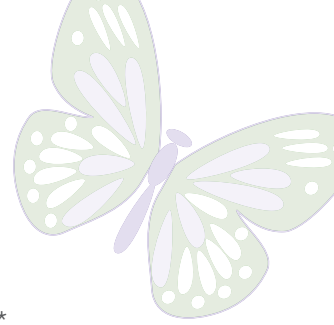


# Japanese Language Program Advocacy

For Middle Schools and High Schools

By Dr. Jonathan Kidder, Assistant Headmaster of the Pilgrim School\*



## Successful Advocacy

Advocacy is the key to the success of any school program, but especially to one as unique as the Japanese language. The more the school, parents and community put into a Japanese program, the more they will get out of it. For a Japanese program to flourish, it needs the support of the administration, faculty, parents, and even community.

Advocating to school faculty is both easy and very important. By showing the other faculty that they are 100% behind the program, an administrator can generate confidence in the Japanese instructor, making their job easier and creating a more positive work environment. Enthusiasm for the program makes other teachers want to get involved. At some schools other teachers get involved with Japan related assemblies and events, and even incorporate Japanese history, literature and art into their curriculum. Once the faculty sees the Japanese language program as something that promotes positive thinking and a broader worldview, they can embrace it and help it to grow.



## Ideas for Program Application

The Pilgrim School experimented with new activities in 2010. The first week after the winter holidays, we suspended all normal classes Kindergarten through 12th grade and decided to immerse the entire school in Japanese culture in a hands-on, interactive fashion. This program—which we called “Golden Week in honor of the cultural festival in Japan—was made possible by the sponsorship of Mr. & Mrs. Noritoshi Kanai, whose grandchild is presently a third grader at Pilgrim. Mr. Kanai is currently President of Mutual Trading Co., Inc., an importer and distributor of Japanese foods nationally, and the pioneer of sushi in America.



Instead of classes on phonics or chemistry, students took classes in sushi making, Japanese language, Ikebana flower arrangement, Japanese tea ceremony, Taiko drums, calligraphy, traditional Japanese folk music, and martial arts activities such as judo, karate, and Kendo (bamboo sword fighting.) In all, over 18 separate courses were offered to students age 5 to 18 and over 35 instructors from throughout the Japanese American community volunteered their time.



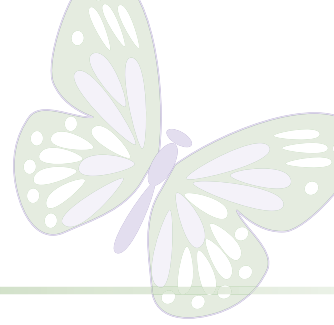
At the end of the week, students organized an art show to display their original art and an assembly to showcase their newfound talents in Kabuki Theatre, music, and their martial arts. While organizing this activity was a tremendous undertaking, interest in Japanese culture blossomed. The students simply didn't want to go home at the end of the day and we actually had the problem of students trying to sneak into classes. As a result, sign-ups for taking Japanese classes are up, the after school Judo club is packed, and the entire community is much more engaged in cross-cultural activities. If your school is worried about the daunting task of raising money or the logistics of organizing an event like this, start small with assemblies, clubs, guest speakers, and volunteers.

\*Reader's Note: Pilgrim School, located in the Wilshire District of Los Angeles just west of downtown, is one of the most cultural and ethnically diverse schools in the United States and draws on students from throughout the city and across the world.

Make sure to visit our website at <http://www.jflalc.org> (select *Advocacy*)

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## Advantages for the Students

1. A Japanese program makes the school stand out. It is a selling point, attracting students and parents to both the school and to the district.
2. A Japanese language program brings with it prestige; it is a sign of a school's dedication to an enriching education and it offers students and families something unique.
3. Having learned Japanese gives students an edge in college admissions, further adding to the stature of the school, especially when the program includes an AP component.



## Advantages for the School

1. Students can look forward to unique activities relating to a completely different culture from their own.

At Pilgrim, we are a 1:1 laptop school and every student creates Japanese presentations using iMovie, which allows them to integrate their interest in technology with their mastery of the language.



2. Students learn the value of persistence and respect for other cultures.
3. Learning any foreign language, especially one as different from English as Japanese, can help students to look more critically at their native language, and understand it at a deeper level.
4. Having acquired critical communication skills, learning one foreign language is often a jumping off point for people to learn other languages within their lifetime.

To help bolster these goals, our Japanese language instructor organized a 10-day spring break trip to Japan this year. Organized at least a year in advance and involving multiple fundraisers and a grant to keep the trip affordable, this experience is building major excitement for the program and is helping foster relevance during classroom discussion. First hand observations show that the students are highly motivated to learn everyday phrases and master their grammar because they know they will need it—and not just in the abstract future.



## Conclusion

No two Japanese language programs are alike. The keys to success involve an engaged faculty, a supportive administration, support from parents and students, and the ability to think long-term in terms about what students will need in the future.

As one of the languages of 21st century commerce, Japanese will expand your student's horizons. Whether students will be running a corporation, making laws in the Senate, or running a school in that distant tomorrow, the ability to speak another language will enhance their leadership capabilities and career opportunities.

Additional information on how to fund a foreign language program can be found on the Grants and Advocacy section of our website at <http://www.jflalc.org>.