, educational agents, and educators at home and abroad.

Global Partners project expands to more elementary schools

by Sean Oussoren,
International Education
Coordinator

We may not be able to travel right now but thanks to technology, Grade 5/6 students from a number of OCDSB schools are making connections around the world as part of OCENET's Global Explorers program. Initiated last May with stu-

dents from Castor Valley ES, the project has now expanded to involve classes at Half Moon Bay and Pleasant Park schools.

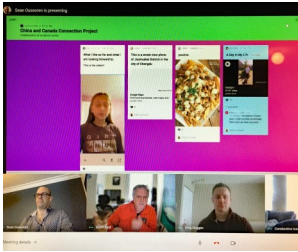
With a focus on better understanding each other's cultures and coming up with solutions to global issues as part of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, these students are

actively collaborating with learners from Chengdu, China.

Over several virtual gatherings, the 23 students in Ms. Karen Snell's Grade 5 class at Pleasant Park PS have engaged with students from Shude Elementary and their teachers, Ms. Niki, Ms. Sepal and Ms. Lily. The first meeting started with

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Global Partners project expands to more schools (cont'd)



Students and educators involved in the Global Partners project use an app platform called Padlet for easily sharing ideas, video and resources between Ottawa and Chengdu partner schools. In the image above, several OCENET staff members can be seen participating in a tutorial on best practices for using Padlet

“It was very interesting to learn about what they [the Chengdu students] like there and how it’s still similar to what we do here in some ways, but in some other ways, we do things very differently.”

*Student, Grade 5
Pleasant Park PS*

introductions and sharing their favourite objects which was met with enthusiasm and many questions. In the words of teacher Ms. Snell: “(The students) have already started to feel a connection with the students from Chengdu after just one meeting. They had so many exciting observations and reflections to share (if it were up to them they would meet every week — everyday for some!).” Building on the successful first meeting, students shared aspects of different cultural celebrations including photos, fireworks, food, and a live demonstration of paper cutting to mark Lunar New Year.

A visit from the Chinese Embassy’s Deputy Chief of Mission and Minister, Ms. Chen Mingjian, was well received and generated many fantastic questions. In addition to future meetings, Ms. Snell’s students will have the chance to learn Chinese through the [OCDSB’s International and Indigenous Language Program](#).

The response by both students and parents has been very positive. In the view of one Pleasant Park student: “It was very interesting to learn about what they like to do there and how it’s still similar to what we do here, but in some other ways we do things very differently.” Parents too are seeing the benefits of this type of international connection: “Our son is not typically very expressive but he had so much to tell us after he left the meeting, including how to say “hello” in Chinese. We

wish to thank you for making the world a little smaller for our students and providing them with this opportunity to see the similarities between themselves and children from another country and culture.”

Across the city at Half Moon Bay PS, principal Ms. Aisling O’Donnell was one of a group of OCDSB educators who travelled to Chengdu in 2019 to sign a friendship school agreement. Part of this connection has been the sharing between nine enthusiastic students in Mr. Darryl Smith’s Grade 6 class and students in Ms. Crystal and Ms. Tiffany’s classes at Panda Road Elementary School. The first virtual gathering gave students the chance to share their interests including favourite books, sports, foods, shows and hobbies. Another meeting focused on traditions and different ways of celebrating — with

OCDSB students learning about the many aspects of Lunar New Year and several phrases in Mandarin. A third gathering allowed students to discuss and share solutions to various global issues, from ending homelessness to protecting the environment and taking care of our oceans and animals. Mr. Smith sees the benefits of the Global Partners project for his students: “The Grade 6 students at Half Moon Bay have been excited by this opportunity. They are eager to connect, share, and discuss their ideas with students from another culture, another country. They have begun to make connections, finding common interests in literature, history, science and food. Framing the learning around the United Nations sustainable goals allows for greater independent learning that adds depth and personal context to the process.

Interested in setting up a global partnership for your students?



Please check out our Global Partners page
www.ocenet.ocdsb.ca

OCENET innovates to support international students during Covid

by **Kari Hanes**
Manager, Programs

The 2020-2021 school year has definitely been a different kind of year for international students. Like everywhere else, OCENET has had to modify and reconfigure our programs to accommodate all the changes that have taken place over this pandemic year.

This year has definitely been a challenge for us, but more than that, it has been a difficult year for our international students who are far from home and trying to adjust and adapt to a school year and a cultural experience in an uncertain and unpredictable world. There are few friends to be made, little social interaction to be had, and no gatherings for school or social events. It has been a year of Google Classroom, Zoom, and Google Meet. Video chats have taken the place of in person get-togethers, parties with friends and family, and human interaction.

