



New Chandler school to mix global teaching methods

by By MICHELLE REESE / East Valley Tribune

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MESA, Ariz. (AP) -- Mandarin Chinese. Abacus math. Arabic. Singapore Science.

Taking a few successful teaching methods and lessons from around the world, two women have co-founded a charter school with international flavor for students in kindergarten through eighth grade.

Maybe more than that, they're hoping to start with a 9-to-1 student-to-teacher ratio when classes start in July at a yet-to-be-announced site on the north Chandler/south Tempe border.

Aim High Institute was founded by Dr. Fawzia Mai Tung and Rueyin Chiou. Among some of their ideas, Aim High will offer students either Chinese or Arabic five days a week, even for the kindergartners.

Chiou said she's even had calls from parents whose kids want to take both in-demand languages.

"We're looking at offering an after-school program then," Chiou said. That after-school program may also include martial arts, chess, fine arts and more.

The area the women picked for their school has seen a growth in the Asian community in the last few years. Metro Phoenix's Asian population rose nearly 35 percent between 2002 and 2006, from 81,113 in 2002 to 108,728, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

"I think, statistically, (Phoenix's east suburbs have) the highest or second highest Asian population in the metropolitan area. Chandler is definitely up there on that," said Leah

Powell, diversity administrator for the City of Chandler. "It's a really thriving area and a lot of it is Asian-based businesses. They have some strong community organizations that are active and do good things."

But that's not the reason they targeted the site.

"We are in this community. My students are from this area also," Chiou said of her tutoring program. "We know the parents are focused on education as well. It's a relatively high income area and ... a lot of the households are double income and employed by the high-tech companies."

While some of the curriculum - Abacus Mental Math and Singapore Math and Science - is from the East, the school is targeted to all parents who want a quality education for their kids, the women said.

"Those are probably new to Western society that we would like to introduce to others not from the Chinese heritage," Chiou said. "We will combine Western and Eastern learning blended together. That's the point of our new charter school."

With that in mind, the school will use abacus math - essentially a "pocket calculator in the brain," as the core program.

"Essentially, there is no limit," to the brain's learning, Chiou said. "That's the beauty of developing brain function."

The language piece of their school flows in with the globalism students will study. It's right on par with what's going on with employers and governments seeking more workers who know the critical languages.

Several of the hired staff speak Mandarin, Arabic, French or all the above.

Singapore Science, a curriculum with a "European" style, will be used. Students will undergo computer training that could have them Microsoft Certified by the end of eighth grade.

Fawzia also plans to offer a strong character development program she created at her private school, she said.

But into all these international ideas, American teaching will be intertwined, they said. The two co-founders have sought out the best ideas from around the world.

"To us, anything good is not good enough," Fawzia said. "Is it the best in the state? Well, what is the best in the world?"

The women say they are taking their collective education experiences to create the school.

Fawzia was a principal for several years at a private school in Phoenix. She has lived around the world and is a medical doctor, as well as a trained and certified teacher and principal. Chiou runs the IQ Abacus Math and Language School in Tempe, an after-school tutoring program.

While some of the students may come from Chiou's tutoring program, others have started to hear about it and inquire about openings.

"We believe we've got something," Fawzia said. "We believe as we grow, as new things come along, if we develop a good model, we'll develop branches."

Eventually, Fawzia and Chiou hope their charter school will grow and add grade levels. As the school grows, they hope to cap each grade level at 24 students.

Classes will start July 17 and run 200 school days. Arizona schools typically offer 180 days of education a year.

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