

This past semester OCENET and OCDSB schools hosted international students from **48** countries around the world...with international students attending **21** high schools and **32** elementary schools throughout the OCDSB.

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The Divisions of OCENET

OCENET organizes student exchange with Chengdu, China



OCDSB students exploring the culture and history of China in Chengdu with their host student partners

This past April, eleven secondary students from six OCDSB schools travelled to Chengdu, a city of over 20 million, which is located in central China in Sichuan province to learn about and experience Chinese culture.

All of the students were eligible to be part of the excursion by being enrolled in the International Certificate Program (ICP) which focuses on encouraging intercultural awareness and understanding.

The reception by the host school was very welcoming with a whole school assembly

to greet the Canadian guests along with providing school uniforms and opportunities to attend classes and to visit other schools. In their travels students participated in art classes, Tai Chi exercises, Sichuan cuisine classes, and a musical performance on stage. In the words of Sean Oussorren, OCENET International Education Coordinator and trip leader, "the schools made the students feel like rock stars."

The students had a chance to learn about and visit many of the local landmarks including Mount Qingcheng, a holy site in



After 36 hours of air travel, eleven OCDSB high school students and their two teacher leaders arrived to a warm welcome from their host students and their families and school in Chengdu with a banner reading "Welcome Our Friends from Ottawa" which was the start of nine full days of cultural activities and memorable experiences

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OCENET organizes student exchange to Chengdu (cont'd)

“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 of their home country and culture.”

- Pino Buffone,
Director of Education



Trip leader and AY Jackson SS teacher, Bob Barter, taking a “selfie” with the Ottawa students in a crowded subway car in Chengdu



Sean Oussoren, trip leader and OCENET International Education Coordinator, accepts a student's friendly challenge to a Ping-Pong game

Taoism, during the busy Qingming Festival, as well as the Giant Panda Breeding Centre and the Dujiangyan Irrigation System.

The OCDSB students had an opportunity of experiencing another level of cultural engagement by billeting with the families of a student from the host school. Many of the host students were proficient English speakers, but any communication issues were alleviated with the help of translation apps on cellphones.

Students' Stories



Chantal (left) and Sophia light incense sticks at a Buddhist temple

Chantal (AY Jackson SS) A recent Grade 12 graduate, Chantal has been in the ICP since Grade 9 and wanted to have the opportunity to live with a Chinese family to experience day-to-day life in Chengdu. She went with an open mind and few assumptions to find the people gracious and the food delicious. Chantal participated in available online Chinese lessons to help prepare her for the trip. She was impressed by the many traditions and fes-

tivals. She learned how Chinese culture is different than Canadian culture, but also how it is similar in many respects.

Sophia (AY Jackson SS) Sophia had not travelled beyond North America prior to the trip to China. In Chengdu, she noted the unique architecture and how most families lived in apartments, and the schools she visited were modern, clean and had large classes. She was impressed by the strong work ethic and the importance of history and the arts in Chinese culture. Sophia felt a strong connection with her host family and Chinese people in general. She viewed the trip as a challenge that has encouraged her to start travelling more widely in the future.



Parker “high fives” students at one of the elementary schools the OCDSB students visited

Parker (Osgoode THS) Parker's first plane trip was to Chengdu and feels the visit to China was an amazing learning experience which opened his eyes to a totally different part of the world. He enjoyed trying the spicy food associated with Sichuan cuisine. He felt comfortable going because of the preparatory meetings the parents and students had prior to departure. He

described his host family as “fantastic hosts” who went above and beyond to be hospitable.



Jennifer (left) with her student host partner

Jennifer (Earl of March) Jennifer's father studied in Chengdu and she wanted to visit to see Chengdu and to practice her Chinese speaking skills. She was impressed by the sense of community she saw with her host family. She noted how the students there didn't have part-time jobs nor were allowed to use cell phones at schools. Jennifer appreciated living with a family and knows that the insights into Chinese culture she gained would have been very different had she been travelling “just” as a tourist.

The reciprocal part of the exchange involved 18 students from Chengdu elementary schools attending Grade 5-8 classes at four OCDSB schools: W. Erskine Johnston PS, W.O. Mitchell ES, John Young ES, and Jack Donohue PS.

This student exchange is part of an educational partnership to encourage intercultural cooperation with the Chengdu education bureau and the OCDSB which was renewed last November by Pino Buffone, OCDSB Director of Education, and Geoff Best, OCENET Executive Director.

Constantine Ioannou reflects upon a long and successful career at OCENET



Constantine Ioannou, Program Director of Short Term and Group Programs, at the OCENET offices at the Albert Street Education Centre

Starting 33 years ago as an educator with the former OBE and with almost 24 years at OCENET, Constantine Ioannou will be retiring in the spring of 2025 and looks back at a long and successful career.