Through regular and ongoing contact and discussions with our international students, we have learned that their greatest challenges have been ways to find coping mechanisms, the effects of long periods inside on their mental health, missing family, making new friends, being alone with no real sense of belonging, and the realization that any normalcy will most likely not return in 2021.

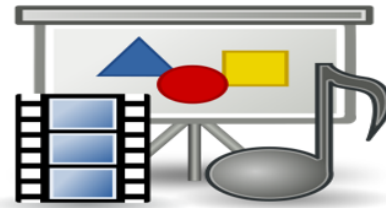
When we speak with them about their challenges and struggles, we also ask them how they are managing and what strategies they are using to lessen the Covid impact.

They are a resilient bunch these international students of ours! They are “learning to knit and cook”; they “talk to everyone”; they discover their own novel approaches: “I sometimes use the classroom and find the name of my peers and search for them on social media and start a conversation with them. Some of them are great and are really eager to make new friends”; others try to “visit places to see the beauty of Ottawa” but most, we believe, share this student’s sentiment: “I am trying to make the best out of the time I have in Canada... Having a good time with the people you have and the things you can do to make this year as fun as possible.”

OCENET recognized early on in the pandemic that additional ‘fun’ support would be needed for our students, especially for those students who couldn’t return home during the summer of 2020 because of the lockdown and new travel restrictions. It was through that initial realization that OCENET decided to offer something very enjoyable for the students, something to take their minds off their situation if only for a few hours.

OCENET sponsored a QuarantArt Contest and a COVID Cooking contest over the summer and then

CALL TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS



COV-ART CONTEST #2

DO YOU HAVE A SPECIAL TALENT THAT IS HELPING YOU THROUGH COVID-19?

Let that talent shine by joining our COV-ART Contest sponsored by OCENET!

Song writing, rapping, original poems, musical compositions, original artwork, short story, amazing photo, baking/cooking masterpiece, skit, comedy routine, magic act...or any other artistic medium...be original...be creative...be fun!

Join the contest, submit your work, and be eligible for a great prize! Contest is open to all international students...elementary and secondary!

Submit to: ocenet@ocdsb.ca

Deadline for submissions: May 15th, 2021

To see last year's winners, visit [ocenet quarantart contest](#)

as the pandemic situation failed to improve into the fall, OCENET decided to host a virtual discussion group with our international students to share ideas and suggestions for other virtual activities. Our combined suggestions have led to virtual scavenger hunts, games night, movie nights, an amazing workshop through the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity, Anishinabe drawing classes through Wabano, and another Art Contest (COV-ART). In collaboration with our international students we are currently ‘in talks’ to start a virtual book club and a Culture Sharing Evening.

These virtual events have been as interesting and fun for OCENET as they have been for our students. Our plan and commitment is to continue these events long after COVID has left the building.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Apply for the Lynch-Getty Global Student Award

APPLICATION DEADLINE
April 19, 2021

Go to:
www.ocenet.ca/en/page/show/lynch-getty

International Certificate Program students explore the world....from home!

by Sean Oussoren
International Education
Coordinator

One of the requirements of the [International Certificate Program](#) (ICP) asks students to gain a minimum of 100 hours of intercultural experience. Before Covid, this often involved travel as part of school trips, family travel or exchanges. Meeting this ICP requirement did not look very likely for many students when the pandemic hit. Thankfully, the students have done an amazing job of pivoting from exploring the world in person to demonstrating their curiosity from home.

Students have taken full advantage of technology to attend workshops hosted by their peers on a range of topics including Morocco, Japanese art and fashion,

Islamophobia, Iran, Black hair, Malawi, Sri Lankan food, and more. By providing students the opportunity to learn from and with their peers, there has been a sense of increased engagement and enjoyment with many aspects of this style of learning.

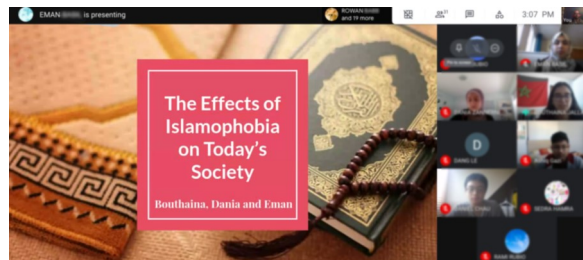
In addition, students have the chance every day to attend different virtual events hosted by tour guides around the world on the website [virtualtrips.io](#). Short and

informative, these on-the-ground experiences provide an opportunity to see and hear what life is really like in various places as well as ask questions of the tour guides.

