

This past semester **OCENET** and **OCDSB** schools hosted international students from **48** countries around the world...with international students attending **21** high schools and **27** elementary schools throughout the **OCDSB**.

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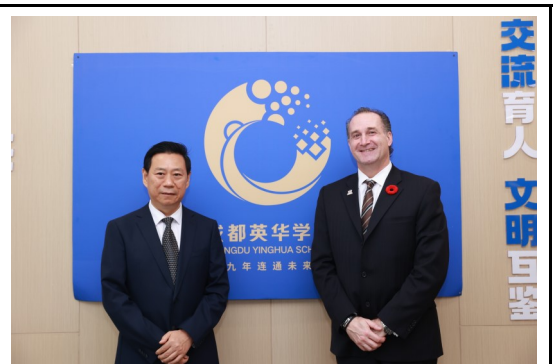
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## OCDSB & OCENET = International education leadership



An exchange of gifts at the Memorandum of Understanding signing ceremony in Chengdu, China with (l-r) OCENET Executive Director, Geoff Best, OCDSB Director of Education Pino Buffone and DAI Zhiyong, Director, Chengdu Education Bureau



(l-r) DU Kuyang, Director of the Chenghua Education Bureau, with Pino Buffone, OCDSB Director of Education. The Chenghua Education Bureau hosted the visit and has been a partner with the OCDSB and OCENET for eight years.

## A conversation with Director of Education Pino Buffone: International education initiatives at the OCDSB

### As the new OCDSB Director of Education, what directions do you see international education heading in the future?

"I am really excited to be back at the OCDSB and to continue building upon the strong partnership between our school district and OCENET. I am also excited about the future of international education in the OCDSB on several fronts through the following initiatives:

- ◆ continuing to align district initiatives with the international education strategies outlined by the Ontario Ministry of Education;
- ◆ reinforcing the connections with the OCDSB's multi-year 2023-2027 Strategic Plan. In particular, this would include the areas of social responsibility, student wellness, and learning opportunities, whether through short-term excursions, hosting an international student, or going abroad; and
- ◆ supporting student exit outcomes including global awareness, effective communication, and critical thinking when dealing with new cultural contexts."



Meeting the Chinese Ambassador to Canada, H.E. CONG Peiwu, at the Chinese Embassy's Spring Festival Celebration

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## Discussing international education with Pino Buffone (cont'd)

*"I am passionate about international education and looking forward to the future possibilities. The "global awareness" aspects of our educational partnerships brings so many benefits to our students, staff, and school communities."*

- Pino Buffone,  
Director of Education



*Experiencing the cuisine and culture of Chengdu*

**How can the OCDSB and OCENET work collaboratively on international education goals?**

"The OCDSB, along with OCENET, continues to collaborate on achieving international education goals in three key areas:

- ◆ Providing students with opportunities for international experiences, whether through virtual online learning, or through hosting a student on an international exchange, or through travelling abroad.
- ◆ Offering staff opportunities for international experiences, either virtually or in person, to learn about teaching strategies and pedagogy practiced elsewhere, or through extended exchanges for staff overseas.
- ◆ Developing a series of professional learning programs focusing on the many teaching practices we do well at the OCDSB to share with international educators. As an example of what I mean, on the one hand we can showcase the ways in which we address students with special needs, and likewise, we can learn from other educational jurisdictions about how they promote student well-being. These types of two-way partnerships benefit all involved.

I should note that OCENET has helped facilitate many innovative international initiatives through organizing student exchanges, welcoming foreign delegations of educators, sending OCDSB educators overseas, and a signature example of the collaborative partnership is the success of the International Certificate Program."

**What are some of the benefits that students can gain from participating in an international excursion (trip) or an international student exchange whereby a student lives for a time with a host family?**

"These types of experiential learning experiences allow students to gain an appreciation of other cultures, other ways of living, and break down cultural barriers and possible misconceptions. In addition, students learn much about themselves and usually arrive at a new understanding and appreciation of their home country and culture."

**Last November you travelled to Chengdu, China, to establish an international exchange program. The first group of OCDSB students will visit Chengdu in March. How has your visit to Chengdu affected your role in supporting this type of experience for students?**

"Visiting Chengdu reinvigorated my commitment to the possibilities of international education partnerships. We connected with educators in Chengdu who are equally enthusiastic about the Memorandum of Understanding we signed between our school districts which aims to develop both short-term and long-term projects. Through visiting schools and meeting educators in Chengdu I saw firsthand the potential learning opportunities for our students and staff. Chengdu is an example of what I call a "deep partnership" and the eventual goal is to establish several similar "deep partnerships" in different parts of the world to both send and receive students annually."

