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Dree-el Simmons

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The International Academy of Language and Culture: The Global (pre)K – 12  
Charter School Network

by

Dree-el Simmons

A master's capstone project submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal  
Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Arts, The City University of New York

2022

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The International Academy of Language and Culture: The Global (pre)K – 12  
Charter School Network

by  
Dree-el Simmons

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate  
Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement  
for the degree of Master of Arts.

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## ABSTRACT

### The International Academy of Language and Culture: The Global K – 12 Charter School Network

by

Dree-el Simmons

Advisor: Jose del Valle, Ph.D.

The International Academy of Language and Culture (IALC) is a charter school based on the original concept of charter schools by Ray Budde and Albert Shanker, as an academic environment dedicated and designed to improving the educational outcomes for its students through innovative pedagogy. Committed to American (and global) education reform, the IALC incorporates elements from higher education into the early childhood and adolescent settings. We accomplish this by utilizing an interdisciplinary approach in our language and culture-based program.

The IALC is a multilingual, full-immersion program. Food Studies (including culinary arts), the Arts, the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Martial Arts are all important aspects of our interdisciplinary approach to modern education. In addition, the IALC educational philosophy is a student-centered, humanitarian pedagogy. Through local and global travel, students will experience diverse cultures, people, and environments. Students will also develop a strong sense of compassion and social justice by engaging in cultural, linguistic, and environmental initiatives.

Our interdisciplinary approach and philosophy highly values experiential learning. Martial arts, swimming, culinary arts, and the arts help students discover and identify their own interests, skills, and talents. This kind of practical knowledge makes room/holds space for indigenous and other traditional sources of knowledge in support of the effort to decolonize western academia. We recognize and whole-heartedly believe that traditional knowledge has an important and vital role to play in the development of academic programs with the highest academic rigor and a progressive, inclusive globalized perspective.

Keywords: Urban Education, Linguistics, Multilingualism, Charter School, BIPOC, LGBTQ+, Black, Transgender, Language Acquisition, Food Studies, Language, Culture, Non-Profit, Experiential Learning, Interdisciplinary Studies, Humanities, Arts, Social Justice, Decolonization, Indigenous, Food Security,

Preservation, Restorative Justice, High Academic Rigor, Martial Arts, Culinary Arts, Social Sciences, Critical Thinking, Whole-person Education, Child/Student-centered Education, Whole-life Learning, Humanitarian Education, Practical Knowledge

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Above all others - I must acknowledge my ancestors, my spiritual guides, guardians, and masters – all of whom have guided me, supported me, believed in me, watched over me, hoped for me, worked for me, protected me, and loved me. I give my deepest gratitude to the divine universal spirit for my gifts and being in alignment with my purpose.

Thank you all!!!

Dree-el Simmons



## DIGITAL MANIFEST

- I. Capstone White Paper (PDF)
- II. Archived version of website at [www.theialc.org](http://www.theialc.org) (WARC file)

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## **Glossary of Terms/Definitions**

International Academy of Language and Culture (IALC) – the name of the non-profit charter school

Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) – people whose primary identities and phenotypes are non-Caucasian and/or European

LGBTQ+ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and other diverse & marginalized sexual and/or gender identities (this does not include pedophiles)

School-to-Prison-Pipeline (STPP) - a framework describing mechanisms and pathways within the education system that drive students towards involvement in the criminal-legal system

Primary Language Group (PLG) – the main languages of instruction being used at the IALC; which include Mandarin (Chinese), Russian, Arabic, French, Spanish, and English considered as the common language. K-12

Secondary Language Group (SLG) – this group of languages are introduced into the program starting in intermediate/junior high school. Languages in this group are elective and students may choose up to six to learn between 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade. This group includes Cantonese (Chinese), German, Hausa, Hindi, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese (B/P), Swahili, Thai, Urdu, Yoruba, and Sign Language (Am, Br, Ch, Fr, Sp)

## Introduction:

The idea for “The International Academy of Language & Culture: The Global K-12 Charter School Network”, came to me when I met my newborn nephew, Burrito. When my younger sister put him in my arms at the hospital, he immediately snatched my heart and wrapped his auntie around his finger. He nestled into my arms and all I could think about was how much I wanted to protect and help him have an amazing, happy, and successful life. At the time, 2017, I was in my final undergraduate year at City College. I was a double major in communications (with a focus in media studies) and in classical and modern languages (Spanish & Italian), with a double minor in French and Portuguese. I had just returned from studying abroad in Spain. I asked myself, “What do I have to give him that will help him manifest his best life?” This question stayed with me. I thought about how far I had come; and how through my academic journey, I discovered many new interests and a passion for language and culture. My desire to be able to share that with him by teaching him the four languages that I had been studying, and my desire to take him on global travel adventures to experience different things, became the inspiration for and the foundation of the multilingual school I have designed. This is a real school that I am actively developing. This project is designed to be a visual representation and as part of my submission and application to the New York State Charter School board.

The International Academy of Language & Culture is my concept, model, and blueprint for a new multilingual, (pre)K-12<sup>th</sup> grade, non-profit charter school.

The best way to explain my vision of the educational program I have created, designed, and developed, is to follow the same format of the website that I have designed. In this way, it will be a clear companion guide. So, each major section of this white paper, will correspond to the seven main pages on the website: Home, About, Academic, Schools, Initiatives, Admissions, and Contact. Likewise, some of the pages contain subpages; therefore, the explanations may encompass these subpages/categories, as needed. The website address/URL: [www.theialc.org](http://www.theialc.org)

## Page One: Home

### Section 1 – Header

Contains the full name of the charter school, an original logo design, the website address, site navigation menu, social media icons, and marketing catch phrase quote.

The home page contains the most general information about the charter school. The first design element that stands out and is most important on this page is the logo. It is made of three distinct elements: first, is the lotus flower (which represents the student). Lotus flowers typically grow in murky waters; yet they grow beautiful and strong, despite their environment. They symbolize purity, beauty, strength, resilience, and the mystic law of cause and effect (or the concept of simultaneity). The second, is the image of a school. The lotus flower is super-imposed on the school (representing knowledge, learning,

education, and development). In our society, schools are the primary place and medium by which knowledge is gained. The third part of the logo is the world. The lotus is super-imposed on the school, and the school is super-imposed onto the world. The world, therefore, represents the global aspect of our vision. In addition, it represents the concept/belief of the interconnectivity of all life on the planet.<sup>1</sup> The logo is a visual representation of our overall inspiration and concept for the school.

## Section 2 – Visual Academic Journey Image

Another design element on this page that is important is the five-part image. It is the first image that appears. In it, the students represent the five stages of education and schools that our academy is comprised of. This includes daycare, elementary school (K-5), intermediate/junior high school (6<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> grade), high school (10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade), and the study abroad program. This a visual representation of a student’s academic journey.

## Section 3 – “Real Education, not Indoctrination”

This brief section contains a link to the mission statement. The accompanying text is a hint of what the mission statement is about.

## Section 4 – Class Size: Small

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<sup>1</sup> Each page of the website is a different color that corresponds to the Chakra system (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet). This represents and acknowledges the spiritual aspect of/influence on all life.

