

Field Guide to Twin Cities German Immersion School

An Unofficial Guide For New Parents

*Compiled by the
TCGIS PTO Parent Outreach Committee*



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Willkommen! We hope this field guide will give you a satisfactory introduction to the lay of the land at TCGIS. Our aim in developing this guide is to illustrate certain "field marks" characteristic of Twin Cities German Immersion School, and help you to readily identify answers to some of the common questions new parents often have. However, this is only an introduction to the delights of parenting at TCGIS. As your child settles in and your interest in learning more about the school and community is piqued, do not hesitate to find the answers you seek by contacting other parents, teachers and staff.

The Parent Outreach Committee, TCGIS PTO

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Updated July 2011

First Days: Things to Know

Schultüte

The "Schultüte" is a tradition from Germany that is part of the celebration of a child's first day of school. It is a cone shaped paper container that is traditionally filled with candy and small gifts such as school supplies. Kindergarten families have the opportunity to make a "Schultüte" at the open house held at the school before school starts. The kids usually bring the "Schultüte" with them to school on the first day, though they are opened/emptied at home!

Hausschuhe

Hausschuhe translates as "house shoes". Each child will have a pair of indoor-use-only shoes that he/she keeps at school. The shoes should be comfortable and secure but can be of any type. This tradition is common both in German households and in German kindergartens. The use of *hausschuhe* helps keep the school clean as well as your child comfortable (especially in the winter months when kids are often arriving at school in heavy winter boots).

Start of the Year School Events

Familienfest

Sunday, August 21st from 2pm to 5pm.

The GAI will host picnic-style food at family-friendly prices, interactive family games and entertainment. There will also be a special ceremony at 4:00pm to honor those children beginning their first year of school.

Open House

Thursday, August 25th from 4:00pm to 6pm.

Before school starts every year there is an "open house" where families have a chance to come in and drop off school supplies, meet the teachers, and see the classrooms. Kindergarteners can make a "Schultüte". There will also be information available regarding school volunteer opportunities and after school care provided by Kinderclub.

Information Night/ Meet the School Board

Tuesday, September 6th from 7pm to 8pm

The various groups and committees at TCGIS will have tables set up so you can find out the function of each group, and discover where your talents may be of service. The same evening, parents will have a chance to meet the members of the school's Board of Directors in a casual setting. Legally, a charter school like TCGIS, is its own school district and therefore has its own Board of Directors. The purpose of the Board is to provide general oversight and policy direction. They are also fiscally and legally responsible for the school.

Curriculum Night

*Thursday, September 15th from 6:30pm to 8pm.**

Curriculum Night, usually mid to late September, is a chance for you to gain a more in-depth understanding of your child's day and the classroom curriculum. Parents can spend time in the classroom with the teacher and also meet with the art, music, and P.E. teachers.

Common German Words Heard Around School

Deutschland/Deutsch: Germany/German

Guten Morgen: good morning

Guten Tag: hello (good day)

Hallo: hello

Tschüs: bye

auf Wiedersehen: good bye

die Schule: the school

die Klasse: class or grade

das Klassenzimmer: classroom

der Lehrer/die Lehrerin; teacher

Herr: Mr.

Frau: Mrs./Ms.

das Büro: the office

Ja: yes

Nein: no

Wie geht's?: How are you?

Danke/dankeschön: thank you

Bitte: please

Gut: good

der Freund/die Freundin/die freunde: Friend(s)

die Eltern: parents

die Kinder: children

der Elternbrief: parent newsletter

Kaffeeklatsch: coffee hour

die Kunst: art

der Sport: sport/PE

die Musik: music

die Woche: the week

der Tag: the day

Frequently Asked Questions

What should I know about TCGIS school culture?

Perhaps the most important thing to realize is that TCGIS is a young school, and our school culture is still evolving. As we enter our seventh year, TCGIS has changed a great deal from the little school that opened its doors to 43 kids in 2005. But the enthusiasm and energy that those pioneering families brought to that brand-new school remains, and our school culture continues to be one that welcomes and even expects parents to be involved and engaged—regardless of whether they speak German!

Parents, teachers, and staff all care deeply about TCGIS and its mission to educate kids to be bilingual, global citizens. Like any community of passionate people, we occasionally have our differences. As a general rule, though, people are able to work through their disagreements and find common ground.