And finally, ICP students have been taking advantage of collaborative learning opportunities with students from around the world. In November, four ICP students attended the Jeju Youth International Forum meeting virtually with 150 others from 27

cities around the world to come up with solutions to global issues. Other opportunities to learn have been provided by the [Korean Cultural Centre](#) and the [Embassy of Japan in Canada](#) for students to learn about a range of topics from art to food, animation and music.

Many ICP students look forward to travelling again when it's safe to do so. In the meantime, their creativity, flexibility and willingness to adapt to the current realities during Covid have been inspiring to witness and share in.



The pandemic has necessitated that ICP students present their assignments in new ways, and a benefit is that their work is shared to a wider and larger audience from many schools throughout the OCDSB. Student topics tackle a wide range of global issues and raise cultural awareness.

OCENET moves new student assessments and orientation online

by Greg Duggan
Director of Studies, Young
People's Language School

Despite the Covid-19 global pandemic, some students continue to pursue education overseas. The OCDSB has welcomed over 100 such additions to the international student program this year.

However, the process of welcoming and acclimating these new students has looked different this year than in the past. New international students arriving for the fall and winter semesters were assessed,

provided their orientation, and registered for their schools online, a change from the in-person process usually used.

OCENET introduced new Reading, Writing, and Math assessments that can be completed remotely, and assessors conducted student speaking assessments online. Jill Doherty, lead assessor, says of the new process, "While the assessment team misses the camaraderie of working together in-person, they feel the

online format provides a distraction-free setting that works well for assessing listening and speaking skills."

Daily online orientation sessions focused on various aspects of the international student experience, including school life, homestay, and things to do in Ottawa. Kari Hanes, OCENET Project Leader, feels that students benefited from the online orientation sessions, saying, "They kept our new students engaged and busy during

what could have been a lonely quarantine, allowed us more time to spend with them, and gave us a better understanding of their needs."

While things generally went well with the online assessment and orientation process, feedback from schools indicates that there is room for improvement. OCENET Operations manager, Kevin Orange, says "As a team, we are committed to improving this new process. We will be working with schools to ensure that their needs are met and to make the process as seamless as possible."

In their own words: International students enrolled in the ICP

Each issue of *Global Connections* highlights the experiences of international students or educators who visit Ottawa and attend OCDSB schools through OCENET. In this issue the focus is on three international students who are enrolled in the OCDSB International Certificate Program (ICP).

Tomona from Japan



An international student from Japan, Tomona has been in Canada for one year. She is in Grade 10 at Bell HS. Tomona became interested in studying in Ottawa because of its cultural diversity; she also likes that her school allows her to choose her courses of study and that Ottawa is a safe place to live. Despite arriving shortly after the Covid lockdown started last year, Tomona has adjusted very well, including enjoying living with her Canadian host family. For the first several months she had to attend all her classes online which made it difficult to make new friends, but since September she has been attending in person classes. She feels that her English language skills have improved immensely and is getting more and more confident with her speaking skills every day. She continues to improve her language level by reading books and watching movies and TV series in English. She says that she has not felt homesick since she keeps regular contact with family and friends. Tomona is also getting involved in school life, and recently served as a presenter in an orientation program for new international students. In the future, she intends to study social sciences at university.

Kaining from China



Kaining is from China and excited to be studying in Canada because of its natural environment and his wish to experience the world from a different perspective. His reasons for wanting to study in Ottawa: "I was fascinated with the history of the city of Ottawa as well as its importance in Canada and around the world." He was also keen to learn in Ontario's highly regarded school system since it allows students to choose their own courses tailored to individual interests and academic strengths. The National Gallery of Canada and the Canadian Museum of Nature are two of his favourite places to visit in Ottawa. Kaining has found the pandemic a challenge as it severely limited opportunities to make new friends at school. While he liked some of the flexibility that online learning provided, he is now pleased to be attending in school classes. When not completing school homework, he has found that keeping active through running, hiking, and cycling has helped him during Covid, as well as frequent phone calls to family and friends. While the isolation during the lockdown was not always the best, he feels it provided him time alone to think about his goals for the future.

