

# International School of Monterey

## Fall 2007 Parent/Guardian Meeting

Presented by Prashant Gupta

### Introduction

Good evening. I appreciate your being here during a very busy time of year, right between Thanksgiving and the holidays.

We wanted to squeeze this first parent/guardian meeting of the year in here because the message that I am delivering on behalf of the board starts with thanks, then draws on the themes of the holiday season—a time when people from many cultural backgrounds immerse themselves in the spirit of community, respect, kindness, and giving—to encourage you to deepen your involvement in our school community and your commitment to the ideals that the International School of Monterey represents.

### Thanksgiving

At our board meeting during Thanksgiving week, we discussed how much we have to give thanks for here at ISM.

Consider the curriculum.

- ▶ We offer a full range of subjects that includes the arts, Spanish, and physical education.
- ▶ Through the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM), we expose our students to an even wider range of activities such as photography, dance, and sports to maximize their engagement in the learning process.
- ▶ We get our students hands on in the real world. Two-thirds of them participate in a multiday science camp at some point during the academic year.
- ▶ And students in every grade regularly participate in fieldtrips tied to their current units of instruction.

Consider the success of our students.

- ▶ In February, fourth-grader Anisha Dangoria took 3rd place in the Monterey County Spelling Bee for elementary students.
- ▶ In March, 5th graders Reece Gagnon, Sumner Healey, Andrew Miles, and Justice Post finished first in the Monterey County History Day competition. Sean Burns, Suraya Essi, Reeve Grobecker, and Taylor Hobbs finished second. Both teams earned a trip to the state finals in Long Beach in April. Zoe Deoudes, Camille Fuentes, Izzie Leahy, and Ari Meininger got honorable mention. Meanwhile, the team of Preston Evers, Bennett Parrish, and James Welsh won multiple special awards.
- ▶ Also in March, 8th grader Catrina Fuentes finished fourth in the Monterey County Spelling Bee for middle schoolers.
- ▶ Meanwhile in the March 2007 Monterey County Science and Engineering Fair, 50 ISM students participated with 21 earning awards. Jared Clark, Victoria Hutchins, and Amanda Weber took first place honors, earning the right to represent Monterey County at the 56th

annual California State Science Fair in May. Greg Diamond, Dylan Essert, Nick Evans, Alyssa Hicks, Demar McMillan, and Ruby Sanchez finished second. Cobi Allen, Ellie Beckett, Jamie Berg, Cassandra Curatolo, Enrique Garcia, Andres Jimenez, Kevin Lin, Will Perkins, Misha Polovneff, Alyssa Seva'aetasi, Emily Shifflett, and Anna Welsh held down third.

- ▶ In April, ISM fielded a 12-member team of 5th through 8th graders at a Mathletics competition. The team of Brian Clark, Daniel Kanak, and Peter Mellinger won the 5th grade School Award. In individual competition, Daniel Kanak finished second with 5th grade classmates Brian Clark and Peter Mellinger earning honorable mention. Sixth grader Matty McCarthy also finished second, with classmate Kevin Lin earning honorable mention. In 7th grade, Cobi Allen finished third and Iljin Cho earned honorable mention. Meanwhile, brothers Cyrus and Erik Ruediger won rapid-fire problem solving competitions.

Consider our test results, always outstanding though we, unlike some schools, do not “teach to the test” or spend weeks prepping our students to take them. Our results on the California Standardized Testing and Reporting—better known as the STAR test—make us proud every spring.

- ▶ Our 2007 combined average score of 765 for the 2nd through 8th graders put us 73 points ahead of the state average, 102 points ahead of the Monterey County average, 83 points ahead of the combined MPUSD schools; and 45 points ahead of Colton, MPUSD’s highest scoring elementary and middle school.
- ▶ At every grade level, 85 percent or more of our students scored in the advanced, proficient, or basic levels in both subject areas.
- ▶ Our 7th and 8th grade math scores went up 24 and 30 points respectively, proof that our staffing a middle school math specialist and adding class sections to teach 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> graders in smaller groups based on their current math proficiency has made a big difference in this vital subject area.
- ▶ More meaningful than testing as a measure of our effectiveness, the teachers at the high schools where our students have matriculated—including York, RLS, and MAOS at Monterey High—regularly report that our graduates are far ahead of their peers in their ability to research, organize their thoughts, and present information.

Clearly, we have much to be thankful for! And who should we thank?

First, the board and I want to thank the heart of the school—you. Given that those who have shown up for these parent/guardian meetings the past two years have primarily been the ones who contribute their parent hours and support ISM financially, the board would like to thank you for being the lifeblood of this school. Through a challenging change of leadership that impacted much of last year, and the other hurdles that have faced our school over the past couple of years, you have stayed involved and committed. The board appreciates your fortitude. The teachers and staff members appreciate your support. And, most importantly, your children appreciate your commitment to their futures. Please give each other a hand for being the heart of the International School of Monterey.