**One of the criticisms of international travel for students is that there are inequities about which students can participate due to financial disparities among families. How are the OCCSB and OCENET addressing this issue?**

## Discussing international education with Pino Buffone (cont'd)

“This is a key issue. In recent years the OCDSB leadership has focused on the importance of equitable access. There is an opportunity here for the district to be resourceful, an opportunity for ingenuity to be proactive with fundraising initiatives, and opportunities to explore options for payment plans over an extended period to be more affordable. We can reinject some of the funds OCDSB schools receive from OCENET to provide more equitable access to opportunities and we can continue to inform students and parents about student scholarships available through the Education Foundation of Ottawa and bursary funds for educators available through OCENET. In addition, it is necessary for school staff to reach out to students who may be hesitant to sign up for an international experience and provide encouragement and awareness of the resources that may be available. It is also important to recognize the equitable access opportunities for virtual global engagement and classroom partnerships for all OCDSB students in both the elementary and secondary panels. Currently we have such virtual connections with schools in China and France, and are working on similar initiatives with schools in Spain, Tanzania, Morocco and Japan.”

**Another issue that is often raised by parents relates to student safety overseas. What safeguards and protocols are in place to mitigate risk factors?**

“The safety of students and staff is the OCDSB’s first and foremost priority. One of the questions administrators often get from parents regarding safety overseas is “Have you been there?” It’s both a personal question and professional question. It is my goal to have a member of senior staff visit those places where we develop “deep partnerships” to ensure safeguards and organizational structures are in place at a particular location. In reinvigorating international student excursions, we need to revisit policies and procedures for international excursions as well as review public health and safety protocols following lessons learned during the pandemic.”

**What strategies can the OCDSB use to limit the number of days students would miss at their local school to enable them to participate in international experience?**

“What became apparent during the pandemic is that students and teachers can shift to a different mode of learning quite quickly and effectively. With internet connectivity and some flexibility in scheduling assignments and tasks, students can participate in their learning while on a short term or even extended international excursion. Of course, March Break and summer excursions can continue as in the past without affecting attending school in person.”

**Some concluding thoughts...** “For me, it is a privilege to be back at the OCDSB and to work with OCENET. I look forward to building on the great work that has taken place in the past. I am passionate about international education and looking forward to the future possibilities. The “global awareness” aspect of educational partnerships brings so many benefits to our students, staff, and school communities that it is “value added” for our organization.”



OCDSB Director Pino Buffone and Director DU Kuniyang and guests launching the opening of the **Chengdu-Ottawa Youth Exchange Centre Office** during the **Chengdu-Ottawa China and Canada People-to-People Exchange Month** held at Chengdu Yinghua School.

(l-r) XIONG Min, DU Kuniyang, Pino Buffone, Vivian Best, Constantine Ioannou, Geoff Best, WAN Bin, and CHEN Tiejun

**“During my term as Director of Education my hope is to seek out opportunities on several continents ... with the safety and security of students and staff foremost ... that represent the faces of our students.”**

- Pino Buffone,  
Director of Education



Meeting with students at  
Chengdu Yinghua School



## French exchange students learn to make S'mores and more



(l-r) French student Carla with Elizabeth from West Carleton SS



(l-r) Host parent Jennifer, Kaitlin from Earl of March SS, and exchange student Tanguy



(l-r) Lorelei with Arusha from Sir Wilfrid Laurier SS

In early October a group of close to 40 international exchange students from the Provence region of southern France arrived in Ottawa to spend 5 weeks living with an OCDSB partner student and host family while attending an OCDSB secondary school.

Apart from an interruption of a few years due to the pandemic, the French Exchange has been an annual program since the fall of 2018. The main goals of the exchange are to provide opportunities for students to practice language skills and develop intercultural awareness.

During their stay in Canada, the French students attend the home school of their exchange partners and participate in many activities, such as the day at the MacSkimming Out-

door Education Centre as well as attending a hockey game and other events.

In the spring of 2024, 39 OCDSB students from seventeen local schools will

have the opportunity to reunite with their exchange partners and live for 5 weeks with their French host families to experience the second half of the learning exchange.