In his role as Program Director, Constantine manages OCENET's short term program, known as *Global Classroom*, which partners with schools from around the world to bring groups of students to integrate in local OCDSB classrooms for several weeks or months. This provides a "reciprocal" learning experience for both the visiting students and the Ottawa students. Constantine has found getting to know and work with OCDSB administrators and teachers particularly rewarding.

Another role involves overseeing the *Summer Explorer Program* which invites students from many countries to spend the summer months in Ottawa to participate in language development using the Common European Language Frame-

work. The students use an OCENET developed curriculum that takes an activity based approach to language acquisition based on themes of interest to students (such as "the environment" or "social media"). Outside the classroom, every afternoon there are excursions to experience the Ottawa area.

One of the initiatives Constantine is most proud of is his work in fostering and expanding OCENET's renowned Teacher Training Programs. He develops proposals for educators from different countries and also mentors local teachers and administrators to deliver workshops on effective teaching methodologies, often with language development using CLIL (Content and Language Integrated in Learning). Following educational workshops delivered at OCENET, the visiting educators are integrated in OCDSB schools and are paired with local mentor teachers. Both the visiting and OCDSB teachers benefit from the shared learning experience. In past years, OCENET has facilitated edu-

cators from Spain, Sweden, South Korea, and China, among others. Some groups are here for two weeks or more extended periods. This model is unique for the OCDSB and OCENET because few school boards in Canada participate in this type of comprehensive experiential teacher training program.

Constantine has observed many changes in international education over the years. A positive development is the ever growing awareness across the OCDSB about the work OCENET does, and that more local teachers want to get involved and invite international educators into classrooms. Some challenges of the job involve finding spaces in schools to host visiting students and the need for more homestay families to host students.

Constantine is proud of OCENET and the work it does because more educators now understand the benefits of international education and OCENET has shown its commitment to promoting global perspectives, as demonstrated with such initiatives as the OCDSB International Certificate Program. For Constantine, OCENET is much more than an organization that recruits international students.

One evident aspect throughout Constantine's life and career is his passionate commitment to international languages. Besides English, he is fluent in French, Swedish, Spanish, Norwegian, and Greek, and continues to

"It's great that we have more local OCDSB educators interacting with global partners because it makes us all stronger in our intercultural understanding and openness to other cultures and languages."

- Constantine Ioannou,
OCENET Program Director



Constantine with some of his work "family" - past and present. (l-r) Sue Boudreau, Katharine Noble, and Kari Hanes

study other languages.

Following his retirement from OCENET in the spring of 2025, Constantine intends to continue to volunteer with ILEA (International Language Educators Association) which promotes international language education in schools. He also plans to continue his work as a part-time professor at Queen's University teaching language instruction methodologies to pre-service teacher candidates.

Constantine sums up his career with his characteristic enthusiasm: "It's been a blast!" For the future, he looks forward to seeing other teachers take 'the torch' by inspiring international language learning, and promoting cultural and global understanding.

Popular French Exchange program gets students out of their “comfort zone”

Since the fall of 2018, with the exception of a few years because of pandemic restrictions, the OCDSB/Aix-Marseille-Nice Student Exchange has provided an opportunity for students from southern France to live with local Ottawa students and their families and to attend OCDSB schools for 5 weeks each Fall, and likewise, for the Ottawa students to be hosted by a French family for 5 weeks and attend schools in France each Spring. This past Spring, 39 OCDSB students participated in the exchange by making the journey to southern France to reconnect with their host partner and to experience a taste of being immersed in French language and culture for an extended period. Many students describe the experience as “life changing” and credit the program with getting them out of their “comfort zone” by learning to be more independent and self-confident, as well as being more competent French language speakers. Here are some of the students’ stories:



Cadel (2nd from right) and Ayan (far right) pose with their respective French student host partners Eliot and Amaya at the Aix en Provence sign

Cadel from Glebe CI



Cadel is in French Immersion and also an ICP student. He applied to the exchange in part to improve his French and feels that his conversation skills have definitely improved. His parents were very supportive of him participating in the program. He was impressed by the French school system but noted that the school days are much longer but there are several “breaks” throughout the day which he liked. Cadel also pointed out that there are fewer extra curricular clubs and sports at the French school he attended. He appreciated the exchange because it enabled him “to make connections and have new friends from different places” and that “the whole experience of the exchange helped to prove that I can do things on my own.”

