



## TCGIS Board 2011–2012

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## Why Twin Cities German Immersion School?

By Annika Fjelstad, TCGIS Director

**Balance.** The best place to seek an answer to this question is from the parents who have made that choice. Each year the school conducts a parent satisfaction survey. When asked, “Which of these attributes describes Twin Cities German Immersion very well?” the results for the last three years indicate a consistently strong showing in these two top-scoring items:

	2008	2009	2010
Supportive Environment	91%	92%	90%
Academic Excellence	87%	85%	91%

The high approval rating in both supportive environment and academic excellence marks the hallmark of Twin Cities German Immersion School’s success. TCGIS students and parents know that community and academic rigor are concepts that support each other. Each of our teachers undergoes, as part of their teaching orientation, training in a teaching philosophy called Responsive Classroom (RC). The teaching strategies that make up RC combine specific strategies to increase students’ academic success by focusing first on building a safe and welcoming community. Greeting each person by name every morning is one sign of an RC classroom, which intersects nicely with German culture where a proper and formal greeting also serves as a cultural hallmark. The day is kicked off by time in a circle, playing games and strengthening how a classroom functions as a community before asking students to focus on academics. Students that feel safe and welcome become successful students.

**Community.** The parent survey indicated that 87% of TCGIS families volunteer at school and 91% of those are satisfied with their experience. The halls of TCGIS in the morning echo with the sounds of adults, as well as children, connecting with each other. Parents sharing their time, insights, and professionalism are core components of TCGIS’s solid operational, financial, and technological infrastructure. For those looking for community for the whole family, the opportunity is rife.

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**Language.** For some families the German connection is the obvious reason to choose this school over any other. As the years go by, however, and the school establishes its reputation both academically and socially, the amount of parents who pick this particular program in spite of the German language, rather than because of it, continues to grow. In our 2011 parent satisfaction survey, 24% listed German immersion as the reason their children will continue at TCGIS, while 15% list immersion in general.

**Immersion.** Many parents are committed to the cognitive benefits of their children learning a second language, more than they are to German in particular. As they shop between immersion schools they weigh academic

success, teacher-student ratio, and school climate equal to or perhaps more than the specific attraction to German itself. TCGIS, in fact, solved one family's internal divide between two successful immersion programs when they realized that students get the opportunity to learn Spanish as well when they enter 5th grade. More broadly, however, the confidence and skill in learning any second language sets students up for the capacity to more easily and successfully teach themselves a third language. TCGIS programs can open the key to Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, or other languages later in life, purely by letting kids experience that language is accessible, fun, and learnable. Being able to order at a German restaurant can be just a side benefit.

## Kindergarteners Begin a New Year at TCGIS

By Cynthia Miller, TCGIS Parent

The classrooms of Frau Eufinger and Frau Heindl are ringing with the sounds of 43 brand new kindergarteners this year. For some, the path at TCGIS has been paved by older siblings. But for many families, this is their first year with TCGIS. What brought these families into German immersion education, and what do they think of their experience so far?

Sara and Tom Scholtens wanted their son to continue the German education he was getting when they lived in Germany. Deanna Perchyshyn wanted to provide a way for her son to get in touch with the family's German ethnic roots. Marilee Tuite was drawn to a school that values math and science as well as early exposure to foreign language. Sean Beaton wanted his son to prepare to be a global citizen. Although several students have at least one German-speaking parent, the majority of kindergarteners come from homes where German is not fluently spoken.

The small class size, sense of community, parental involvement, and creative, compassionate teachers have impressed these parents. They are excited by the unique opportunities offered, such as the variety of after-school activities, the presence of German-speaking interns in the classrooms, the chance to learn Spanish in middle school, and the fact that parents, students, and staff can actually get to know each other.

The kindergarteners like their classes in *Kunst* (art) and *Sport* (gym), singing and counting in German, their teachers and new friends, and time on the playground. Sara Scholtens says her son comes home every afternoon with a big grin on his face, and Sean Beaton describes how his son loves to tell everyone he sees about his school.



Frau Heindl's kindergarteners keep busy on Halloween Day

These parents encourage all prospective families to come to an open house and take a tour. They will find the school to be a friendly, well-run, active place, with a strong mission to provide a solid education in a caring environment. As Sara Scholtens explains, "TCGIS is really more than a school for learning German. It is a school where parents, teachers, and kids enjoy each other and enjoy learning."