Highlights the small class. The classes will have a maximum of 12 students per class. Ideally, there will be 4 classes per grade (starting small); however, it can easily grow and be expanded to six, or up to eight (being the maximum number of classes the program would ever permit), classes per grade. Small class sizes are essential to improving the individualized attention students receive from their mentors, daily.

#### Section 5 – Open Enrollment

This section gives information about enrollment and when the school will be launching – the target being in the fall of 2024 (for the 2024 – 2025 academic year). A link to the Admissions page is available.

#### Section 6 – Supportive Readings

In this section, additional information and articles that support the concepts that underpin the overall academic foundation the school is based upon, are available through links that navigate to outside sources.

#### Section 7 – Be the First to Know

Offers the opportunity to sign up to our mailing list.

#### Section 8 – Footer

Like the header, this contains the similar information. It is viewable, accessible, and the site is navigable from the menu it contains. Like the header, the footer, is available on all pages.



Page Two: About

## Section 1 – “Our School”

I chose the charter school model for the IALC because it aligns best with the vision and purpose for the school. The typical public-school model didn't work, because of its rigid guidelines about curriculum and strict oversight. Likewise, the private school model didn't work, as it would be inaccessible to most of our target demographics. As I researched the various American school models, Diane Ravitch discussed the origins of the charter school, the true intent and nature of it, in her book, *Reign of Error*:

One of its originators, Ray Budde, was a professor at the University of Massachusetts who envisioned charters run by teachers, free to teach without interference by the local district bureaucracy. The other originator was Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, who envisioned charters where teachers sought out the lowest-performing students, the dropouts, and the disengaged, then figured out innovative ways to ignite their interests in education. Both these men, unknown to each other, saw charters as schools empowered to devise innovative practices and ready to collaborate and share what they had learned with their colleagues and existing schools. (12)

I subscribe to the original spirit of what charter schools were intended to be. I do not see charter schools as competition, nor as replacements, to public schools. I believe that a charter school is (or should be) a non-profit entity that offers students the highest quality education. I don't support, nor agree with,

the idea of corporate privatization which commodifies the educational environment. The idea of the IALC as a global network is not at all like the corporate machine that produced many of the most popular charter school businesses across the country. The IALC network is one unified academy; therefore, though there will be additional locations globally, they will be part of the same educational entity – not individual, or separate/privately owned and operated facilities leasing the name like in a corporate-franchised business model or a private for-profit corporation “charging exorbitant rental fees” (Ravitch 170).

## Section 2 – “Mission”

This student-centered school will engage culturally sustaining pedagogy, utilizing experiential learning, food studies, and interdisciplinary studies (based in the humanities and social sciences) to add in the achievement and acquisition of language skills for multiple language literacy (reading, writing, listening, and speaking, with in-depth knowledge and respect for diverse cultures), encourage lifelong learning and critical thinking skills, development of a strong self-identity/awareness (based on embracing individual cultural differences, diversity, and acknowledgement), and foster global leadership through social justice activism.

## Section 3 – “Schools in the Academy”

The academic journey begins with our daycare/pre-K/early education program. Ms. Bea’s Daycare is named after my maternal grandmother, Beatrice Mosley.

She was known in our building and community as the woman who you could trust and would watch your kids, so many parents could work. As a child, everyday life after school consisted of an apartment full of kids (up to 30 additional children, besides the three who lived there). She made sure everyone did their homework, had a snack, and were safe, until about 4:30 pm (when some of the parents who finished work early) would pick up their children.

The IALC daycare will offer an open enrollment program with double daily sessions - morning (8 am – 11:30 am) and afternoon (12:30 pm – 4 pm). Enrollment will start at 2 years old. In daycare, students begin their linguistic journey. This is my way to eternally honor my grandmother for the kind, compassionate, loving, and generous woman that she was.

Next, is the elementary school. It includes the K – 5<sup>th</sup> grade students. Enrollment will be available in kindergarten, 1<sup>st</sup>, and 2<sup>nd</sup> grades – starting at age 5. Students will remain with their mentor-cohorts for two years (k-1<sup>st</sup> grade, 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> grade, 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade). Students graduate from 5<sup>th</sup> grade to start their next academic phase.

The intermediate/junior high school journey begins at 6<sup>th</sup> grade and ends after completing 9<sup>th</sup> grade with graduation. Like in elementary, students and mentors remain together for two years (6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> grades). However, enrollment into the academy from outside the program will start becoming difficult – due to the linguistic requirements that will need to be met. Students who wish to apply for enrollment, will also be required to pass linguistic testing

to determine their knowledge in/of at least two languages in our primary language group (Mandarin, Russian, Arabic, French, or Spanish) – as it will be difficult for students to catch up without extensive tutoring (which will not be an available option, at this time). However, for those who are eligible for enrollment, students should be 11 years old.

The high school program spans 10<sup>th</sup> grade – 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Students in the 10<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> grade will remain with their mentors for these two years, just like it has been throughout their time at IALC. At the end of their 11<sup>th</sup> grade year, students will have to decide which path forward they want to pursue: graduation (after completion of 12<sup>th</sup> grade & certification testing), or study abroad (2 year intensive study at 1 or more [up to 4] international campuses in the IALC global network); after which, they graduate with a CUNY endorsed associates' degree in linguistics and the humanities. Whichever path they choose, during their 12<sup>th</sup> grade senior year, students will complete intensive linguistic certifications in all languages in their individual linguistic profile (this includes all language in the primary and secondary language groups) to be certified in translation and interpretation for each language and cultural knowledge.

#### Section 4 – “TIDE”

This double acronym stands for: T – tolerance & think, I – inclusion & interest, D – diversity & discovery, and E – equality & equity. These represent some of the guiding principles students should strive to embrace during their academic

journey at the IALC. The stock image I used of paper lanterns, represent and symbolize our students being points and beacons of light illuminating the way to a brighter future.

## Section 5 – “Program Features”

Highlighting what is unique and special about the IALC is one of the easiest parts about this whole concept, because everything about it is unique and special – particularly in comparison to the traditional model(s) and standards in the American Educational system. As I have mentioned and will surely repeat in other areas throughout this paper, one of the most unique and outstanding features of the IALC is its multilingualism foundation. No other bi or dual language program offers the linguistic and cultural diversity of the IALC. As most language programs offer one “foreign” language immersion program, the IALC will offer full foundational education instruction and increasing immersive levels in six languages (Mandarin, Russian, Arabic, French, and Spanish – with English as the common L1). Additionally, incorporating an interdisciplinary approach to early education, further distinguishes the IALC from other academic programs and models. Other unique features our program is incorporating are experiential learning, practical knowledge (including traditional sources of knowledge), restorative justice/social justice practices, food studies, and martial arts. We will explore and discuss each of these further as we move forward.

## Section 6 – “Affiliates & Associates”

This section focuses on some of the various local institutions that I want to forge mutually beneficial and professional relationships with. Being a student at City College and a graduate student at the Graduate Center, CUNY (the City University of New York), has been a major part of my life for more than a decade. Within that time, I have met some of the most incredible academic experts, leaders, and powerhouses in their fields that I could ever have had the fortune to encounter in one lifetime. Therefore, I want to have the ability to avail my students of such rich resources, too. In addition, I believe that my school can offer amazing and unique opportunities as a research facility for graduate students and doctoral candidates in various GC departments – but particularly in urban education and linguistics. Furthermore, I believe the IALC would be a perfect training environment for bilingual education educators and bilingual reform. This is an opportunity for re-imagining how bilingual educators are trained, and their roles in developing new protocols/higher standards for language education and educational policy in America (and ultimately, globally).