As with any organization that is experiencing growth and change, the school and the staff work hard to manage daily functions while solving new challenges as they arise. This year we have several changes in the front office, and a number of new teachers, many of them from overseas. For new and returning parents, it can be helpful to remember that many of the adult people at TCGIS are learning right alongside the kids, and that we must all be supportive of each other as that process unfolds.

Finally, don't hesitate to approach the "old-timers" who've been with the school for a while. We are really glad that you've chosen to send your child(ren) to TCGIS, and will be happy to answer questions and share their insights and experience. Beginning with this 2011-2012 school year we are implementing a "buddy system", pairing up new families with established families, to help you get acquainted with school workings. If you are interested in a buddy, please contact Krista Johnson monk2miles@comcast.net.

What if I don't speak German?!

Don't worry if the adults in your house don't speak any German--you are not alone! Many TCGIS families have no German-speaking adults, and even when both parents are fluent, English may still be the dominant language at home.

Naturally, as parents we want to keep abreast of what's happening in the classroom and to support our kids in their immersion education, even if we don't speak the language. Many teachers are willing to provide homework instruction in English so that parents help to oversee it, although this may become less feasible in the upper grades, when homework becomes more complex (and kids more fluent!). Check with your teacher to find out his or her policy. Teachers also distribute regular classroom letters in both English and German that give an overview of what the kids have been learning.

For obvious reasons, non-German-speaking parents can't really serve as regular classroom volunteers in an immersion setting. But there are many other ways that you can help out and become more connected to the school. Outside of the classroom, most of the school-related activities and meetings are conducted in English.

You can also learn to speak German! By October, you'll probably find yourself exchanging German greetings, and some people take it even further. In addition to the language classes available through area schools and community education programs, our school

sponsor, the Germanic-American Institute in St. Paul, offers regular German classes. If you're lucky, your kids may be willing to help you with your pronunciation.

Your child's teacher can suggest other ways to support your child's language acquisition even if you don't speak the language. A few ideas from other TCGIS parents include:

- (1) Host an Amity intern, and ask him or her to speak German with the kids as much as possible.
- (2) Look into online German television or stories for kids, such as <http://www.pikcha.tv/>. This one contains stories read aloud while following along in the "book". The school has an account already set up. To log in:

Benutzername: **tcgis2** Passwort: **Deutschland** (both are case sensitive)

Please be careful to not change any passwords so all may use it!

[Http://kika.de](http://kika.de) is the website for the children's channel Kinder Kanal, and they have some streaming shows. Navigating this website may be a little difficult, though, if you don't know German, so ask for help if you need it!

- (3) Bookmark an online German-English translation site and use it regularly. One of the more popular is <http://dict.leo.org/>. There are also some translation apps for smartphones!
- (4) Once your kids are reading, consider signing up for an account at www.antolin.de, which offers all kinds of German literature for kids. (You might need a German speaker to help you with the registration.)
- (5) Befriend some of the many German parents at the school. Not only can they be a great linguistic resource, they are a diverse and interesting group of people, and fun to know!

Finally, some parents worry that they shouldn't continue reading to their children in English during the early years of their immersion education. Set aside that concern and keep right on reading those bedtime stories for the recommended 30 minutes per day. It won't impair their German acquisition, and will only help them become bi-literate that much faster.

How are decisions made at TCGIS?

Like all charter schools, TCGIS is governed by an elected school board. The school board, and our director, Annika Fjelstad, have the authority to make decisions to run the school. Many of our school board members are also TCGIS parents, and parents also serve on virtually every board committee. There are many opportunities for parents to be part of the school's governance!

On a practical note, be sure to read the regular school newsletter, *der Elternbrief*, and anything that comes home in your child's folder. Also try to attend community meetings. The school board and administration often seek parental input in advance of major decision-making, but parents need to stay alert to opportunities to provide it.

As noted above, TCGIS is a dynamic and evolving place, which means that a parent who has a great idea and the energy to implement it can often find a supportive reception. School committees are great incubators for new ideas about operations, while the PTO is a place to start if you have an idea for fundraising, parent outreach and education, or a new community event.

How do I raise a question or concern?