Cindy from Vietnam



In Grade 12 at Gloucester HS, Cindy has been an international student in Ottawa for two years and she will be graduating this year. Her home country is Vietnam, and originally, she intended to come to Canada to study at university, but instead chose to come to Ottawa early to help prepare herself for future university studies in Canada. Cindy decided to stay in Canada throughout the pandemic lockdown early last year and participated in online learning. She found online learning challenging at times, and now is attending in person classes. She finds her teachers very helpful: "My teachers are always available to answer any of my questions after class." Cindy has made friends at school and consequently she uses English a lot more and her English language skills have improved. She is also very actively involved in school life at Gloucester HS. Cindy is a member of the Key Club, Link Crew, and she is also enrolled in the International Certificate Program (ICP): "I want to have as many experiences as possible throughout my high school time. I find the ICP interesting because I have a chance to know more about other cultures and languages." Cindy plans to pursue a degree in accounting after graduation this year.

Meet OCENET: Donna Bass



- Donna Bass,
Academic Advisor

1. What are some of your main roles at OCENET?

As an academic advisor for international students at 10 OCDSB secondary schools, I am the main liaison between OCENET and the students and staff at those schools.

Since the pandemic began a year ago, I'm grateful that my role hasn't changed drastically - apart from not being able to visit schools, which I miss the most. I've found, however, that keeping in touch with school staff by phone and email is proving to be quite efficient. Less contact in-person with students is certainly the most disappointing aspect of Covid-19 safety measures, but luckily I'm able to monitor academic progress regularly through my contact with school staff and by reviewing students' report card results each quadmester.

I share information about student progress with my OCENET colleagues and

communicate directly with students, education agents, custodians, and family. Strong links between all stakeholders is critical to OCENET programming and in encouraging student success.

Another key role I have at OCENET involves initial assessment of newly-arrived international students to the OCDSB. This year has been quite challenging, but I'm proud that OCENET has worked diligently to develop an effective online assessment process.

2. What aspects of your job do you enjoy most?

I most enjoy my interaction with OCENET colleagues, school staff, and students. Working to ensure student success in schools; and participating in, and contributing to, various OCENET initiatives is extremely rewarding.

3. What have been

some of your accomplishments at OCENET that you are most proud of?

I'm proud of the contributions I've been able to make in developing a robust initial assessment and intake process at OCENET for secondary students arriving from all around the world. It's especially satisfying to then observe how well most of these young learners settle in to life in Ottawa, adapting to and thriving in a new environment.

Knowing that the vast majority benefit greatly from studying here - whether short term or for graduation - I feel proud of the role I've played in their positive OCENET experiences.

4. What are some of your interests outside of work?

I've been an avid reader my entire life, and so I tend to "inhale" books on a regular basis. Keeping up with current events is another interest, along with watching favourite TV shows and movies.

OCENET staff adjust to working from home during Covid



All OCENET staff members "connected" for a recent staff luncheon in front of their computers, followed by a very competitive bingo game!

by **Dahlia Liwsze**
OCENET Admin. Assistant

It has been a year since Covid changed the world, but OCENET has been working through it.

"Working from home is OK, but sometimes I tend to feel a bit lonely," says Vicente Conte, OCENET Office Coordinator. "At the beginning of the pandemic, I was very stressed about the unknown, and it was very difficult for me to discon-

nect from my work. I was spending many hours in front of the computer... and wanted to go back to the office to spend time with my co-workers."

Program Coordinator Chau Hoang agrees. It was "quite a challenge" at first, but she now has set up "a comfortable home office." What helps her and Conte cope is keeping their routines. Katherine Noble, Pro-

gram Coordinator, says at some point during her day, "Whatever the weather, it's nice to have some fresh air." Talking on the phone and having video calls after work with family and friends has helped Noble feel connected. And Conte has started learning Italian, which will help when he visits relatives. Hoang adds, "This has been a great opportunity for me to spend more time with my children and to prepare them healthier meals, as well as practice my piano."

A peek into culture peaks student interest in international languages

Through many partnerships with schools overseas, OCENET has supported international language learning for OCDSB students and staff.

OCENET has many international connections with schools overseas and they often request an intracultural exchange with OCDSB schools. Sometimes these intracultural exchange projects are initiated by OCENET and other times requested by OCDSB principals and teachers.

Everyone recognizes the benefits of these intracultural exchange projects for students. An interesting phenomenon tends to occur with each of these projects; the students start to learn about a particular culture, make friendships and connections with the students in the exchange country, and then they want to learn their language.