#### Section 7 – “Mentors, not Teachers”

Over the past 40 years, and multiple political administrations, academic policies have had negative impact on the teacher – student dynamic. The focus on test scores and performance, has been instrumental in creating a power imbalance in classrooms and schools nationwide. This has also led to a lot of educators becoming disenchanted with continuing to work in education and a

shortage of professionals. The impact of the recent COVID pandemic on schools and educators has further pushed many skilled professionals out of the field all together. “Mentors, not teachers” is designed to re-invigorate, re-inspire, and help educators re-discover their passion for learning alongside their students by changing the power dynamic – moving from an adversarial relationship, to one of allies in exploring and understanding the world, together. Highly trained and qualified educators are essential to the academic success of any student and will have to meet the educational standards of the IALC, while simultaneously receiving deserved benefits and professional respect, which will include:

- All mentors will have native-like language skills/cultural knowledge (heritage speakers) who are, at minimum, bilingual in one, or more, target language(s) and English
- Hold a M.A. in education with 5+ years of in-classroom experience (TFA [Teach for America] credentials will not be accepted<sup>2</sup>)

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<sup>2</sup> TFA is at the center of the corporate reform movement, supplying young teachers to staff the growing number of non-union, privately managed charter schools across the nation. These inexperienced young men and women will work hard...trying to perform a job which they are ill-prepared...then move on. ... TFA is no substitute for thoughtful, long-term federal and state policies to transform the recruitment, preparation, and retention of career teachers. ... Five weeks of training is insufficient. Many teachers are now getting their degrees online from “universities” of dubious quality. The biggest producers of master’s degrees in education are online universities. This is wrong. Teachers should have a year of study, research, and practice teaching before they are allowed to teach. ... In addition to knowing their subject, they should learn how to teach, how to manage the classroom, how to deal with disruptive behavior, how to educate students with special needs, and how to engage parents to help their children. There is much more they should learn – about the history, philosophy, and politics of education, about cognitive psychology, and about the sociology of education – and there is much more that they will learn on the job. They should pass tests to demonstrate their mastery of what they intend to teach. Once in the classroom, they should have mentors who help them improve their

- A demonstrated commitment to restorative justice/culturally responsive/sustainable pedagogy, engaged teaching and transformative learning, and general education reform
- Mentors will be well compensated for their talents, certifications, and years of in-class experience (\$90k - \$110k starting base salary range – plus annual increases and bonuses; Master’s + years of experience: 0-5 - \$90k/6-10 - \$100k/10+ - \$110k)
- Small classes with access to full resources (professionals will not be required to provide materials out of their own pocket)
- Active input into the curriculum design (respect for their professional experience) and supportive, on-going professional training
- End the high attrition rate associated with charter schools and to attract/retain highly skilled professionals
- A five (5) team-member teaching cohort (group) per class – working in a four (4) day a week format (Saturdays, plus three (3) consecutive days during the week – the day they lead in their target language, plus the day before and after where they assist)

These are just some of the initiatives, policies, and practices that will be in place to attract, retain, and support the very best education professionals –

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teaching. Teaching is complex, and it should be a career, not a springboard to bigger and better things. ... TFA reinforces the public perception that teachers need very little training. (Ravitch 140-141)



ending the high attrition rates and poor work conditions commonly attributed to charter schools.

### Section 8 – “Let’s Meet Some of the Team”

In this section, I begin to introduce some of the education professionals I have been considering to be active members of the board of directors. Though, all of these people have given me their permission to use their names and likenesses, there will likely be additions/substitutions moving forward. It is obvious that a project like this will require a collaborative effort to bring it into fruition. As I move forward, I fully expect to see the development of the board members, as well as administrative and mentor staffing, change/grow to meet the needs of the IALC. However, for the sake of this project, I included a scaled down version – using people that I have consulted about the development of the IALC.

### Page Three: Academics

The IALC is a completely unique, original, and innovative student-centered charter school model with a global perspective. Our foundational concept and pedagogical vision is that of a High Academic Rigor Language and Culture program with a curriculum based in Second Language Acquisition theories and practices that foster Multilingualism; Experiential Learning using Practical Knowledge and incorporating Traditional Sources of Knowledge (traditional wisdom has valid, important, and necessary contributions to make in a

language and culture based program with high academic rigor) to Decolonize Education; Social Justice and Humanitarian Education embracing Diversity, Restorative Justice and Culturally Responsive Teaching/Learning ideologies and practices – including Critical Race Theory (which will focus on emphasizing objectivity and truth in education by looking at the diverse socio-economic and socio-political influences that contextualize modern society); and Interdisciplinary Studies using/utilizing Food Studies (including Agriculture, Culinary Arts, and Natural Resources Education), The Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, and Martial Arts. Our educational philosophy and charter school models are both designed to engage, encourage, identify, guide, stimulate, and challenge students to use their innate curiosity, creativity, interests, talents, abilities, and imagination by introducing and incorporating higher education practices into foundational, primary (K-12) pedagogy. Incorporating and introducing elements from higher education into early childhood development to identify, encourage, and stimulate students' innate interest, desire, and ability to learn and achieve academic success. The goal – giving students the academic resources, practical training, social skills, and mental tools that aid in developing emotional maturity, critical thinking, mental dexterity, open-mindedness, achieving better whole-life educational and professional outcomes, and creating global citizenship with perspectives, resources, experiences, and knowledge to lead society in more conscious, mindful, unified, and progressive ways into the future.

The academic framework for the school will be based on an increasingly immersive, rotating multilingual model with a rigorous curriculum designed to engage, guide, and challenge students to use their innate curiosity, creativity, interests, talents, and imagination to acquire knowledge and develop critical thinking skills. The school will operate on a six (6) day a week model – Monday through Saturday and offer small (12 student) class sizes in a free and open format. The school’s environment will include green space (and possibly green materials) in the design and integrate green theory (like solar power, water turbines, aquaponics, etc.) with innovative technologies.

The school will use practical knowledge to introduce foundational skills and educational principles to students – thereby connecting these strategies to the more abstract concepts and knowledge, as the students continue to grow and advance. Through the lens and use of food studies, we will introduce students to the concepts of science and math by first introducing them in the agricultural (soil and hydroponic) and culinary arts programs. Just like planting a seed, the students will be introduced to the natural world by engaging with it from kindergarten; then, as they age and develop, the lesson will gradually become more complex, expansive, and lead students to a more organic understanding of the sciences and math, like biology, chemistry, nutrition, weights and measurements, fractions, etc.

This is an example of how we will use the innate curiosity and interests of students to introduce new ideas, information, concepts, and knowledge in a

very practical way (teaching them how to plant a simple seed or make a sandwich), and then connect and expand it to include the most abstract concepts that we grapple with and explore as adults, over the course of their educational journey. Students will learn practical skills that will serve them in their daily lives (how to grow their own food and how to cook), while also gaining academic knowledge and developing their critical/higher order thinking skills. There will be an overlap from/into other academic subjects like history/social studies, as well.