French students on the Provence international student exchange and their local host partners enjoyed a day of hiking followed by a lunch of hotdogs and S'mores at the MacSkimming Outdoor Education Centre

### International Exchanges

**Explore opportunities for OCDSB students to participate in group or individual exchanges!**

**Visit: <https://ocenet.ocdsb.ca/exchanges>**

**Contact:  
Mr Sean Oussoren  
International Education  
Coordinator**

**613-239-0314, Ext. 2108**

## Young People's Language School (YPLS) students practice English language skills and photography on a "photowalk"



YPLS students along with teacher Paul Donaldson pose using the ramp at the Garden of the Provinces on Wellington St.

As a way to apply English language skills to practical "real world" activities, the students at the YPLS summer program participated in a photography workshop. Following a photog-

raphy presentation by OCENET's International Education Consultant and keen amateur photographer, Ross Laing, the students took their cell phone cameras to use 10 specific techniques for taking better pictures. They learned about checking for background distractions, and using architecture to create a "frame within a frame," among other techniques. The students had a lot of fun and showed they were able to improve their photo skills and enhance their creativity.



YPLS students posing within a "frame within a frame" shot

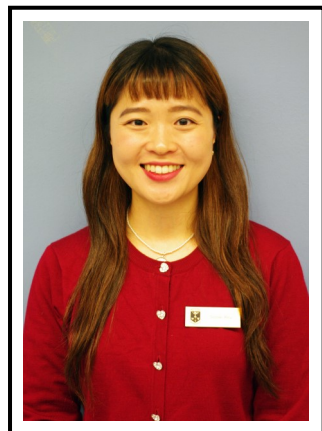


Having fun with a group portrait

## *In their own words: Life as a Visiting International Teacher*

Most issues of *Global Connections* highlight the experiences of OCENET international students in OCDSB schools or visiting educators participating in one of OCENET's teacher training programs.

### Soomi, South Korea



Soomi teaches English at a girls' school on Jeju Island in South Korea. She arrived in Ottawa in mid-September and was assigned to Brookfield High School, which she finds to be a welcoming place. Soomi has been impressed by the way so many students from diverse cultural backgrounds are all learning together, and by the dedication of the teachers to their students. In particular, she has been appreciative of her co-teacher, Michael Kellerman, who has encouraged her to expand the range of her teaching strategies. She feels that Canadians are kind and generous. Her biggest challenge has been "negotiating" Ottawa's transit system. During the Christmas break, Soomi travelled to Vancouver and also ventured north to Yellowknife. She values the impact the international teacher training program will have on her teaching.

**"South Korea is a very homogeneous society and with so much cultural diversity among the students here, I am learning to be better at accepting differences."**

- Soomi  
international teacher from  
South Korea

### International teachers learn new teaching strategies



Brookfield HS English teacher Michael Kellerman with Soomi following team teaching an ESL class with students from around the world

Teachers across the globe recognize the value of learning from other teaching colleagues.

OCENET organizes teacher training programs where visiting teachers receive an orientation to the Ontario curriculum and current teaching strategies, and assigned to OCDSB schools to turn the theory into practice.

Last September twelve experienced teachers from South Korea arrived in Ottawa to participate in school placements for one semester.

One of these teachers was Soomi and she was paired with Michael Kellerman, who has assisted as an exceptional co-teacher to international educators for several years.

At first Soomi observed Michael's classes and noted that his teaching style was much more "informal" than hers and that of most Korean teachers. She was not used to seeing students sit in desks arranged in a circle. She was not used to a classroom where students were encouraged to express their personal opinions. She was not used to teaching boys and students from diverse cultures. Gradually, she started to team teach with Michael and came to recognize the impact that modifying her teaching style could have in helping students learn.

Soomi's initial concerns about adapting her teaching style eased. She aims to incorporate much of what she has learned in Ottawa with her students in South Korea.

**"Working with other teaching colleagues is the spark that you need to reinvent your teaching and how you are in class with students."**

- Michael Kellerman,  
English and ESL teacher  
from Brookfield HS



Soomi was new to the traditions of costumes for Halloween, so Michael introduced her to a local thrift store where they found matching lumberjack shirts.



## OCDSB students experience Japan in summer exchange program



Students from four local OCDSB secondary schools at the Ottawa Airport prior to boarding their plane for a 2 week student exchange visit to Japan. Along with the 34 students is trip leader and OCENET International Education Coordinator, Mr. Sean Oussoren

OCENET has an important role in encouraging OCDSB students to become engaged global citizens, both locally and abroad. Part of this goal is achieved through initiating and supporting international students exchange opportunities.

OCENET has been involved in a student exchange program with the Yamate-Gakuin School in Yokohama, Japan, since 2016.

