

Principal-Led Chinese Initiative for Children

Launched and sponsored by
the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation,
assisted by
the Secondary School Chinese Language Center
at Princeton University

June 1999

General Information:

The Principal-Led Chinese Initiative for Children is a statewide project launched and sponsored by the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation to promote Chinese language learning in New Jersey elementary schools. With a total funding of about \$300,000 from 1997-1999, this project marks the Dodge's second initiative to bring Chinese language instruction to American schools.

Two decades ago, the foundation launched its first Chinese Initiative and funded "seed" money to start Chinese programs in 60 U.S. high schools. Those programs now involve approximately 10,000 students, not including those who have graduated in past years.

In the spring of 1996, the groundwork of the second initiative started. With a total funding of \$100,000, its intention was to serve as another "jump-start," but this time aimed at the elementary levels. In September 1997, after more than one year of preparation, eleven schools began to offer the Chinese language to 629 children, mostly first and second graders. In the fall of 1998, the enrollment of these eleven elementary schools doubled, bringing the total number involved to 1200 children.

Unlike the first initiative, school principals have been serving as the primary force behind the second initiative. They talked with school board members, as well as teachers and parents. They undertook the task of planning and implementing the programs for Chinese instruction. They also spent time finding excellent teachers for their programs. All their efforts reflect the strength of their shared vision for our children, represented in the principals' proposals to the Dodge Foundation. Dr. Ward, principal of Thomas Paine Elementary School, said, "There are 1.2 billion people in this world who speak Mandarin, more than any other language in the world. I feel that there's going to be more and more of a need to work with China in the future, and we have to start preparing our children."

The Secondary School Chinese Language Center has been taking an active part in promoting the Principal-Led Chinese Initiative for Children. Starting in May 1996, the

SSCLC conducted a series of meetings with New Jersey principals, discussing the importance of starting Chinese instruction early, as well as administrative concerns regarding the implementation of Chinese programs in elementary schools. In November 1996, the Center conducted a working session of five teachers to develop the document A Guide for Elementary School Chinese Programs. In the past two years, the SSCLC has provided the Teacher Group of the Initiative with support in their monthly meetings and in their effort to develop instructional materials.

Important Events:

May 4, 1996	China Day at Princeton University
May 30, 1996	Follow-up meeting (1) at Princeton University
November 1996	<i>A Guide for Elementary School Chinese Programs</i> , was developed by five chosen Chinese teachers from across the country
January 1997	A videotape of a Chinese program was made by Brightwood Elementary School in MA
January 30, 1997	Follow-up meeting (2) at Princeton University. The Dodge Foundation's announcement of ten grants to NJ schools who wish to begin instruction of Mandarin in September 1997
June 11, 1997	A gathering of the principals who were chosen to receive the Dodge grants
August 24, 1997	A pre-school year meeting with principals and Chinese teachers
September 1997	The beginning of the first year of Chinese for 629 children in 11 elementary schools
February 1998	Additional funding for the eleven schools from the Dodge Foundation announced
Jan.-Feb. 1998	Chinese New Year celebrations in the eleven schools
Sept. 97-- June, 98	Monthly meetings of the Chinese teachers and the coordinator of the teacher group
June 1998	The successful completion of the first year of the Chinese Initiative for Children
September 1998	The beginning of the second year of Chinese with 1202 children in 11 elementary schools
Jan.-Feb. 1999	Chinese New Year celebrations in the eleven schools
March 1999	The third funding for the eleven schools from the Dodge Foundation announced
June 1999	The successful completion of the second year of the Chinese Initiative for Children

The Eleven Elementary Schools: (1999-2000)

Horace Mann Elementary School
 150 Walt Whitman Boulevard
 Cherry Hill, NJ 08003
 Principal: Mr. Robert Sweeney
 Teacher: Ms. Chai-Ho Lo

Thomas Paine Elementary School
 4001 Church Rd.
 Cherry Hill, NJ 08034
 Principal: Dr. Lawyer Chapman
 Teacher: Ms. Chai-Ho Lo

Evergreen Ave School
Evergreen Ave.
Woodbury, NJ 08096
Principal: Ms. Frances Carey
Teacher: Mrs. Shin-Yin Estes

Forest Avenue School
118 Forest Avenue
Verona, NJ 07044
Principal: Dr. Debra Pavignano
Teacher: Mrs. Huei-min Chang

Lawnside School District
426 Charleston Avenue
Lawnside, NJ 08045
Superintendent: Dr. J. Joyce C. Payne
Teacher: Mrs. Shin-Yin Estes
Avon Elementary School
Mercer Drive
Haddonfield, NJ 08033
Principal: Mr. Anthony Arcodia
Teacher: Mrs. Shin-Yin Estes

Tuscan Elementary School
25 Harvard Avenue
Maplewood, NJ 07040
Principal: Dr. Arlene Pincus

Clinton School
27 Berkshire Rd.
Maplewood, NJ 07040
Principal: Ms. Hazel Davis

Princeton Friends School
470 Quaker Rd.
Princeton, NJ 08540
Principal: Ms. Jane Fremon
Teacher: Heping Jiang

Irving Primary School
435 Mansfield Street
Highland Park, NJ 08904
Principal: Mr. Matthew Barbosa
Teacher: Ms. Yuti Hsu
Ms. Kuo-Tsai Chang Pan

Wicoff School
P.O. Box 360
Plainsboro, NJ 08536-0360
Principal: Mr. Brian Stevens
Teacher: Xianqiong Liu

The Enrollments:

The success of the 1997-98 school year greatly stimulated interest in both the schools and the communities in continuing the Chinese program. As a result, in 1998-99, all eleven schools continued to offer Chinese to children who were in the programs during the previous year. Eight of the eleven schools expanded their programs to include a new grade level of students. Therefore, the enrollments in most of the schools saw dramatic increases during that school year. Including the 629 students from the previous year, this growth brought the total enrollment of the Dodge's Chinese Initiative for Children up to 1202 students. The following chart includes information about the enrollments during the Initiative's first two years. The rapid expansion of these programs is both encouraging and exciting.

Language Instruction:

Language instruction is organized by thematic units that are specified in *A Guide to Elementary School Chinese Programs*, developed in November 1996. Each unit lasts for 2-3 weeks, covering basic language items and cultural aspects. Over the past two years, eight booklets for first graders and seven booklets for second graders have been developed. Each of these is accompanied by a recording of the text, plus a song to serve as a learning reinforcement. These booklets, developed by the teacher group, serve as the framework of the language instruction. Teachers, especially those who taught children in higher grades or in elective programs, made changes according to their situations. In addition, a summer review book with an audio tape of the reading has been compiled for children to reinforce what they learned during the school year.

The children's achievements in learning Chinese are undeniably significant. Their pronunciation of the four tones is of better accuracy than that of high school students who have had the same length of instruction time. The children's ability to retain the language is amazing. At the end of year, they can remember most of the language items taught over the year. And most importantly, all children showed increasing enthusiasm in learning Chinese.

Culture Integration:

Cultural information has been integrated into the language instruction. Over the past two years, children were introduced to cultural aspects such as: how Chinese children greet their teachers, how the class is started in a first grade classroom, how Chinese children address their siblings, and how Chinese people celebrate Chinese New Year. In addition, stories relating to Chinese traditions and festivals were told in class. The Chinese New Year celebration was the major event of the year. Most schools had stage performances, including singing and dancing. Some schools celebrated the New Year with projects and hands-on activities involving the whole school.

The children enjoyed their experience with Chinese culture and continue to develop a positive attitude towards it.