#### Section 1 – “Culture, Multilingualism & Multiliteracies”

No other program offers the linguistic diversity of IALC. The (pre)K-12 curriculum will offer a six (6) language primary group. On a rotational daily schedule, students will receive full academic instruction in the primary “foreign” language of day. Content-based language teaching (CBLT), content-based instruction (CBI), or content and language integrated learning (CLIL) will be a major component of the pedagogical framework/profile of the school. CBLT/CBI/CLIL involves students receiving fully immersive language instruction in non-linguistic curricular subjects (like math, science, history, geography). In fact, Dr. Ofelia Garcia, a leading global authority, and a powerful advocate of bi/multilingual education, described this very design necessity in her 2006 book, *Imagining Multilingual Schools*:

We adhere to Andersson and Boyer's (1978) classic definition of bilingual education as one in which two languages are used as languages of instruction in subjects other than the languages themselves. This means

that the main criterion for multilingual education is the number of languages of instruction. Accordingly, multilingual education is education where more than two languages are used as languages of instruction in subjects other than the languages themselves. (13)

These languages were selected by three (3) criteria: most widely spoken global languages<sup>3</sup>, most beneficial for global business<sup>4</sup>, and most popular alternate languages spoken in New York City<sup>5</sup>. Globally, the languages identified as the most beneficial for/used in business are:

1. English
2. Mandarin
3. Spanish
4. Arabic
5. German
6. Portuguese
7. Russian
8. French
9. Japanese
10. Hindi

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<sup>3</sup> ([www.visualcapitalist.com/100-most-spoken-languages](http://www.visualcapitalist.com/100-most-spoken-languages))

<sup>4</sup> ([www.alexika.com/blog/2018/11/29/top-business-languages-of-the-world](http://www.alexika.com/blog/2018/11/29/top-business-languages-of-the-world))

<sup>5</sup> ([www.baruch.cuny.edu/nycdata/population-geography/language-ancestry](http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/nycdata/population-geography/language-ancestry))

Metropolitan New York City has a population of over 18 million<sup>6</sup>. Amongst this diverse population, 49% speak a language other than English<sup>7</sup>. The linguistic demographic of New York City<sup>8</sup> is as follows:

Language and ranking	Percentage of the population in the NY area
1. English	64.47%
2. Spanish	19.40%
3. Chinese (Mandarin, Cantonese)	3.10%
4. Russian	1.35%
5. Other Indo-European	1.31%
6. Italian	1.22%
7. French Creole	1.01%
8. Korean	0.91%
9. French	0.77%
10. Tagalog	0.77%
11. Polish	0.73%
12. Other Asian	0.72%

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<sup>6</sup> NYC demographic trends, (<https://www.macrotrends.net/cities/23083/new-york-city/population>)

<sup>7</sup> ([www.cis.org/Report/Almost-Half-Speak-Foreign-Language-Americas-Largest-Cities](http://www.cis.org/Report/Almost-Half-Speak-Foreign-Language-Americas-Largest-Cities))

<sup>8</sup> For detailed linguistic maps of NYC, ([www.elalliance.org/programs/maps](http://www.elalliance.org/programs/maps))([www.languagemap.nyc](http://www.languagemap.nyc))

13. Yiddish	0.71%
14. Arabic	0.68%
15. African	0.59%
16. Hindi	0.58%
17. Urdu	0.48%
18. Greek	0.45%
19. Hebrew	0.42%
20. German	0.33%

From examining statistics presented in these three (3) categories, there are clear crossovers that encouraged the specific languages selected for the school's linguistic profile. As a leading global business and financial hub (Wall Street, NYSE – New York Stock Exchanges, AMEX – American Stock Exchange, NASDAQ – National Association of Securities Dealers), political center (The United Nations and 118 foreign global embassies), and a leader in the entertainment/media industry, New York is uniquely and ideally suited for such a progressive, multilingual/multicultural school and educational program. It has already been proven by the establishment of bilingual/dual language programs and schools (established and supported by many of the diverse immigrant communities that call NYC home) that they are desired by and important to these native/heritage speaker communities. Maintaining their

link to and the languages of their original cultures, is still important to developing their identities in between two, or more, cultures.

Utilizing the collective research from linguistics, as well as being a resource of/for new research/long-term studies, I believe whole-heartedly in the positive life-changing effects that will come from our dynamic approach to a language and culture-based program and its foundational role for the long-term success of the students. I dare believe Thomas B. Timar, professor at UC Davis School of Education, would consider the IALC to be the type of institution he was referring to when he said “the best hope for a school-based strategy for reducing the gaps lies in a grassroots model of change.” (Ravitch 61) He goes on to describe an institution “which engages the school community in meeting the emotional, psychological, social, and academic needs of students.” (61) Timar also believes the “what works best is not regulation and mandates but professional collaboration, community building, and cooperation. Such a scenario can happen only when those in the school have the authority to design their own improvement plans and act.” (61) As a charter school idealist, I think that would be a positive conceptualization of my vision of/for the IALC.

Achieving better whole-life outcomes for students in disadvantaged and/or marginalized demographics, like those of the BIPOC/LGBTQ+ communities, developing cultural pride, building self-esteem, while simultaneously cultivating a genuine respect for and appreciation of diversity, and making space for inclusion and equity are important milestones in a humanistic



education model. Students will have greater emotional maturity, social awareness, and better mental health resources and outcomes.

## Section 2 – “The Language of Motion”

By thinking about everything from the point of view of “...as a language/the language of...” I began to look at the idea of physical education in a different way. I used the perspective of how we convey culture through motion and how we communicate with our bodies. This led me to the idea of dance as a form of communication; and likewise, martial arts as an expression of culture. As I nurtured these ideas, I began to reflect upon my own training in the martial arts and dance, in my youth. I realized that there was natural intersectionality between martial arts and dance, with experiential learning through muscle memory – as to this day, I still use the movements I learned in those forms of training in my own exercise routines. I also began to think about the benefits that came from my training – body awareness, strength and muscle development, spatial awareness, increased stamina, and conditioning, were all physical; however, they were not the only benefits I got from my training. I developed confidence in my ability to protect/defend myself, improved my mental focus, and learned about dedication. Learning to be centered in one’s own mind and find harmony with one’s own body is true peace.

Martial Arts and swimming will be the primary methods of instruction for whole body development and physical education. Cultural dance helps develop

spatial awareness, flexibility, develop strength, rhythm and timing, understanding non-verbal forms of expression and communication.

Sports aid in social and emotional development, collaborative skills, personal achievement, and team building. Wellness & Meditation practices give students tools to achieve and maintain physical and mental self-care, by developing healthy and productive ways to handle conflict, overcome stress, or negative emotions; not to mention, develop emotional intelligence/awareness, better communication skills, and improve self-control, discipline, and focus.

### Section 3 – “History + Math + Science = Food Studies”

In our program, food studies is an interdisciplinary approach to foundational early childhood and adolescent education. It encourages creative thinking, critical thinking, and problem solving. Students benefit from experiential learning, development of practical knowledge and skills, ability to apply education with practical, real-life implications/applications. Food (studies) can be useful in the exploration of simplistic and basic principles to abstract and advanced concepts that are a part of the human experience. The point is to foster an appreciation and respect for the natural world and our environment.