Ayan from Glebe CI



A student in Grade 10 when she participated in the exchange, Ayan loves to travel and wanted “an immersion experience to learn about language, all about food and daily life, as opposed to just seeing tourist attractions.” Ayan appreciated the challenges of living with a new family and considers her student host partner, Amaya, as a best friend. She found eating dinner at 9:00 p.m took some adjustment but liked the way French families “lingered” at the table over meals and had extended conversations together. She would encourage any student who has the chance to go on a student exchange should take it as “it is a once in a lifetime experience.” Overall, Ayan thinks that the exchange has made her “feel more confident about travel and open to new things.”

Elizabeth from WCSS



From West Carleton SS, Elizabeth had never been to Europe and wanted to “see things guided by people who knew the area.” She is an ICP student and in French Immersion. She was a little nervous at first but soon felt welcomed and comfortable in France. While on the exchange, she appreciated her Canadian teachers providing her with school work and she also took one online course. She visited Paris and the French Alps with her host family and intends to visit Carla and her family sometime in the future.



Elizabeth (far left) with student host Carla and her family

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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

International Certificate Program (ICP) continues to grow



Proud parents and friends take photos of the 2024 ICP graduates who filled the stage at the Albert Street Education Centre auditorium at the ICP Graduation Ceremony on June 6th

The ICP Graduation Ceremony held on June 6th celebrated the accomplishments of 138 graduates from 20 high schools who successfully completed the requirements to receive the OCDSB International Certificate. Accompanying the students were many of the 34 ICP Teacher Advisors in the schools who volunteer their time and are key to supporting the ICP students.

At the ceremony several

students provided an overview of the projects they worked on and the impact of the ICP on their understanding of other cultures and world views. Many of the students noted how the ICP has influenced their future path in post-secondary education.

The ICP is administered by OCENET's International Education Coordinator, Sean Oussoren, who describes the ICP as a way of "providing students the

opportunity to be curious about the other—cultures, perspectives, and people."

The ICP has expanded over the years and currently has an enrollment of over 800 students across the OCDSB. The program not only provides students many opportunities to explore languages, internationally focused curriculum courses, and international experience and engagement either locally or overseas, but also provides



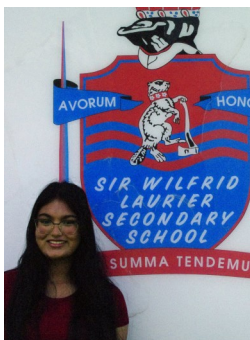
OCDSB Director of Education, Pino Buffone, congratulated the ICP students for their commitment to global citizenship. In his comments he recalled attending the inaugural ICP graduation in 2013 when there were 13 graduates and noted the tremendous growth and success of the program over the years.

students with valuable skills in developing intercultural competencies. The ICP is also beneficial for students applying to post-secondary institutions and for scholarships.

Students and parents can learn more about the ICP at: www.ocdsb.ca/icp

French student exchange (continued)

Anusha from Sir Wil SS



A student at Sir Wilfrid Laurier SS, Anusha found the people in France to be very friendly and feels that she improved her French language listening comprehension skills throughout the exchange. She found the length of the school days a bit of a shock and the teachers quite strict. She also became and re-

mains good friends with the other OCDSB students on the exchange from other Ottawa schools. She used Google Classroom to keep up with much of her classwork. Anusha believes that "the gain in confidence from travelling independently transfers to everything else."



Anusha at the Mediterranean Sea

OCENET International Education Champion: Brenda St. Jean



Brenda St. Jean

1. What are some of your roles with the Canada Homestay Network?

These days (I'm in my 23rd year at CHN) I step in when colleagues are away, mentor and train as needed, and act as the nominal, legal custodian for many of OCENET's international students. The day-to-day, in-person responsibilities of that role are carried by colleague Relationship Managers (RMs) who help students and families make the most of their homestay experience.

2. How did you get involved with supporting international students who come to Ottawa to attend OCDSB schools?

When our daughters were young, we were keen to have them meet international students, so we called OCENET to see if any wished to live with a family. Of the eight international students our family hosted, we remain in touch with seven of them, twenty years later. We have attended weddings in France and Italy and one of "our" Brazilians

recently attended the wedding of our youngest child.

3. How does the liaison between OCENET and the Canada Homestay Network team function in terms of the day-to-day needs for students?

Although OCENET and CHN each have their own schedule of student support, we want students to experience this support as seamless, so we keep each other well informed on issues or concerns and coordinate responses in everyone's best interests.

4. What are some of the roles of host families and how does Canada Homestay support them?

Hosts provide a warm welcome and a rich experience of family life. We ensure they are up to the job. Host education starts during the qualification process with guides and agreements, continues in the form of orientations, and includes in-person or telephone support as needed. We provide a stipend to defray expenses and are available 24/7.

5. Which aspects of your work with international students and host families do you find most rewarding?

Watching as hosts and students open up to each other (warts and all) and delight in the relationship.

