



WORLD VIEW: AGC Students learn that they're part of a global community.

World of opportunity

The new Academy for Global Citizenship gives CPS students an international education.

By Lisa Shames

It is a small world after all at the Academy for Global Citizenship (AGC), a new Chicago public school in the West Elsdon neighborhood on the city's Southwest Side. The school opened in mid-August with the goal of teaching reading, writing, arithmetic and other basic skills by introducing students to cultures and customs from every corner of the planet.

AGC is a part of Renaissance 2010, Mayor Daley's initiative to open 100 new schools by the year 2010 in the city's most overcrowded areas, with an emphasis on alternative education options. The school is the brainchild of 26-year-old Sarah Elizabeth Ippel, who traveled to more than 60 countries to study education practices after earning a master's degree in early-childhood development from Cambridge University. She's also vice president of education on the governing board of the United Nations Association and plans to use her contacts abroad to create a communication network for her school. At AGC, students will interact with other schoolchildren around the world via written letters, the Internet and visits (each pupil gets to take an international field trip prior to graduation).

"I became interested in learning about how people developed their perspectives of the world," Ippel says. "[At the same time,] I knew that I live in a city where thousands of children aren't receiving the level and quality of education they need and deserve."

In 2004, Ippel created a nonprofit group to research alternative schooling in Chicago. She scouted locations and formed a board—which includes Organic School Project founder and chef Greg Christian and Michele Davies, a sales manager at Jones LaSalle, a company offering sustainability and energy-efficiency services to global clients. She also recruited teachers who had themselves collaborated with international schools. Four years and three proposals later, AGC was born thanks to a formal stamp of approval by the Chicago Board of Education.

Located in a space that once housed a dental-tool factory, the school recently welcomed 88 kindergarten and first-grade students to its four classrooms. There are 22 students and one teacher per class, plus a language teacher and education coordinator. Open to all students in Chicago on a first-come, first-served basis (a blind lottery will determine entry if there are more applicants than spots), AGC plans to add one grade level each year until it reaches eighth grade in 2015.

Kids get two organic meals a day here, part of a first-time pilot program by Chartwell-Thompson Hospitality, the food-service provider for all of CPS. A typical day might include tracking the efficiency of the school's solar panels via computer (they offset 50 percent of AGC's energy usage, according to Ippel) or heading to the outdoor learning center—an organic garden with planter boxes and a composting bin.

Children might also play global instruments like a djembe drum from Guinea, donated as part of a \$5,000 grant from Keys 4 Kids, a Chicago-based music-education nonprofit. (In addition to per-pupil allocations from CPS, AGC receives most of its funding from outside sources). Students get a taste of up-to-the-minute technology in their classrooms, too, receiving instant information from their teachers via Smart Boards—blackboard-size screens that connect with the teacher's Internet-connected tablet.

The school is modeled on the philosophies of the International Baccalaureate Organization, a Geneva, Switzerland-based foundation that promotes drawing educational materials from cultures around the world, then integrating them into required subject matter. So instead of learning math and geography separately, students might study the impact of global hunger for six weeks. AGC is working to gain official IB approval, a three-year process with 125 standards.

It's a long way to go, but after the four years of planning, Ippel says she's ready: "Our team has learned that nothing is impossible."

Learn more about the Academy for Global Citizenship (5101 S Keeler Ave, 773-582-1100) 1-4pm Saturday 13 at a ceremony celebrating the installation of the academy's solar panels.