### Section 4 – “Saturday School”

A mandatory part of the extended academic curriculum/program. Social justice activities for students & families run through the school’s Language & Culture Preservation and Food Security NGOs. Students engage in community outreach and learn about ways to support through participation. Saturday school

encourages family interaction and offers fun, meaningful, and interactive ways to engage with, be a part of, and support students' academic journey.

I used various stock images to represent the diversity of cultures embraced through our program. However, the first photo of a mother and son is a personal photo of my nephew, Burrrito, and his mother. As I have credited Burrrito for being a major inspiration for me in the development of the IALC, I absolutely had to have him in my project. Though I'm not exactly certain, I believe he is about 1.5 - 2 years old in this photo.

#### Section 5 – “Studios & Sports”

Using the arts and sports to identify and develop students' talents, interests, and abilities is a part of the foundational theory of the IALC. Connecting the interests, abilities, and talents of students to their academic development can/will inspire greater educational outcomes and professional opportunities – as students can imagine greater possibilities in life for themselves. The Arts help with critical thinking and problem solving through creativity and innovation. Sports develop cooperation, comradery, and the ability to work with others.

#### Section 6 – “The Green Component”

By participating in social justice activities, students become aware and mindful about the natural world & the environment. Additionally, as part of their promotion requirements, students will plant a tree – showing a commitment to supporting our environment.

## Page Four: Schools

There are four basic schools of the IALC: Ms. Bea’s Daycare (pre-K/early education), the elementary school (K-5<sup>th</sup> grade), the intermediate/junior high school (6<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> grade), and the high school (10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade). All schools, except daycare, run on a six day a week schedule. The school day starts at 7a.m. and ends at 5:30p.m. – Monday through Friday. Saturday School has separate hours, covered in its own section. All students receive free breakfast, lunch, and a snack (Monday through Friday) – using organic, non-GMO, in-house sourced produce (fruits and vegetables) from our agriculture program’s grow-house. There are a variety of fruit bearing trees/plants throughout the green spaces built into the facilities that are there to provide accessible fresh fruit to anyone for the picking, as outside food is not permitted on campus. This ensures that students have healthy, nutritious, and balanced meals – made from real food.

### Section 1 – “Facilities & Locations”

In this section, I explain the physical aspect of the New York facility. The New York school will be located on the UWS (Upper West Side) of Manhattan. This geographic location was chosen for multiple reasons, which include accessibility – as students/families from all boroughs (and New Jersey) are willing to travel to Manhattan for school/work/entertainment; proximity – there are numerous educational, artistic, and cultural resources, venues, and

institutions (City College, Graduate Center, Columbia University, Fordham University, etc.); transportation – easily accessible by bus, subway, or car; and diversity – the ethnic diversity of the area greatly reflects the diversity of the various communities that make up our city.

The Metro theater is an art deco style movie theater that is a beloved part of the community. It has been vacant for many years and would be an ideal site for the IALC. The goal would be to renovate and update the existing theater (maintaining as much of art deco architecture as possible while modernizing its functionality) and add to the structure by building an additional 18 to 21 stories. This addition, would incorporate a four-floor greenhouse/grow-house (in-house sourced, organic, non-GMO produce used in daily meals and weekly farmer's market), four to five floor athletic complex (swimming pool, weight room, dojo, gymnasium, track, meditation center, etc.), two to three floors of dormitories for visiting students and one floor of guest accommodations, state-of-the-art classrooms and other academic facilities, rehearsal spaces, open concept green spaces with fruit bearing trees and fish ponds as part of our wellness framework, administrative offices, publicly accessible retail spaces (bakery, farmer's market, etc.), and professional/chef level culinary kitchen-classrooms.

This would be the first school in an interlinked global network – opening over the next 10 – 15 years. These additional campuses will be opened in different countries (like Brazil, India, China, etc.) and the eight DHS (Department of

Homeland Security) defined global regions (Africa, Asia, Europe, Oceania, the Caribbean, and the three American zones [North, Central, South]) that are native to or culturally related to the target languages taught in the program. These international campuses would have additional facilities to offer safe housing to visiting students and/or their families, farming & green space, entertainment & retail facilities (including local & international restaurants, banking, and a food market), athletic/sports facilities, medical-security-transportation facilities, and local branch resource offices for the school-related NGOs. These facilities will offer the junior high and high school students safe, secure, and supervised lodging locations while visiting/studying in foreign countries/regions during their mandatory domestic & international study initiatives – beginning in junior high school (6<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> grade) for two (2) weeks, twice (2x) a year; where they will have first-hand, real world, fully-immersive experiences through volunteer programs sponsored by the school-related NGOs. High school students will spend full semesters abroad focusing on improving their cultural knowledge and linguistic skills – with the added opportunities of learning new languages indigenous to that region, should they want to.

## Section 2 – “Students”

The New York State Education Department Charter School application requires applicants to identify the target population/special community to be served (based on need, such as economic disadvantage, English language learners,

etc.). In this section, I describe who the target demographic groups are. I explain how/why each of these groups were identified, and the percentage of seats being allocated for each.

The American Public School system can be experienced quite differently by students based on such factors as socio-economic and/or socio-political status. Students who are considered economically disadvantaged (regardless of race/ethnicity), who are targeted by socio-political policies because of their gender/sexual identity and expression, or who are (and have been) historically undervalued and mistreated systemically based on race, ethnicity, or country of origin, have often found their academic environments and experiences to be negative, demoralizing, and problematic.

Educational outcomes for minority children are much more a function of their unequal access to key educational resources, including skilled teachers and quality curriculum, than they are a function of race. In fact, the U.S. educational system is one of the most unequal in the industrialized world, and students routinely receive dramatically different learning opportunities based on their social status. In contrast to European and Asian nations that fund schools centrally and equally, the wealthiest 10 percent of U.S. school districts spend nearly 10 times more than the poorest 10 percent, and spending ratios of 3 to 1 are common within states. Despite stark differences in funding, teacher quality, curriculum, and class sizes, the prevailing view is that if students do not

achieve, it is their own fault. If we are ever to get beyond the problem of the color line, we must confront and address these inequalities.<sup>9</sup>

When talking about disadvantaged groups, it may be surprising to consider White students as being disadvantaged when the political and economic power structures greatly favor them. Yet, their disadvantage stems from their privilege. As White Nationalism and White Christian Fundamentalism have been on the rise over the last five decades (and having a historical foundation in White Supremist ideology that traces back to the origins of America), White students are being intentionally misled, misinformed, and lied to about true American history and the nature of policies put into place designed to maintain the myth of White superiority in this country and our global society, as a whole.

Likewise, BIPOC and LGBTQ+ identifying students are exposed to additional socio-economic and socio-political policies and practices that further complicate their ability to access a high-quality education – which include disproportionate allocation of resources/lack of funding, shortages of highly qualified and experienced educators, class overcrowding, and increased exposure to the “School-to-Prison-Pipeline” (STPP). This is “a framework describing mechanisms and pathways within the education system that drive students towards involvement in the criminal-legal system including incarceration, probation, and juvenile detention” (Rosentel et al. 482) through

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<sup>9</sup> (Linda Darling-Hammond; November 30, 2001; *Unequal Opportunity: Race and Education*; Brookings.edu; December 15, 2019; [<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/unequal-opportunity-race-and-education/>])



direct involvement and negative interactions with law enforcement and the judicial system. Black youths (both male and female) are exposed to criminalization, by criminal referral to law enforcement for activities/behaviors which could have typically been handled in school; and, at a far greater rate than that of their White counterparts would be/are for the same (or greater) infractions.

