

2021/2022 J-LEAP REPORT

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It has been almost six months since I started a new life in the United States. It's true what they say, time really does fly by quickly! I think these six months passed very fast because I enjoyed everything that has happened to me. I'm very grateful that I have met such amazing people such as my Lead Teacher Furuya sensei, my host family and my friends who have helped with everything so that I can settle into my new life and enjoy it to the fullest.



My New Hometown

I'm living in Charlotte, North Carolina. North Carolina is located in the southeastern part of the United States and is the 9th most populous of the 50 states. The climate throughout the year is similar to Chiba, where I am from. The people are kind and are true to their "southern hospitality". The capital is Raleigh but Charlotte is its largest city. Charlotte is known as one of the most desirable places to live in the United States. More and more people from other states are moving in because it has many job opportunities, great schools and universities, a variety of places for leisure and a low cost of living. Since Charlotte not only has a modern downtown but also beautiful nature, such as mountains and lakes, I have really enjoyed exploring during my weekends so far. Before I came here, I didn't even know where North Carolina was located in the United States, however, now I like it here so much that I cannot imagine how it would have been if it was another place.

My School

South Academy of International Languages (hereinafter referred to as "SAIL") is a K-8 language immersion magnet school. Previously, the school had a different name and the building was also in a different place. We started in-person classes with a brand-new school in August 2021 for the first time in a year and half since the pandemic started. It has 1200 students, approximately. The students start to learn Japanese, Chinese, French or German from kindergarten. Starting in middle school, they can learn Spanish as well. Each language has 2 classes in each grade, but unfortunately the Japanese program has approximately 200 students in total with just one class in each grade. Furuya sensei and I teach 20 third-



graders. Many of them don't have any roots in Japan, and the language spoken at home is either English or Spanish. What I like about SAIL is that since it is a language magnet school, the teachers are from different countries, have different cultures and backgrounds. Since they are from all over the world, the atmosphere is welcoming and I could get along with many teachers right away. We are here not only to teach language but also our cultures. Therefore, we have many events where the students can

experience each culture. One of the biggest events, called "Japanese Cultural Night" is going to be held in May. The students in the Japanese program present what they learned about Japan and introduce Japanese culture by featuring calligraphy and Origami to the parents and the students in different language programs. On "Nihon no hi (Japan Day)", many students come to school wearing Yukata or other Japanese style outfits and enjoy Japanese snacks. As someone who has always been interested in languages, the circumstance here is ideal to be surrounded by languages and I wish I could have learned at SAIL during my childhood.

School Life

Daily morning in the 3rd grade Japanese class starts with "Asa no kai" just like in Japanese schools: "Kiritsu", "Kyoutsuke", "Rei", "Chakuseki". We confirm the date, weather, "Nicchoku" (the student who is in charge of day duty), and the class rules together. The first block is math. We teach math in Japanese by using an American textbook written in English. I didn't expect at all that I would teach a subject that I have disliked since I was in elementary school to the kids in the United States. However, the good thing is I can understand the feeling of those who don't like math and I try to be patient. The second block is Japanese. We use a Japanese textbook, which is the same as the native Japanese students use to learn vocabulary, practice Kanji and read aloud. Then they have a "Special" (such as art, P.E., science lab, media, etc.). After lunch, they have social studies or science, recess, and at the end of the day, English.

The students are adorable, but having 20 active kids in class all day long is never easy. At 3pm, dismissal starts. At the moment that the last student leaves the class, Furuya sensei and I can finally take a deep breath. "Phew!". They are extremely energetic and it feels like there was a storm in classroom when I hear the silence after school.

Immersion Program

Since it is an immersion school, the students study each subject in Japanese except Specials and English. They are required to use Japanese all the time in class and it is one of the most important class rules. I have been really impressed by how the language immersion program influences the children, who are

good at absorbing new things quickly. I strongly remember that on the first day of the semester after 1 year and half of online class, one of the students didn't understand a simple phrase that I said, such as "please draw a picture" and responded "what?" in English. It seemed that their Japanese had totally gone away due to the long-term online class and returned to 1st grade, when they used to go school in person before the pandemic. Now that five months have passed, the same girl listens to us, understands our directions, tries to speak Japanese as much as possible, and even helps other students in Japanese. While many non-immersion learners study Japanese by memorizing the grammar, the students here learn Japanese through daily life at school. Now they know how to ask if they may go to the restroom, or go to fill up their water bottle. They can tell us when they cannot find a pencil, or some part of their body hurts. Those phrases come out very naturally and fluently. That is undoubtedly because they are taking "a shower of Japanese" all day long. I have been impressed by its power and I am proud of being the one who gives it to them. While I have been surprised by the great influence of the immersion program, I have experienced many challenging scenes as well. I am teaching Japanese but working at an elementally school is much more than just teaching a language. Some of our students who are 8 or 9 years old run in the hallway, make a mess on their desks with snacks, or get in a fight with others anytime. They make me realize that I am a Japanese teacher, but at the same time an elementally school teacher who needs to teach how to behave in the hallway, how to clean up their desks and how to be respectful with their friends. I have learned from Furuya sensei how to handle those scenes besides teaching Japanese. I deeply admire her for being the most patient, energetic, and caring person I have ever met.

Things don't always go well like I expect, but there are many things that I can learn from the children as well. I want to learn and grow up as much as I can during the rest of my time like the children have done. In the case of immersion program, not many students decided to study Japanese themselves, and therefore my goal is to motivate them to lean Japanese even more and get them to say "I love learning Japanese".