6. What has been the impact of your work upon the many people you serve, and what have you learned from them?

Students and hosts have told us of the strong bonds created during their time together. Sometimes, their mutual success was hard won. We have learned that, with the right support, hosts and students can navigate the expected challenges in a way that is confidence building and a tribute to them both.

7. What initiatives are you working on next?

With my colleagues, at CHN, we are always looking for ways to help our host families and our Relationship Managers be as effective as possible in their roles.

Spanish educators attend "summer school" at OCENET's Teacher Training Program



Madrid teachers, along with OCENET's Constantine Ioannou and Geoff Best

by **Constantine Ioannou**,
Program Director

Throughout July, 25 teachers from Madrid participated in a training

program on content based language teaching. This group of teachers represented various subject areas where they teach their curriculum in English and therefore teach subject content as well as English. Selected by the education ministry of the city of Madrid, these experienced teachers of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated in Learning) came to Ottawa for advanced

studies in this field. The program, led by Constantine Ioannou, focused on the 4 Cs of CLIL (Cognition, Culture, Communication, Content) and took place at the Albert Street Education Centre. Presenters included Allison Fuisz (teacher at Bell HS) and Janis St. Germain (principal at Wazonson ES). Course content included planning assessment and

evaluation for language learners, increasing language and culture awareness in classrooms and strategies that are good for all learners but that are essential for language development. This is the third group of educators from Madrid that have received a training program from OCENET/OCDSB. The course was entitled: *Deeper Considerations for Teachers in CLIL*.

EuroChallenge 24 student teams investigate global economic issues



OCDSB students from the Top 5 qualifying EuroChallenge 24 teams were invited to a reception and luncheon at the residence of the Ambassador of the European Union Delegation to Canada. Teams from Merivale HS, Earl of March SS, Sir Robert Borden HS, and two teams from West Carleton SS were among the top teams.

The third annual EuroChallenge event held in Canada took place on May 2 and 3 in Richcraft Hall at Carleton University where teams of students from local OCDSB schools delivered presentations on topics related to economic, social, and political issues related to the 28

countries that form the European Union. The student teams researched a wide range of topics such as *The Role Inflation Plays in Italy's Economy*, *Managing Migration Flows in Spain*, *Unemployment in France*, among others. Each team took a role

representing the position of a particular European country and delivered an in-depth 15 minute presentation in front of a panel of judges. Based on the competition results, the Top 5 teams were presented with trophies at the reception.

International Experience Opens Doors

by **Dahlia Liwsze,**
Administrative Assistant

What started out as an "adventure" by teaching in Japan was instrumental to paving the way for a career in education for OCENET's Greg Duggan.

"My plan was to spend one year abroad and make enough money to pay down some of my student debt. As it turned out, I stayed longer than that," said the Director of Studies, High School Foundations & Student Success at OCENET.

Duggan moved to Japan in January 1998 shortly after completing his undergraduate studies and lived there

for over five and a half years.

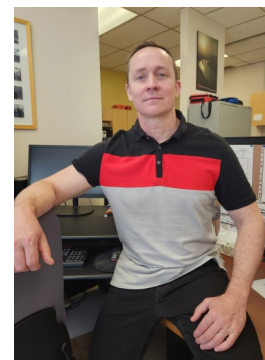
Upon first arriving in Japan his first job involved assisting Japanese employees to develop their English conversational skills at different companies. Greg then went on to teach in a variety of educational settings, which included everything from kindergarten to university.

"One of the best things about teaching overseas was that it was fun. I really enjoyed the pace of life in Osaka, working with students of all ages and abilities, and the fantastic cultural and travel oppor-

tunities that came my way during that period of my life."

Duggan's educational background includes Bachelors degrees in English Literature and Education and a Masters degree in Education. He has been an important member of the OCENET team since April 2010.

In his words, "I think I'm more open-minded and sensitive to how our cultural backgrounds shape our perspectives, priorities, and personalities from having spent the time abroad."



Greg Duggan at the OCENET offices



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OCENET Bulletin Board

2023-2024 Lynch-Getty Global Student Award Recipients

Congratulations to the following OCDSB high school students, two Canadian and two international students, who each received an award of \$1,000 towards post-secondary education.

Zorha Asefi - Gloucester HS
Archie Hallen - Cairine Wilson SS
Abby Lalonde - John McCrae SS
Sweny Saija - Cairine Wilson SS



Canada Homestay Network
Incorporating Canada Homestay International
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Thinking About Becoming A Homestay Host?

- Among the many benefits of being a Homestay host:
- make a significant difference to the life of a student from another country
 - 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
 - Host Support 24/7
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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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