LGBTQ+ identifying students can be subjected to negative realities and/or educational policies that further complicate their academic experience. Some of these obstacles can include poor home situations/homelessness, negative social dynamics in academic settings/environments (verbal/physical [including sexual] assault and bullying, targeting and victimization by peers/staff, and/or targeted discriminatory policies [lack of access to gender-appropriate facilities, exclusionary discipline/expulsion, discriminatory dress codes]) that further isolates marginalized students.

In a 2020 article titled, *Black Transgender Women and the School-to-Prison-Pipeline: Exploring the Relationship Between Anti-trans Experiences in School and Adverse Criminal-Legal System Outcomes*, the authors Kris Rosentel, Ileana Lopez-Martinez, Richard A. Crosby, Laura F. Salazar, and Brandon J. Hill acknowledge that “anti-trans experiences warrant consideration as factors in the school-to-prison-pipeline.” (481) Additionally, Rosentel et al. note, “Previous scholarship also suggests that transgender youth, and young transgender

people of color in particular, face heavy criminalization due to intersecting forms of gender, racial, and sexual marginalization. (482)

All these factors have led to BIPOC & LGBTQ+ students having some of the poorest educational outcomes that can (and have) negatively impacted, altered and/or changed the trajectory of these students' whole lives. Black Transgender students have the worst academic outcomes and are mostly likely to suffer negative interactions with law enforcement and the criminal justice system, then any other group. "Policy interventions that combat anti-trans school victimization and institutional discrimination may be critical to disrupting the STPP for Black/African American transgender women."

(Rosentel et al. 481) Therefore, it is essential that these students have an academic environment that safe, validates their identities, provide them with positive role models, skilled mentors, and offer positive opportunities and experiences in education that are responsive to their needs, and invested in their whole-self-development.. It is because of this that 25% of the available seats will be specifically allocated to self-identifying LGBTQ+ students.

The U.S., and NYC - in particular, has one of (if not) the largest and most culturally and linguistically diverse populations in the world. "Based on analysis of newly released Census Bureau data for 2018, the Center for Immigration Studies finds that 67.3 million residents in the United States now speak a language other than English at home"<sup>10</sup>; and in New York City, 49% of

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<sup>10</sup> (<https://cis.org/Report/673-Million-United-States-Spoke-Foreign-Language-Home-2018>)

residents speak another language other than English at home<sup>11</sup>. It is said that in New York City, just about every language and/or culture is represented. Now, whether that is true or not, the tremendous linguistic and cultural diversity of New York is undeniable. “The rich history of immigration on the east coast of the United States has resulted in a wide variety of nearly 800 native tongues being heard in New York.”<sup>12</sup> However, this cultural diversity and linguistic representation is not reflected in, nor for the most part, respected by our education system. The U.S. educational system is based on a monolingual hegemonic pedagogy – rooted in Western European colonial(ism) policies and a patriarchal, White supremacist sociopolitical ideology.

Dr. Ofelia Garcia commented on the real value and importance placed on knowing and speaking English - emphasizing its commodification, economic advantage and impact, and legacy of colonization upon the global social collective. “Bilingualism is an important resource that accrues socioeconomic benefits ... bilingualism is a form of capital used to 'negotiate social goods and benefits.' The benefits of speaking English are well known throughout Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America.” (97) While White students have always been immediately praised, positively rewarded for, and directly benefited from the awareness of the inherent value of bi/multilingualism, ironically bi/multilingualism in BIPOC has not been viewed as favorably. This has led to many having a complex relationship with the American Educational system.

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<sup>11</sup> (<https://cis.org/Report/Almost-Half-Speak-Foreign-Language-Americas-Largest-Cities>)

<sup>12</sup> (<https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/how-many-languages-are-spoken-in-nyc.html>)

This complex relationship clearly inspired the creation of *Tongue-tied: The Lives of Multilingual Children in Public Education*, a book authored by Otto Santa

Ana:

The public's views about language are based on repudiated learning theories. These theories falsely demand that language minority children give up their home language to learn English quicker. ... all the most important educational theorist of the past century, such as Dewey, Piaget, Bruner, Freire, and Vygotsky, have all stressed that to silence students is to place a great hurdle on their educational path. ... These students' tongues are tied. ... Another tongue-tied segment of the U.S. population is the parents of these children. An antidemocratic linguistic ideology discredits their home language or home dialect, as it falsely exalts Standard English. Most often, the warranted outrage of these adults is often dismissed as so much garbled ingratitude.

Another group of throttled Americans include the schoolteachers who are constrained by the prevailing linguistic ideology. The teachers speak English, of course, but their heartfelt desire to provide the best education for each student is undercut – often unintentionally – by their unquestioned acceptance of the monolingual ideology. English-only instruction restricts the range of pedagogical methods available to teachers. This ideology also insists that dialects, such as Chicano English, African American English, Neoriquen English, American Indian English, Native Hawaiian English, working-class white English dialects, among others – all legitimate dialects of home communities – must be cut out of the children's mouths to advance their education. (2-3)

The truth is the current state of the country is a direct result of the disfunction in the American Educational system. The rise of white nationalism, white Christian fundamentalism, and the MAGA people are all products of the narrow, colonized, western European false narratives of white supremacy, that are the founding principles of this country. This method and message of indoctrination is disseminated in academic institutions, inculcated by the insistence on a monolingual education system, and reinforced by popular media. Peddling of these false narratives, changing the facts of historical events, gaslighting everyone into not believing what they know to be true, omitting people and/or their contributions to this country because it makes you look bad, projecting the notion of morale goodness, benevolence, trustworthiness, and innocence while banning books and censoring educational material that is available to children because they give honest accounts, hiding a history of threat, theft, and violence by vilifying the target, is what the American educational system has been reduced to.

In an interview with Variety.com at the Dubai International Film Festival, American actor and filmmaker, Rob Reiner, said “Donald Trump is the single most unqualified human being to ever assume the presidency of the United States. He is mentally unfit. Not only does he not understand how government works, he has no interest in trying to find out how it works.”<sup>13</sup> Trump is not new; in fact, he is the living, physical embodiment of all American History and

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<sup>13</sup> (<https://variety.com/video/rob-reiner-trump-mentally-unfit/>)

the purest example of what the American Education system produces<sup>14</sup> – white mediocrity believing in its own lie/myth of superiority.<sup>15</sup> He is all the ugly things that America tries to hide publicly, but that ugliness is the truest version of itself – America just doesn't want to see/claim/own it. If we could coax/cause all American history to take human form, it would literally coalesce to be D.J. Trump.

White supremacy, “white rage”<sup>16</sup>, and white guilt are all covered in Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility*, all sharing the common core – FEAR. “Thus, white fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress in the habitus becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt.” (103) Fear of the unknown, fear of diversity (things/people that are different), fear of retaliation (for all the horrors, crimes, and injustices inflicted on others by White people historically), and fear of exposure (having to own their true legacy) are just some of the obstacles to addressing America's real legacy of institutionalized discrimination and systemic racism.