Everyone at TCGIS supports open and honest communication. If your concern is a classroom issue, discuss it with the teacher first. If you feel that the issue is not resolved, the next step would be to talk to the Director. Non-classroom issues can be taken directly to the Director. If at that point the concern still remains unresolved, then it is time to approach the Board. The Board has a designated Parent Liaison, Marcus Sheire marcussheire@comcast.net, and you can always approach him or any other board member. The Board's role at that point would be to mediate and help the appropriate parties come together to resolve the issue.

What if my kindergartener/first grader isn't reading by the end of the year?

Ask a few first-grade parents and you'll soon realize that this is not at all unusual. Hard as it may be, new immersion parents should try their best to avoid comparing their child's progress with kids in traditional programs. Remember that your child is expending a huge amount of intellectual energy to learn a new language, and so she or he may take more time to acquire and hone his or her reading and math skills. Have faith, and prepare for that moment of pride when you realize that your child is reading, writing, and computing-- and in two languages!

How will I hear about what's happening in and around TCGIS?

For general information the school website <http://www.tcgis.org> and our PTO website <http://www.tcgispto.org/> are informative resources. You will receive a regular newsletter from the school, *der Elternbrief*, which will give you current updates and school news. Your child(ren)'s classroom teacher will also send a letter home periodically, either separately or as part of the *Elternbrief*. The PTO sends out a monthly newsletter that includes school happenings, fundraisers, and volunteer opportunities. The PTO also publishes a calendar with all the school activities, breaks, etc. It is available at the Open House, and through the PTO after that. A small donation is requested.

If you are part of the *Facebook* community, "like" our pages!

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Twin-Cities-German-Immersion-School/206853352692160>

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Twin-Cities-German-Immersion-School-PTO/113721818682257>

What is the Yahoo! group and how do I sign up?

The TCGIS Yahoo group is an online discussion board where TCGIS parents can discuss latest developments at the school in an informal forum. The group is **not** sponsored by the school or the PTO. It can be a useful forum for sharing news and tips, asking questions, and gaining the perspective of other parents on the topics du jour. Just keep in mind that the Yahoo group is not a school-sponsored site, and so posting a concern or question there is not the equivalent of bringing it to the attention to the school board or the director.

To request membership, visit the URL:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/tcgis/>

and click on "Join this Group." The moderator will need to authorize your membership, which typically happens within a day or so.

How can I get involved?

There are many ways to get involved: some are short term, some are longstanding commitments, some require physical labor, some involve your children, some are strictly for your enjoyment. It may seem like events and happenings and volunteer opportunities come flying at you every day, but relax...you are not expected to get involved in every happening, just get involved when and if you can. Here's an overview of some of the possible ways to be involved, meet other families, and become better connected.

1. Join a Board or PTO Committee

Committees are found under three umbrellas at TCGIS. School Committees report to the school's Director. Board Committees report to the Board Chair, and PTO Committees report to the PTO Executive Board. More detailed information about the breakdown of school committees and how to sign up to become a member of one or more of them will be sent soon via the Elternbrief and posted on the PTO website <http://www.tcgispto.org/> . Be sure to attend the PTO meeting and Information Night on Tuesday, September 6 at 6:30pm.

2. Come to a Kaffeeklatsch

Come join other parents, siblings, and extended family for a cup of coffee and conversation. Kaffeeklatsch is a frequently occurring social gathering and a great way to get to know other parents or faculty in a relaxed, casual setting. Kaffeeklatsch typically occurs at drop-off on the second and fourth Friday mornings of the month. Watch for reminders, and don't forget to bring your own mug! A paper cup will cost you 25 cents more.

3. Attend School-wide Events

Get to know other parents and family members by attending school and PTO events. School concerts, school picnics, Maskenball, game night and the Auflauf Cook-Off are just a handful of the many social gatherings held throughout the year. And of course, we could always use volunteers to help put on these grand events (another way to get involved!!)

The PTO – Parent Outreach Committee hosted events for 2011-2012

New Parents' Night out – Tuesday, Sept. 20th, Sweeney's, 96 N. Dale St, St Paul

Whether this is your first year or you are a seasoned *Eltern*, you are invited to attend "New Parents' Night Out." This casual, social gathering for adults is meant to allow parents/family members to mingle without the constant tug on the pant leg. A night of adult conversation once in a while can be great!