## Inquiry Units Immerse Middle Schoolers in Quest for Knowledge

By Katie Stephens, TCGIS Middle School Teacher and English Curriculum Coordinator

- *A large group analyzes the ancient city of Machu Picchu in terms of its ability to meet the basic needs of its citizens.*
- *Students record their sensory observations during a teacher-led neighborhood walk down University Avenue.*

These are just two snapshots from Day 4 of 12 in “Inquiry Unit 1: Anatomy of the City,” in which the diverse activities of students are unified by the following critical questions: What are humans’ essential needs? How do cities provide for our basic needs? What are cities’ essential needs? How are these needs sustained? What is the relationship between cities and their inhabitants?

The Inquiry Unit both encapsulates and crystallizes the philosophy and practice here at TCGIS. It is the culminating phase of teaching and learning, a three-week block of intense, hands-on learning, in which students stand on the basis of what has previously been taught and reach for what they would like to

know more about. Two-hour blocks of time are devoted to exploration, research, problem solving, creation, and presentation. Students work in small teams with adult guidance in structured project phases. It is a time for fun, focused engagement, self-guided discovery, and it fulfills standards that otherwise could not be met well. Students discover for themselves that learning is not confined to disparate subjects, and some assignments cannot be completed in 50-minute blocks. It is a time to enact, perform, max out our technology resources, and transition from knowledge to action.

For “Inquiry Unit 2: World Savvy – Sustainable Communities,” students form self-directed research teams of up to ten. Each team chooses a topic, identifies a problem, researches its impact in two or more countries, and explores strategies to address the problem. Students then develop their own solutions at the local, national, and global levels, and prepare a knowledge-to-action plan to implement one of their solutions.

Working closely with the TCGIS Sustainability Council, students have the opportunity to visit a local water treatment facility, explore the vibrant Midtown Global Market, and tour a nearby recycling center. Additionally, students speak directly with local experts in the fields of pollution control, sustainable food systems, and energy efficiency.

*Andere hören, andere sehen, weltoffen denken und handeln.*

Inquiry Units in middle school are exciting multisensory, multimodal, interdisciplinary studies that engage our students in critical thinking. Out of necessity, out of passion, because intuition and best practices guide us to do so, we are a fundamentally collaborative team of teachers. We are experts of different subjects, with a range of cultural backgrounds, skills, styles, and interests (as are our students). While each subject is unique and distinct, no subject is private or wholly discrete. We are multifaceted, but we are unified by our school’s mission: educating active, engaged, world citizens.



*Working in pairs, students test their ability to create the tallest noodle structure using uncooked spaghetti and masking tape*



*Small teams of mixed-grade students cut, fold, and arrange medieval castle structures and discuss their modern-day city equivalents*



*Market, Mercado, Markt. Partners use pencils, paper, and laptops to create a trilingual “Glossary of the City”*

## Fourth Grade All-Girls Field Trip

By Sylvia Elias, TCGIS Fourth Grader

First we carpoled from the school to the U of M lab. They showed us different kinds of fungus and took us through lots of labs. Then we got to go outside and see the fungus on the plants. Next we took the city bus to a different U of M lab, which was much bigger than the first, although equally interesting. Some labs had to keep special fungi in -100 degrees. It was really high tech. We had to walk around the city a lot from the bus stop to the U of M and back. It was super hot, and we got quite the workout.

Amanda said that it changed her dream job. Laurel liked the physics show and when a woman did a special paper on potatoes. Margarete thought it was interesting to learn about fungus that grows on plants, especially leaves. A lot of the girls really enjoyed it, especially me. The boys did not have to stay and do schoolwork; they had a pizza party and watched a movie.



## After-School Activities Keep TCGIS Students Busy

By Cynthia Miller

For many TCGIS students, the learning and fun does not stop at the end of the school day. That's because TCGIS offers a wide range of after-school activities at all grade levels throughout the year. Over 25 extracurricular classes were offered first semester, including beginning French; guitar, violin, and piano lessons; swimming, soccer, gymnastics, karate, and running; computer skills, dance, and drama.

In Hip Hop-n-More, seven girls follow teacher Theresa Borgren in rhythmic moves with a feather before starting their well-practiced dance routine. Six boys and girls spend an hour working on hand-drawn books, cards, and comics in Basic Bookmaking. Down in the basement, a dozen boys and girls in safety goggles make the dust fly as they hammer and saw in Woodworking, led by second grade teacher Scot Stephenson.