A recent collaboration with schools in Chengdu, China, has elementary level students at Castor Valley ES, Pleasant Park PS, and Half Moon Bay PS (see pages 1 and 2 of this edition of *Global Connections*) are presently learning basic Chinese and exchanging ideas with their counterparts overseas.

A similar language learning exchange is currently in place with French as the focus between OCDSB elementary students in Ottawa and Aix-Marseille, Provence, France.

Here is where the support of the OCDSB Continuing Education's International and Indigenous Languages Program (ILLP) has been a key partner in arranging the language instruction based on this student interest.

Through Continuing Education and under the leadership of Principal Anne McKillop-Ostrum, the OCDSB offers opportunities for both elementary and secondary students to learn languages besides English and French. Nectaria Karagiozis is the Program Officer in Continuing Education responsible for the International and Indigenous Languages Program and she along with OCENET may arrange for language instruction to enhance the exchange projects where there is sufficient student interest. In this way, students

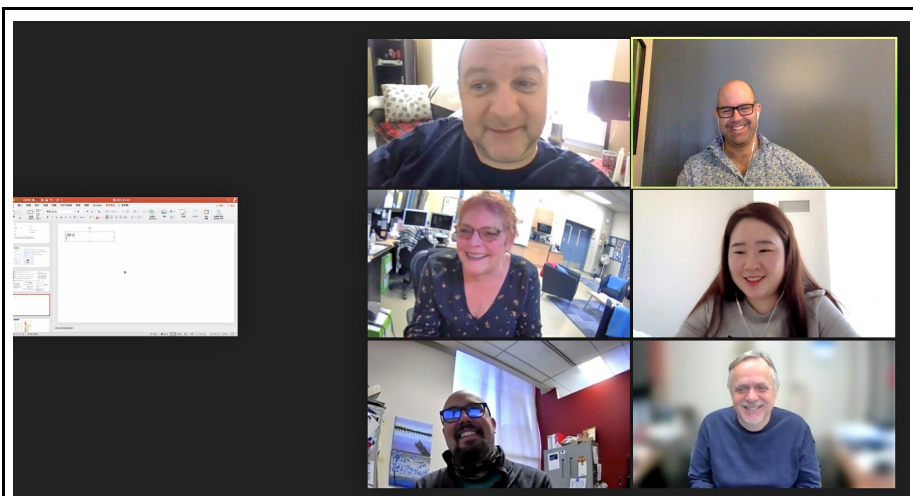
will benefit from a deeper understanding of the culture through language.

As these elementary school students continue in school, it is more likely they will be open to additional language learning and be more culturally aware as they enter high school. Research has shown that brain development is affected by language competency, such that when students become competent in one language, they acquire the structures to learn another language more easily. For students with English or French as their first language, learning an additional language opens doors to new opportunities, whether for student exchanges, gap year travel, or learning about another culture.

OCENET values the connections between

language and cultural awareness, and strongly supports student acquisition of international languages. Programs such as the OCDSB International Certificate Program administered by OCENET's International Education Coordinator includes learning an international language component in addition to English or French. Learning international languages is a key to supporting the goals of global citizenship and cultural competency.

If your school wishes to explore a partnership with another school overseas and to include learning an international language as part of the intracultural exchange, please contact OCENET's Executive Director, Geoff Best.



A screenshot of several OCENET staff members enjoying their Chinese lessons at their virtual class for one hour each Wednesday with language tutor Chang Liu (centre right).



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OCENET Bulletin Board

TEACHERS: Get to know a colleague from Spain this coming summer!
by Constantine Ioannou, Program Director, Short-term/Group Programs

OCENET is happy to announce that it will be running a training program for secondary teachers of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) from Madrid, Spain this July!

The program will be offered online and is the first program being delivered to educators of the Spanish capital. Teachers will pursue a program that will include 2 to 3 online sharing sessions with their Canadian colleagues. Each session is approximately 90 minutes long and will be done through online meetings on either Google Meet or Zoom.

The educators from Madrid teach in a wide variety of subject areas and are currently teaching their courses in English (bilingual programs) so they are particularly interested in getting ideas from colleagues on how they differentiate and modify their content for English language learners (ELLs). The level of English of your Spanish colleagues is very high so no Spanish skills are needed.

Please email Constantine Ioannou (Program Director) at constantine@ocdsb.ca to indicate your interest and include information on your teaching areas and experience with ELLs. An honorarium will be provided.

Divisions of OCENET



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If you have an international education story that should be included in *Global Connections*, let us know.

Please direct any comments, questions, or suggestions to:
ross.laing@ocdsb.ca



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