Auflauf – October 14th 6pm – 8pm

Mix, sauce, and layer up your finest at the third annual TCGIS Auflauf Cook-Off! It's competitive, hot-dish-style action as TCGIS cooks face off over their best recipes. When the judging is done, everyone will have a chance to dish up at this community dinner. This year we are introducing the "Non-Judgmental Dessert Buffet," which is a chance for those not in the competitive mood to share some sweet culinary delights.

Game Night – March 23rd, 2012

The PTO Parent Outreach Committee will be hosting a family game night at school. Admission is FREE. Bring a game and/or snack to share. The PTO will furnish drinks. There will be door prizes for students.

4. Join the TCGIS Parent Teacher Organization

The PTO is open to all teachers and parents/guardians of students at TCGIS. The PTO website (www.tcgispto.org) is a great way to keep updated on what is going on with the PTO and any available volunteer opportunities.

The first meeting of the school year is Tuesday, Sept. 6th at 6:30pm, followed by Information/Meet the Board Night from 7-8pm. An invitation email is sent out one week prior to all meetings, and babysitting is available free of charge with your RSVP.

The PTO was formed during the 2008-09 school year. Its mission is to foster the relationship between school, home, and community for the academic success of all of our students. To that end, the PTO works in partnership with the school's administration, board and committees and organizes events, programs, and fundraisers in support of that mission. The PTO has a group of five elected officials and currently has four standing Committee: Parent Outreach, Classroom Support, Educational Support, and Fundraising.

2011-2012 Officers:

President – Kari Swedberg, karilswedberg@gmail.com

Vice President – Lisa Antony-Thomas, lizabella16@gmail.com

Treasurer – Dani Sanders, dani_sanders9@hotmail.com

Secretary – Michelle Sheire, msheire@comcast.net

Archivist – Heidi Zimmerman, hzimmermann22@yahoo.com

Parent Outreach (co-chairs Mickey Jurewicz mjs_art@hotmail.com and Krista Johnson monk2miles@comcast.net) are responsible for coordinating welcome and orientation programs for new school families; coordinating PTO communications to the broader school community throughout the year; developing parent education programs; and organizing school-wide, community-oriented events such as Auflauf and Game Night. (We also developed this handy-dandy Field Guide!)

Classroom Support (chair Karin Spencer spencer.karin4@gmail.com) is responsible for recruiting and training classroom parents (*Elternkontakte*) from each class during every school year; coordinating volunteers for school-wide events as requested by the teachers and the administration; coordinating staff appreciation programs and activities; providing assistance with cultural differences in areas such as the celebration of holidays, and otherwise facilitating communication between classroom teachers and parents.

Educational Support (chair Leslie Watson leslie38@comcast.net) provides support for field trips, assists with promotional tours for prospective families, and works in close cooperation with TCGIS administration and teachers to support school-wide initiatives and curricular goals.

Fundraising (chair Kate Olson Kathryn.a.olson@gmail.com) is responsible for coordinating all PTO fundraising activities and for recruiting volunteers to manage individual fundraisers. See the section on Fundraising to learn more and how to become involved.

5. Host an Amity Intern

Hosting an Amity Intern automatically connects you to the school as well as other Amity Intern hosts. The Amity Interns tend to be close knit and socialize quite frequently. As a host family, you help provide a very unique and essential service to the school and it is a great experience to welcome an Amity into your home.

What is the Amity Intern Program?

TCGIS has been fortunate enough to have Amity interns from German speaking countries come and help teach in our classrooms. These interns are between the ages of 20 and 30. They are students or graduates of institutions of higher education in their home countries. Having the interns helps support TCGIS' low teacher/student ratio as well as supporting our goal of immersion learning by having more native speakers in the classrooms. These interns stay for either one semester or the full year and live with host families from our TCGIS community.

Hosting an intern allows your family to develop a meaningful relationship with someone from another culture and provides your family an opportunity to learn about another country. It also creates unforgettable experiences for the Amity intern by allowing him or her to see the best that US culture has to offer. If you are interested in learning more about the Amity program or if you are interested in hosting an intern, contact the Amity Committee Hosting Coordinators:

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Mary-Fred Bausman-Watkins | mary-fred@comcast.net |
| Ina Elliott | inaelliott@gmail.com |
| Nicole Grenz | nicole_grenz@hotmail.com |
| Darcy Rindelaub | darcydeboer@hotmail.com |
| Andrea Zibble | azibble@visi.com |

What do I need to know about fundraising at TCGIS?

