

JES International Fair

*Jonathan Elementary School
Chaska, Minnesota*

Students from different cultural and religious backgrounds do not always have the opportunity to share who they are and where they come from. With students from 17 different countries, Jonathan Elementary School (JES) wanted to find a way for students to better understand each other and the world they live in.

The JES Parent and Community Involvement Committee led the way on this around-the-world tour, organizing the second annual JES International Fair. The day-long event spotlighted the cultures, languages and traditions of many countries – Germany, Honduras, Laos, Kenya, Australia and Guatemala, among them. The fair also brought together parents, students from nearby Chaska High School and community members who offered to participate.

To build interest, the school planned a special lunch menu for International Fair Week highlighting foods from different countries. Each day that week, students posed a question about a distant country on their morning JES news; answers were given the following day.

On the day of the fair, welcome banners in several languages waved from the school. The question that day: Where in the world will you be on March 2? Nearly everyone could answer differently as they traveled to new lands. Each student received a passport modeled after a United States passport, complete with picture and two labels indicating the countries they would visit.

Before setting off on their individual travels, however, the students watched a video, “Welcome on Board,” created by the school’s media specialist and two parents – one is a flight attendant and the other a pilot. Then the children found their way to the country presentations, where they were greeted by an ambassador who stamped their passports and welcomed them to the country. The ambassadors were parents and grandparents.

For 25 minutes, the students toured the country, learning about its geography, culture, language, food and music. Their guides were Chaska High School students who had lived in or studied in a particular country or parents or grandparents who were natives of another country or who had lived or traveled abroad. Each presentation included an activity such as a game, craft or dance.

“I had fun meeting people from the Netherlands and Germany,” commented one student. “Also, I learned a lot of things in the German language like hello and goodbye.”

The parent involvement coordinator said that the students “left the fair excited about their experiences and interactions with the adults and [high school] students. They wanted to learn more and wished the fair were longer so they could have visited more countries.”

Others involved also were impressed. The world languages teacher who organized and coordinated the high school presentations said that her students gained self-esteem and confidence from their roles as guides and presenters. “The JES International Fair gives students a wonderful opportunity to share who they are . . . their backgrounds, traditions, culture and religion – things they normally don’t talk about with their peers.”

One grandparent considered the fair a great event, saying: “It was so exciting not only seeing the elementary students engaged with folks from other countries, but also hearing the high school students give presentations about their cultures and countries. One high school student in particular blossomed right before my eyes, starting shy and afraid, to answering questions, smiling and being fully engaged with her students. What a wonderful event to witness.”

The fair supports three school and district goals:

- * To create a global awareness and understanding of a diverse world. The fair promotes citizenship and appreciation and

respect for others through understanding and interaction.

- * To support and strengthen the school, family and community partnership. The fair drew on the NNPS six types of involvement for this multifaceted project that involved 50 parents and other caregivers and at least 70 staff members.
- * To involve students (in this case, high school students) in service learning.

The fair cost \$660. The school won a Learn and Serve America mini-grant to cover most of the expenses, and the PTO contributed funds, too.

An unexpected benefit of the fair was the successful partnership that developed between the elementary and high school students. The older students were wonderful role models, and gained leadership skills and experience.

Jill Anderson
Parent Involvement Coordinator
(952) 368-9585
jill_anderson@yahoo.com