Some programs like Blumenkranz, a middle school dance group, and Twinklers Strings Group perform at events in town. Most activities take

place in the school building or at the YMCA next door. Many of the instructors are staff members and parents. Teaching an after-school activity is a chance for the TCGIS community to get involved in another aspect of educating the students.

The cost for most activities is around \$9 per session, with music lessons running a bit more. Scholarships are available. In the future, the school hopes to bring down the cost of after-school activities and to incorporate homework help. The schedule for second semester is already out, and students are eager to continue their after-school fun.



Children show off their lanterns during the St. Martin's Day celebration at St. Paul's Landmark Center

"Our family has enjoyed the St. Martin's Day celebration for the past three years, even before Ella started attending TCGIS. Of course, now it's even more fun, since she gets to make her own *Laterne* in art class with her friends, and because she knows the German lyrics to the *Laterne* songs. Grandma and Grandpa love the atmosphere, and watching how much Ella has learned at school. Our younger daughters were thrilled to get to make their own lanterns, too. But I would be lying if I didn't admit that the highlight for the girls was getting to pet Moon, the horse that St. Martin rides during the reenactment of the St. Martin story."

-Amy Ireland

## PTO Announces Theme for 2011-2012

Each year the TCGIS PTO chooses a theme to focus on throughout the school year. This year, that theme is Family Volunteerism. While many TCGIS parents and staff already volunteer in countless ways, the PTO encourages us all to take the opportunity to show our children the importance of community service as well. In order to support its mission of "fostering the relationship between school, home and community for the success of every TCGIS student," the PTO will incorporate Family Volunteerism into existing events, scheduling speakers for upcoming meetings, and bringing volunteer opportunities to the TCGIS community.

The PTO has already organized several volunteer/contribution opportunities this school year. So far, families have collected magazines for a women's shelter, gathered nonperishable food items for a local food shelf, and donated gently used winter jackets and clothing for children. The PTO also arranged for Jenny Friedman, executive director of Doing Good Together, to speak at their October meeting.

But the volunteer spirit doesn't stop with the PTO. Turn the page to learn how TCGIS fourth graders have been working together to help improve lives around the globe.

## Students Read Their Way to a Better World

By Michelle Wallace, TCGIS English Teacher

Fourth-grade students at Twin Cities German Immersion School have been busy reading books for fun and pleasure, while at the same time helping to end world hunger and improve the environment through Heifer International's Read to Feed® program. The sponsored program helps students raise money for Heifer to provide livestock, seeds, trees, and training to families in need around the world.

The program fit in perfectly with the school's "Teamwork" theme in November/December. It empowered students to use their desire to read to help change the world.

With Read to Feed, students enlist sponsors who pledge donations—a dime, a quarter, or a dollar a book—any amount, really. Then they read, and as they finish more books, the pledges grow higher. At the end of the program, the children gather the pledges, pool their money, and donate the total collected to Heifer, which, in turn, helps families build sustainable lives and become self-reliant.

No matter the size of the gift, the impact is great. Just \$20 buys a flock of chicks, which can provide a family with protein from the eggs, as well as an income. For \$60, students can buy a tree, which provides fruit for a family and at the same time helps protect the soil. For \$120, students can give a family a goat, which provides milk for the home and milk to sell, generating income to pay for school fees and medical care. All gifts help build better, more hopeful lives.

Forty fourth-grade students raised \$2,527.97 in all — enough to purchase 3 heifers, 4 goats, 2 water buffalo, and a flock of chicks!! We celebrated our success on December 16, 2011 with a pancake breakfast. Each student received a certificate of recognition.



The gift will continue to grow through Heifer's cornerstone, "Passing on the Gift." Each family agrees to share their animal's first-born female offspring, as well as the education and training they received, with another family, thereby multiplying the benefit. Receivers become givers, and over time, a community is lifted.

Read to Feed is an exciting adventure for children. Along the way, they learn many important lessons. They learn about different cultures around the world and learn the importance of using the Earth's resources wisely. They learn the value of self-reliance. Perhaps most importantly, they learn that they can make a difference in the world.

Heifer's mission is to end hunger and poverty while caring for the Earth. Since 1944, Heifer International has provided livestock and environmentally sound agricultural training to improve the lives of those who struggle daily for reliable sources of food and income. Heifer is currently working in more than 50 countries, including the United States, to help families and communities in need become more self-reliant.

For more information, visit [www.heifer.org](http://www.heifer.org) or call 1-800-696-1918.

### *Schultüte* Volume 3, Issue 1

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