

**Field Guide to Twin Cities German Immersion School**  
*An Unofficial Guide For New Parents*  
*Compiled by the TCGIS PTO*

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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## **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, although they can serve a double purpose if they are sneakers and then also function as *sport* shoes. This tradition is common both in German households and in German kindergartens. The use of *hausshuhe* 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:**

### **Open House**

Before school starts every year there is an “open house” where the kindergarten families have a chance to come in and drop off school supplies, meet the teachers, see the classrooms, and make a “Schultüte. There will also be information available regarding school volunteer opportunities and after school care provided by Kinderclub. Please see the school calendar for the Open House date and time!

### **Picnic/Potluck**

In September there is a school wide picnic/potluck organized for all families. It is usually scheduled on a midweek late afternoon/early evening and is at a local park.

### **Curriculum Night / Meet the School Board**

Curriculum Night is usually in late September, it is a chance for you to gain a more in-depth understanding of your child’s day and the classroom curriculum. Typically parents spend time in the classroom with the teacher and also meet with the art, music, and P.E. teacher. On 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.

## **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  
*die Kulturwoche:* culture week

## **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 fifth 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 will have a new director 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.

### ***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 programming for kids, such as at [www.shifttv.de](http://www.shifttv.de).
- (3) Bookmark an online German-English translation site and use it regularly. One of the more popular is <http://dict.leo.org/>
- (4) Once your kids are reading, consider signing up for an account at [www.antolin.de](http://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 biliterate that much faster.

### ***How are decisions made at TCGIS?***

Like all charter schools, TCGIS is governed by an elected school board, and the school board and our director, Annika Fjelstad, have the authority to make decisions and run the school. But many of our school board members are parents and parents also serve on virtually every board committee, so there are many opportunities for you 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, and to show up for 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 will I hear about what's happening in and around TCGIS?***

For general information the school website (<http://www.germanschool-mn.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*.

### ***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 two umbrellas at TCGIS. There are Board committees and there are PTO committees. Please see PTO section below for more information.

##### ***Board Committees***

If you are really committed to being involved in the workings of the school, consider running for election to the Board. On a slightly less involved level, the Board Committees include: Facilities, Finance, Grants, Technology, and Governance. The Committees are formed as necessary and are typically chaired by a Board member. Some are ongoing and meet frequently, some serve their duty and then recede slightly until need again arises. Feel free to contact the board if you are considering running for the board or serving on a committee.

#### **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 on the last Friday morning of the month. Watch for reminders!

### **3. Attend Schoolwide Events**

Get to know other parents and family members by attending school and PTO events. Winter and Spring concerts, school picnics, Tanz in den Mai, 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!!)

Whether this is your first year or you are a seasoned *Eltern*, you are invited to attend "Parents' Night Out." These casual social gatherings for adults are 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!

### **4. Join the TCGIS Parent Teacher Organization**

The PTO is open to all teachers and parents/guardians of students at TCGIS. Just attend a meeting and sign the roster and you will be considered a member. The PTO website ([www.tcgispto.org](http://www.tcgispto.org)) is a great way to keep updated on what is going on with the PTO and the volunteer opportunities are available.

The PTO was formed just last year (2008-09) and 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.

- **Parent Outreach** is 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 Tanz in den Mai. (We also developed this handy-dandy Field Guide!)
- **Classroom Support** is responsible for recruiting and training classroom parents 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** oversees funding requests for school projects, assists the Director and teachers with Culture Weeks (Kulturwoche), provides support for field trips, and assists with promotional tours for prospective families.
- **Fundraising** 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 around 5 to 6 months 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
Nicole Grenz	nicole_grenz@hotmail.com
Chris Weimholt	weimh002@tc.umn.edu
Andrea Zibble	azibble@visi.com
Kate Wagner	kwagner@germanschool-mn.org

### ***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 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 to the Director directly. If at that point the concern still remains unresolved, then it is time to approach the Board. The Board has a designated Parent Liaison, Kim Kompel, and you can always approach her 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 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 viewing fundraising as the adults' job. We believe in fundraisers that reflect our school community's values and interest, such as sales of fair trade coffee, locally-made strudel, or the Blue Sky Guide. We sell potential gifts, but no gift wrap! We also undertake fundraisers and events that build connections between the members of our school community; or, in the case of the Rummage Sale, that encourage reuse and recycling.

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.

Some of this year's events will focus more on community building than raising significant amount of money. These include: our new Auflauf (hot dish) Cook-off in the fall, Game Night, and our spring carnival, Tanz in den Mai. By contrast, our Maskenball gala in February is a major fundraiser that brings together both parents and other TCGIS supporters in an adults-only evening of music, dancing, hors d'oeuvres and a live and silent 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 co-chairs are Leslie Watson, leslie38@comcast.net, and Heidi Zimmermann, hzimmermann22@yahoo.com. Additional fundraising details and the PTO budgets can be found on the PTO website at [www.tcgispto.org](http://www.tcgispto.org).

## **2009-2010 TCGIS Fundraising Overview**

### **Fall:**

**Flower bulb sale (PTO)**

**Blue Sky Guide coupon book (PTO)**

**Equal Exchange chocolate, nuts and tea (new 2009-2010) (PTO)**

**Auflauf Cook-off - Potluck-style hot dish competition (Fri., 10/23) (new 2009-2010) (PTO)**

### **Winter:**

**Holiday Community Craft/Bake Sale (Sat., 11/21) (new 2009-2010) (PTO)**

**Poinsettia and wreath sale (PTO)**

**Strudel sale by Ruhland's Strudel Haus (PTO)**

**Direct Donation Request (School)**

**Maskenball (Sat., 2/20) (PTO & School)**

### **Spring:**

**Grand Marais Spring Break Weekend for TCGIS Families - Eastbay Resort (Date TBA, usually the first weekend of Spring Break)**

**Game Night (Fri. 3/19) (PTO)**

**Rummage Sale (Sat., 4/3) (PTO)**

**Tanz in den Mai (Sat., 5/8 – GAI) (family carnival) (PTO)**

**Spring Plant Sale (PTO)**

### **Ongoing:**

**Velasquez Family Coffee** - Fair-trade, shade-grown coffee grown in Honduras by a St. Paul couple's extended family, available by special order and every other Friday morning in the school lobby (PTO)

**Great Gatherings** – New for 2009-2010, the Great Gatherings program invites community members to put together events, classes, parties, or any other fun gathering for other school community members, with the entrance fee as a donation to the PTO. Our first Great Gathering, a backyard "Haus Party" for 40 people, took place in July at the home of parents Gina Vader & Jim Crego and raised \$450! Great Gatherings can be small or large, for adults, children or families, and could include things such as a history tour, a craft or BBQ party, cooking or knitting classes, a wine tasting, or a Poker Night—whatever your passion, you can make a Gathering of it! We're looking to build this new program—just let us know if you'd like to host something and we'll help to organize the details. Contact: Gina Vader.

**SCRIP** - Great Lakes SCRIP is a program that allow 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)

[www.LetsGoGreen.biz](http://www.LetsGoGreen.biz) - This online retailer offers green products for home, office or business, and will donate 25% of all purchases. Just select "TCGIS PTO" under the Fundraising option at checkout

Target Visa Card Rewards **Program** – Register your Target 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.

***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)

***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, TCGIS parent Tim McGuire, will need to authorize your membership, which typically happens within a day or so.

***Why is the school concert not at the school?***

Because TCGIS does not have sufficient gathering space, school-sponsored events such as the annual meeting and spring concert must take place off-site. In the past two years, for instance, we have gathered at a large church.