The Japanese students visited Ottawa during the spring

of 2023, and this past summer 34 OCDSB students from Gloucester HS, Cairine Wilson SS, Colonel By SS, and Canterbury HS had the opportunity to travel to Japan to reconnect with their Japanese friends.

The Canadian students were immersed in Japanese culture and participated in a wide range of activities during their two week visit in July and August. Students learned about traditional Japanese music and dance and had the chance to wear

customary yukata robes. They also enjoyed trying many types of Japanese cuisine throughout their educational trip.

While in Japan, the students had a “real world” opportunity to practice their Japanese language skills from credit courses they had studied in their Ottawa schools. The students also had the chance to experience Japanese culture and traditions firsthand by being billeted with host families. While

the students stayed in Yokohama with their host families for the majority of their time in Japan, the Ottawa students also spent time exploring many famous landmarks when in Tokyo.

International student exchanges provide opportunities to make connections with people from other parts of the world and expand a student’s horizons. Often enduring friendships are formed which last a lifetime.

## Carleton University hosts OCDSB International Certificate Program students



Professor Marylynn Stickley presented a mini lecture to the ICP students in the Azrieli Theatre

On November 22, over 120 International Certificate Program (ICP) stu-

dents and their ICP Advisors attended a special day of events at Carleton University. The day began with an overview of Carleton’s Bachelor of Global & International Studies (BGInS) degree which is of interest to OCDSB students enrolled in the ICP. Faculty from the BGInS program informed students about the entrance requirements and

the course content which is interdisciplinary in nature. The BGInS program includes an opportunity to take part in an overseas learning placement. Three current BGInS students told the audience about their overseas placements in countries such as Ghana, France, and Ireland where they worked in outreach pro-

grams. The BGInS degree offers many diverse career paths.

The BGInS program is well suited for ICP students who wish to explore their interest in international affairs and global citizenship. Carleton University provides a \$1,000 scholarship to ICP graduates who enroll in the BGInS program.

## OCENET keeps students informed with monthly “happenings.” newsletter



Here are images from the January 2024 edition of the **happenings.** newsletter. Each issue of the newsletter always contains two pages full of information of interest to international students and visiting educators. A pdf version of **happenings.** is distributed at the end of each month throughout the school year to help readers plan for activities they may want to participate in during the upcoming month. Feedback from students and teachers has been very positive.

During the Covid pandemic, OCENET launched a colourful new newsletter for international students and visiting international teachers to let them know about interesting things to do

around the Ottawa area that are accessible and generally inexpensive or free. Every issue of **happenings.** includes a wide variety of activities that appeal to many interests.

The newsletter also provides information about what to expect at school every month and explains many common Canadian cultural traditions and customs.

## Working in the world of international education

by **Dahlia Liwsze, Administrative Assistant**

International education has grown exponentially over the years. Canada's Immigration Minister Marc Miller said that Canada was on track to welcome around 900,000 international students in 2023. It is a field that I feel happy and privileged to work in.

I had experience in administrative work prior to working at OCENET. However, I had never been as exposed to the world, its people, and its many languages as I have been since beginning to work at our offices on Albert Street. Not only was I now working with people

from countries like Korea and Vietnam, but also I was introduced to students from many different cultures. As someone who has an undergraduate degree, I value education. As someone who is outgoing, I love meeting new people. I get the best of both worlds by working in international education.

I have met many interesting people over the years through my work at OCENET. These include the many educational agents who have come to visit our schools or brought over student groups, such as the Osaka Gakugei group from Japan or the Study Now group

from Colombia. Of course, it is always interesting to meet the international students and their parents. Helping students navigate through the application process, connecting them with homestay staff or guidance counselors, or meeting them during their orientation are aspects of my job that I enjoy.

By helping promote international education, I have also been educated in various ways by the students and their worlds. That is something school cannot teach you.



*Dahlia at her workspace at OCENET where she is in contact with people from around the world*





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## OCENET Bulletin Board

### 2023-2024 Lynch-Getty Global Student Awards

Four OCDSB high school students, two Canadian and two international students, will receive an award of \$1,000 each towards post-secondary education.

Application information will be posted in early March 2024.

Go to [www.ocenet.ca](http://www.ocenet.ca) and click on "Scholarships & Bursaries" and then "Lynch-Getty Award."



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### Thinking About Becoming A Homestay Host?

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  - learn about people from other cultures
  - make friends across the world
  - introduce your children to an intercultural experience
  - share Canadian culture and life in Ottawa
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  - receive an honorarium to cover expenses

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[www.canadahomestaynetwork.ca](http://www.canadahomestaynetwork.ca)

## 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:  
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