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Eco Leader Sarah Elizabeth Ippel Answers Your Questions

Sarah Elizabeth Ippel talks back...

Sarah Elizabeth Ippel, Founder and Executive Director the [Academy for Global Citizenship](#), was featured last month as our Eco-Leader. She received many wonderful questions from our web community and has provided a select number of responses. Please read on to see if your question was answered and to learn more about the Academy for Global Citizenship.

Question posted by Pat W: Sustainable curriculum sounds great. But what about the traditional classes -- math, reading, art, pe? are those topics recast within a sustainable theme, or are they just put on the back burner?

Response:

The Academy for Global Citizenship is a candidate school for the International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Programme (PYP), a transdisciplinary framework of international education designed to foster the development of the whole child. The curricular approach embraces students' learning through inquiry and is structured around six organizing themes of global significance, supported and balanced by all subject areas, including mathematics, language, social studies, science and technology, physical education and the arts. Our school year is divided into six units of inquiry, where teachers facilitate the incorporation of necessary learning standards into the exploration of an internationally focused theme. For example, one Kindergarten unit this year is titled, "Changes in Nature". For six weeks, all "traditional" subjects and will be integrated into the learning of natural and unnatural changes of our planet, and how our choices as global citizens play a role in climate change and related environmental matters. It truly is a wonderful, relevant and engaging way for children to learn.

Question posted by Alisha S: What was your personal inspiration for starting up this school and why in Chicago given your international experience?

Response:

After growing up in the Midwest in a rather ethnocentric community and educational environment, I ventured to England for graduate school. I was profoundly impacted by the varied histories, languages, cultures and worldviews of my colleagues, which initiated within me a desire to examine philosophies of education across the globe. Throughout the exploration of over 100 schools in nearly 70 countries across 6 continents, I was particularly struck by both the state of our global educational systems and the planet's environmental degradation, recognizing the desperate need for our current generation to be equipped with globally collaborative opportunities to develop their eco-literacy as future world

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leaders. I moved to Chicago with the desire to live an internationally engaged city with a commitment to their leadership in sustainability and learned about Mayor Daley's revolutionary Renaissance 2010 initiative to open 100 new innovative school models by 2010.

Question posted by Diane T: How are the students responding to the curriculum so far? Are the parents involved in any way?

Response: Our students recently completed a writing project titled, "If I were the President ...", where they shared their 6-year-old perspectives with President-elect Barack Obama regarding the suggested focus of his leadership. As I read through their letters, I was particularly struck by the environmental emphasis of their counsel:

"I would tell people to clean the earth. I would teach them to pick up the garbage and recycle."

"I would make a rule to make our food healthy with no pesticides."

"I would help the earth by saving energy. Solar energy is clean energy."

This is a powerful example of how our "curriculum" and overall mission have provided a fresh lens through which our students view life, a new foundation of values with which they approach their learning and a shifted framework through which they engage with our world.

The Academy for Global Citizenship has a phenomenal team of impassioned teachers, administrators, PTA and a fervently aligned board of directors, consequently inspiring an exceptional level of dedication from our families. Our team has been conducting ongoing parent education evenings, focusing on topics such as child nutrition and wellness, making healthy choices and learning through inquiry in addition to special school events which have included a solar installation celebration, student yoga performance and garden harvest party. Our parents are also asked to volunteer 20 hours per school year, whether it is working in the garden, assisting in our organic cafeteria or accompanying the students on their field trip to a green roof. These have all been wonderful opportunities to foster meaningful engagement with our families in addition to extending the school's mission into their lives and homes.

Question posted by Georgia P: Why did you choose the location on the southwest side? Was there a particular need for a school there?

Response: In conjunction with the founding of Mayor Daley's Renaissance 2010 initiative, his plan to address the underperformance and overcrowding of Chicago Public Schools, research was conducted to identify communities with the greatest need for both revitalized and additional learning opportunities for our youth. West Elsdon and Archer Heights on the southwest side encompassed some of the city's most overcrowded schools and have a rapidly expanding school-aged population, contributing to the communities' identification as a high priority location.

Question posted by Randi V: What is the definition of a "public contract" school. I know of gifted programs and charter schools, but I have never heard of a contract school.

Response: Contract Schools are a newly created public school model established as part of Renaissance 2010. A Chicago Public Contract School is similar to a Charter School in the sense that a performance agreement is established with the Board of Education which provides certain autonomies to the school in exchange for accountability and compliance to the Illinois School Code. Contract Schools are managed by independent nonprofit organizations.

Question posted by Kelly D: Who makes up your student body? Do the parents have to apply and do you have enough students signed up now to continue to expand into higher grade levels next year?

According to Conscious Media and Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability (www.lohas.com), 63 million adults in the US are considered LOHAS consumers. They are attracted to products and services focused on health and the environment, and are more likely than the general population to buy a product from a company with values like their own.

Response: The Academy for Global Citizenship is a new open enrollment Chicago Public Contract School that opened in August of 2008 with 88 Kindergarten and first Grade students and a waiting list of additional prospective families. One grade level will be added each year until Eighth Grade is reached in 2015-2016. Although we have a citywide acceptance boundary, our students predominantly live in the West Elsdon and Archer Heights communities on the Southwest side. In order to apply, parents must submit an application which consists of their child's name, address and birth date; students are selected by a blind lottery.