School fundraising can seem a bit overwhelming to new kindergarten parents, but at TCGIS we do our best to strike a healthy balance by raising money in a positive and low-pressure way. Some fundraisers are dedicated to the school's overall budget while others support the PTO's budget, but in the goal is the same: to raise money for the many little "extras" that help to enrich our kids' education.

We don't ask kids to sell anything directly, and instead view fundraising as the adults' job. We believe in fundraisers that reflect our school community's values and interest, such as, locally-made strudel or the Chinook Book. We sell potential gifts, but no gift wrap! We also undertake fundraisers and events that build connections between the members of our school community.

There is no pressure for families to participate in every fundraiser. Our goal is to offer a variety of activities and merchandise so that you can just buy or participate in the things that you actually want.

Our Maskenball gala in February is THE major fundraiser that brings together both parents and other TCGIS supporters in an adults-only evening of music, dancing, hors d'oeuvres and preceded by an on-line auction. Last year's Maskenball was fantastic, and a great

time was had by all. We hope to repeat that success this year!

Our Fundraising Committee is always looking for people to help staff and coordinate fundraisers and events, so please let us know if you'd like to help, or if you have any ideas or suggestions. The PTO Fundraising Committee chair is Kate Olson, Kathryn.a.olson@gmail.com and she is also heading up Maskenball event, with assistance of Lisa Antony-Thomas, lizabella16@gmail.com. Kami Blackwell Kinney, blackwell.kinney@juno.com, is chair of the Maskenball on-line/silent auction, with the assistance of Noel Carlson, noel.m.carlson@gmail.com. Additional fundraising details and the PTO budgets can be found on the PTO website at www.tcgispto.org.

2010-2011 TCGIS Fundraising Overview

Fall:

Chinook Book coupon book (PTO)

Holiday Community Craft/Bake Sale (Fri/Sat, 11/18 &19) (PTO)

Winter:

Strudel sale by Ruhland's Strudel Haus (PTO)

Direct Donation Request (School)

Maskenball (Sat., 2/4) (PTO & School)

Spring:

Spring Plant Swap (PTO)

Ongoing:

SCRIP - Great Lakes SCRIP is a program that allows you to purchase gift certificates/card to national and local retailers for food, clothing and other essentials. In return, TCGIS receives 2%-15% of the revenue for every gift certificate/card purchased (School).

Target Visa Card Rewards Program - Register your Target Red Card Visa under our school's code, 122860, and Target will pay a portion of sales to TCGIS (School)

Office Depot Rewards Program - Mention our school code, #70212624, at the register and TCGIS will earn credit for office supplies.(School)

Items to collect for cash redemption (turn in at front desk):

Box Tops for Education (School)

Campbell's soup labels (School)

Land O'Lakes & Kemps Milk Caps (School)

Used Ink Jet Cartridges (School)

Who are the TCGIS administrative staff members?

Director

Annika Fjelstad, ext. 103
afjelstad@tcgis.org

Site Administrative Manager

Sarah Bailey, ext. 101
sbailey@tcgis.org

Front Desk/Office Coordinator

Molly Kalda, ext. 100 (Cordless Phone ext. 118)
info@tcgis.org

Admissions, Extended Kindergarten, Volunteer & Lunch Coordinator

TBA
??????@tcgis.org

Events, Communication, Data, Powerschool Coordinator

Stefanie Berres
sberres@tcgis.org

Kinderclub Program (GAI)

Babbett Larimer, Director
blarimer@gai-mn.org
Telephone: 612-227-4412
Cell Phone: 763-222-3479

Is it Kinderstube or Kinderclub?

Kindestube, operated by the GAI, is the preschool and has two locations. One is located at the GAI in St. Paul and one is at Mayflower Church in Minneapolis.

Kinderclub is the after school care located at TCGIS. Babbet Larimer is the Kinderclub director.

Kinderclub and extended Kindergarten are billed separately.