Due to the combination of White fragility and the mistaken notion of White supremacy, real American history is being redacted, reimagined,

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<sup>14</sup> This statement is not meant to discount the efforts of American students who have achieved academic success despite policies designed to impede their advancement and progress.

<sup>15</sup> An article discussing Trump's educational history, his time at the Wharton School (University of Pennsylvania) and his hidden college transcripts (<https://www.phillymag.com/news/2019/09/14/donald-trump-at-wharton-university-of-pennsylvania/>)

<sup>16</sup> Anderson, Carol Elaine. *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide*. United States, Bloomsbury USA, 2016.

reconceptualized, and rewritten – as to not upset White students (or cause them to feel guilt, shame, or a responsibility for the actions of their ancestors). White students cannot, and must not, be sheltered from the truth and the realities that all other students must face. If we are to dismantle the systems of institutionalized racism and eliminate the myth and specter of White supremacy, then it is time that White students wake up to the realities of the world and society the rest of us live in.

White fear is at the root of systemic and institutionalized racism. Though most White people would argue to the contrary, and genuinely believe it - it is not only the work of BIPOC/LGBTQ+ people to fight racism. White people must accept their responsibility in/for the part they have played creating this reality and be a part of doing the work to change it.

Naming white supremacy changes the conversation in two ways: It makes the system visible and shifts the locus of change onto white people, where it belongs. It also points us in the direction of the lifelong work that is uniquely ours, challenging our complicity with and investment in racism. This does not mean that people of color do not play a part but that the full weight of responsibility rests with those who control the institutions. (DiAngelo 33)

We can help by allowing them time and granting them access to learn about others. Teach them how to appreciate and respect other people/cultures; without appropriation, assimilation, and/or destruction. Through honest exchange, dialogue, accountability, mutual respect, and hearts full of love – this is how we open minds clouded by the panic of guilt, hearts cold from

hatred, and souls misshapen by fear. White students would greatly benefit from having access to our unique program & school environment.

The IALC offers an opportunity to change this outcome in/for the future. Our program is uniquely positioned to address fear, hatred, intolerance, and violence, through speaking truth to power (those in fear) and sharing the truth of who we are with one another, expressing love to those who have acted the worst but are in need the most, giving ourselves and others the freedom to be who they are, and acting from compassion to help those in need rather than doing them harm.

Schools should be places that provide respite from the uncertainty in children's lives. They should be safe havens from what is often a heartless world. They should be institutions that change with the times when it is necessary to change. They should be up-to-date with technology, they should welcome evidence-based innovation, and they should be receptive to the best ideas about meeting the needs of children. (Ravitch 305)

The path forward requires that we tell the truth about our collective past, so that we can heal the angry, festering wounds that are the root cause of our troubling state. If we are to dismantle the systems of institutionalized racism and eliminate the myth and specter of White supremacy, then it is time that White students wake up to the realities of the world and society the rest of us live in.

There is no more room for white fragility born out of white guilt and white fear. White students need academic environments where it is safe for them to hear,



see, and learn the same truths as everyone else. They need a place where they can learn about other cultures and people, without fear; a place to learn appreciation of, respect for, and acceptance of diversity and different ways of moving through the world – without replacement and appropriation. White students deserve to have genuine pride in their own culture and accomplishments – without the need to dismiss or diminish those of others. It is time for them to ask themselves the problematic questions and do the work – to be the voice (cause) of change (effect) in White spaces. White people have a major and vital role to play in and responsibility to the transformation of our global society. When the healing work is done, then we can move forward towards a future yet unimaginable. Therefore, the target demographic for the IALC includes and holds space for BIPOC (50%), LGBTQ+ (25%), and White (25%) students.

#### Sub-Section A: Wellness Initiatives

The next section focuses on the wellness initiatives in place for students. These six initiatives are part of the restorative justice/trauma-conscious framework that we will use to help give students the tools and support to cope with their everyday life – in school and out. These six programs are:

- A. Peer-to-Peer Mentoring: a program where older students foster a big brother/big sister like relationship with younger students to give them a student perspective, advice, and support.

- B. The Future Foundation: Leadership, Wealth Building & Entrepreneurship: students will get advice, guidance, and training to help them prepare for the realities of the professional world.
- C. Student Advocate/Representative: students will have someone who's purpose is to make sure the student is heard and treated fairly in any/all disciplinary issues.
- D. Talk to Me: Talk Therapy: a mental health resource, staffed by mental health professionals, that provide students with individual, or group talk therapy sessions.
- E. Keep it Moving: Pilates & Yoga Movement Therapy: led by trained professionals, students learn positive physical activities they can employ to relieve stress, or cope with other emotions.
- F. A Quiet Place: student will be instructed in meditative techniques and restorative spaces created to encourage students to find respite from stress, gain clarity and focus, or quiet the mind.
- G. Real Talk: this program will be only available to the intermediate/junior high school and high school students. Periodically, a diverse panel of guest speakers will be invited to share real-life experiences on wide ranging topics, followed by a Q&A session.

Sub-Section B: Self-Development Principles

Following this section, I outline the “Self-Development Principles” for all students. As most of these are self-explanatory, it is unnecessary to give an in-depth explanation/definition of each principle.

### Section 3 – “Parents”

This section is designed to give the parents of potential students’ basic information about attitudes, policies, practices, and the positionality of the IALC. Though I’m not going to discuss this section too in depth, I will point out that this section is aimed at parents being aware of the commitment they and their children would be making in joining the IALC community. Family support is a major component and important factor in the academic success of any student – even more so for our students.

We highlight some of the programs and activities that are designed to encourage interaction between students and their families offered weekly during Saturday School. This also helps families see how committed we are to developing positive community ties – both with the IALC and the greater local communities where our schools/campuses are located.

The other vital information for parents – uniforms. We provide the basic dress code for students – from elementary to high school. The main color of the school (the tops) will be dark purple. The accent colors (the bottoms) will include beige (elementary), grey (intermediate/junior high), black (high school), and white (in some instances, like gym shorts). Purple represents and symbolizes leadership (royalty), divinity, wisdom, creativity, transformation,

strength, power, wealth (luxury), dignity, peace, independence, nobility, and pride – all qualities we seek to instill in all students.

#### Page Five: Initiatives

The desire and hope for our children to grow up and be kind, caring, and compassionate people is common amongst most families. To that end, involving our students in social justice activities is the point, purpose, and focus of our “Initiative” programs. These initiatives will be managed by the three Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) established by the school. Each of these NGOs will focus on one of the following issues: food security, language & culture preservation, and the environment & the natural world. Each of these issues is a real problem facing various communities and peoples around the world in modern society.

#### Section 1 – “Food Security”

During the pandemic and in my final semester, I was able to take a course in food studies. This is an area I had always had an interest in and finally had the opportunity to take a course. From early on, I had always believed that food studies should be a part of the design and included in the curriculum for the IALC. Simultaneously, the problem of food insecurity was highlighted for many families and in many communities throughout the city, state, and country (as a whole). This led me to consider how some of our potential students, many of whom could come from economically disadvantaged households, could be

directly affected by this very issue themselves; and what we (as a school/community) could do to actively work against and combat this problem on a personal, communal, and societal levels. I further contemplated how to inspire our students to care about struggles many people are going through to put food on the table. Some people (primarily in communities of color) not having access to healthy food options/living in food deserts (lack food markets that offer produce); and ways to make it a positive teachable moment for social justice and getting them involved in finding solutions. From this, the idea of incorporating agriculture into the curriculum, as a means to introduce math and science, developed. Additionally, in another course related to curriculum development, I focused on experiential learning and practical knowledge, as being important parts of education. I demonstrated the connection between food, culture, and emotional memory, as my part of a group presentation. I collected recipes from my colleagues and asked them to write down any memories/experiences related to these recipes. This led to the creation of a collective cookbook (compiled from the recipes and memories associated with them). Ultimately, I realized that food was the perfect vehicle to explore more than just math and science, but history, culture, and language as well. As I thought about it more, I also realized that food studies and culinary arts had interdisciplinary applications – as it had the ability to convey very simplistic and practical ideas to very complex and abstraction notions, as well. I became very excited about the idea, and this inspired my research into incorporating and utilizing food studies and culinary arts in the design for the IALC program.

The intersectionality of social justice, interdisciplinary studies, and food studies became obvious, and more and more so as I thought about it. The development of NGOs (non-governmental organizations) that focused on developing safe, interesting, and positive ways for students to engage with social justice issues, while actively helping various communities fit with the global perspective of the IALC – as food security issues are a global problem. Establishing separate NGOs that are related to the school, allows for the expansion of the initiatives as more campuses are built and added to the global network of the IALC. The NGOs will act as an intermediary between the IALC and the local communities, other organizations, and national governments where the regional campuses are located. Through such initiatives, students can be involved in green technology projects, community gardens/farms, running community farmer’s markets, supplying produce to community pantries/kitchens, and more – while simultaneously having culturally immersive experiences that further their academic, cultural, and linguistic pursuits. Additionally, they will gain invaluable life experiences that can lead to a variety of professional pathways in life.

## Section 2 – “Language & Culture Preservation”

Like food security, the endangerment of languages and cultures is a global phenomenon that needs attention. Many indigenous cultures and their unique languages are being lost – some that have little to no documentation. In some cases, indigenous elders are unable to pass on their linguistic knowledge to the

youth because of lack of interest. This initiative program would focus on exposing our students to these and other regionally specific languages, histories, and cultural practices, to preserve their unique and traditional knowledge. This will be done in three ways: first – Saturday School’s “The Indigenous World” program. Students and their families will spend part of their day learning about languages, cultures, and histories of the indigenous populations in their region; and second, they will spend part of the day listening to stories from a person they “check-out” from our “Living Library”. The library will be made up of weekly community guests who will share stories about themselves, their culture, etc., in their native language. Though the languages used in the living library will be based on those in the curriculum (and are not endangered), the program will still operate through the language and culture preservation NGO (as the NGO is the liaison between the school and the public/other organizations). These programs are designed to help students with their listening, comprehension, and conversation skills; as well as, become aware of the diversity, beauty, and appreciate different sources of knowledge in/of the indigenous populations all around us (effectively working to decolonize sources of knowledge).

The third phase of the program will consist of bi-annual domestic and/or international travel. During these trips, students will have the opportunity to experience immersive cultural activities in the arts, language, and learn about how diverse groups live. However, this part of the program will only be available starting in intermediate/junior high school and continue through high school.

### Section 3 – “Environment & the Natural World”

The final NGO will deal with the environment and the natural world. These initiatives will offer students opportunities to learn about the flora and fauna in our local and distant ecologies. In the early childhood phase (pre-school to 5<sup>th</sup> grade), students will visit local parks, museums, aquariums, zoos, and other educational resources and venues. When students reach intermediate/junior high school, they will have opportunities to gain experience about, experience, and explore the biodiversity of the areas they visit during their domestic trips and international travel.

#### Page Six: Admissions

The “Admissions” page is very simple. It gives general information about enrollment. However, this page can easily be augmented to contain more information about the application process, admission lottery dates, and anything else more specifically related to the opening of the IALC, as this project moves closer to fruition and its future locations. The three stock images chosen were deliberate to show the diversity of the modern family and that all family dynamics are valid, embraced, and welcomed at IALC. The first solo image of the young boy is a current photo of my nephew, Burrito. Currently, he is almost 5 years old (this picture is 3 months before his 5th birthday).



## Page Seven: Contact

The final webpage is the “Contact” page. Interested parties are encouraged to sign-up for the mailing list. This is the way families can receive information and updates about the IALC as we move forward towards opening.

## Conclusion:

In 2009, I was working at a job where I made decent money but had no future (NYC-OTB [Off Track Betting] would be closed for good in 2010), as the company was being dismantled by the city and state legislature. However, I knew that I wanted more, better for myself; and a powerful desire to return to college and a fear of what the future could hold, motivated me to return to college. I applied to CWE (Center for Worker Education), a division of CCNY (City College of NY) and was enrolled, beginning my undergraduate academic journey in the fall 2009. I enrolled in the communications program (with a focus in media studies), believing that I wanted to be a fantasy/science-fiction writer, like one of my favorites, Octavia Butler. I started my unique and completely independent academic journey (and continued on with it) unsure of and not knowing where I was really going, nor what I intended to do once I reached the end (graduation in 2018); but this road didn't lead me where I thought I wanted to go, instead it led me to where I needed to be.

When asked, my original and quick answer was – I was creating a school for my nephew (and other marginalized, disadvantaged and/or vulnerable kids).

However, as I went through this process of research, project development, and introspective writing, I discovered a much deeper and more profound truth, I designed and am building the school I created through and manifested with my own unique academic journey. I designed the school that I needed, wanted, and had (in a way, as individual parts) as a child; and likewise, children like me. I used my own life's experience as the blueprint for the design of the school that can and will change our collective futures. Though a child may come from what society deems a socio-economic disadvantaged household, or have a socio-politically marginalized identity, doesn't mean that that child is incapable of academic brilliance or any less deserving of an education of the best quality and high academic rigor. As I am living proof that socio-economic disadvantage, nor a socio-political marginalized identity, is not an indication of the trajectory of a student's potential, nor the quality of their mind. The IALC is needed. Success can be defined differently for everyone – STEM (Science, technology, mathematics, and engineering) is not the only way to build a successful future or have a meaningful life. I spent my whole life hearing and being told that I don't, I shouldn't, or even that I'm not allowed, to exist. I've been told that I'm less than, not good enough, or unworthy of being loved – and that I should be grateful for any acknowledgement at all. When the truth is I am the rare, and magical, winged Black unicorn that academia (and the rest of society) feared to imagine could actually exist. I will spread my powerful wings and continue to soar to ever new heights to inspire those around me, those who will come after me; and beyond the reach of those who didn't believe in

me, didn't/don't respect me, and don't deserve me - because they tried to destroy me. And I'm here to illuminate the way by creating pathways for others to discover their own magnificence and live their own truths. As I once read in a FaceBook meme by an unknown creator, paraphrasing a quote by Tom Peters (co-author of *In Search of Excellence*) - "True leaders don't raise followers, true leaders raise new leaders". To raise the new leaders and global citizens of tomorrow – this will be my legacy.

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