Second, the board and I want to give thanks to the hands of the school—the teachers who deliver quality instruction each day.

- ▶ Old hands like Tod Spedding, who has been here from the start of the school delivering on his promise of inquiry-based learning and understanding by design. Tod will leave at the

end of this year to teach overseas, and, before he goes, I want to make sure he knows how much we all appreciate his efforts through the years.

- ▶ And newcomers like Maren Dinsmore, who was recently named KWAV 97 FM Teacher of the Month based on a nomination submitted by kindergartener Kylie Johnston, who said, "[Miss Maren] is the best of all in the whole wide world!"

It is this bond between students and teachers across our campus—a bond fostered by caring parents—that creates the strength of ISM education. Please join me in thanking all of the teachers for all that they do to connect with students each day.

Third, the board and I want to give thanks to the brains of the school—all of the administrators and staff members who thoughtfully keep our operations moving forward.

Since arriving just before the start of school in August, Interim Head of School Larry Cummins has guided improvements in many areas including teacher observation and evaluation, student discipline, and curriculum development. In the process, he has asked much of the staff, and the staff has delivered.

Head of School Lou Persky will pick up the reins in January. Between them, this new administrative team of Lou and Larry has more than 65 years of experience, and they have served in international schools on five continents. I am excited to get to full staffing and to hit full throttle as we move forward. Please give a hand to the administration and staff for all that they do to keep us heading in the right direction.

Fourth, the board and I want to give thanks to the very soul of the school—the students—the reason the rest of us do what we do. Our students are truly special. Walk the campus any day, and you will feel their energy, sense their enthusiasm, and marvel at their accomplishments. Please join me in a round of applause for all of our students, then go home and tell each of them how much we all appreciate them.

Fifth, I want to personally give thanks to the backbone of the school—my fellow board members. These volunteers contribute countless hours and sizable dollars to ensure that ISM continues to be available to you as an international school and a public charter school. Over the past year, we have been fortunate to bolster the board with several new members who bring unique backgrounds and abilities to the table.

- ▶ Alastair Rodd, an Australian citizen who lived much of his life in Britain, consults on school operations around the world through his position as Senior Education Analyst, International Development Group for RTI International. He has already contributed much to our strategic planning efforts and in specific areas of school operations.
- ▶ Plasha Fielding Will, a political consultant who works with elected officials such as Representative Sam Farr, has brought deep insights into local politics and effective communications with government entities such as the MPUSD Board.
- ▶ Rob Lee, Manager at Hayashi & Wayland Accounting & Consulting, and Chris Steinbruner, Partner at Dunlap, Steinbruner & Lubow, CPAs, Inc. have brought new depth to our financial oversight capabilities given that they are both accomplished certified public accountants.
- ▶ Finally, Mike Whilden, an attorney specializing in school law, has provided constant insight on the educational code and our legal rights and responsibilities.

These five new board members join a proven cadre of eight professionals who have made their mark on this school through the years. Each has a core specialization that has been put to work for ISM. Ours is a working board that, while fulfilling its fiduciary responsibilities, has also been hands on helping get day to day work done. Please join me in thanking all of our board members for their service to ISM.

Finally, the ISM board and I want to express our gratitude to the knees of the school—the members of the Foundation board. Why do I call them the knees? Because they do the dirty work of scraping up the financial support that we need to keep this school running, and they sometimes get dragged through the mud in the process. Because they have been willing to get down on their knees to beg you and others to open your hearts and pocketbooks to make sure that we have the money necessary to be different than the neighborhood schools funded by the state through its woefully inadequate allocation. Please join me in a round of applause for the Foundation.

Now, I want to express thanks for the hard work of representatives of all these groups in addressing the challenges that have faced our school over the past year.

In the area of accreditation, teachers, administrators, staff members, and parent volunteers have been following up on the directives from the joint Council of International Schools and Western Association of Schools and Colleges review last year. They have particularly focused on improvements in our curriculum integration, professional development, and strategic planning. We have submitted our required response to the accreditation team, and have set the stage for a return visit by CIS/WASC representatives this winter. We anticipate a favorable report based on the work that has been done.

In the area of strategic planning, a committee of the board and a broader team of parents and staff members have us within a few weeks of finalizing a 2008-2012 strategic plan that will guide our efforts and application of human and financial resources going forward. Each of you has been given opportunity for input via email and survey responses along the way—including 134 who completed the most recent survey—so I am confident that the finished product will be a strategic roadmap to the future that we can all rally around as a community. The plan will focus our attention on resolving areas of concern such as the Spanish curriculum, student discipline, and teacher evaluation and training that have come out of the accreditation report, and the surveys and discussions surrounding strategic planning itself.

In the area of school site, last spring, as many of our parents rallied to put pressure on the district to do the right thing, our school administrators and a committee of the board worked diligently behind the scenes to secure an additional portable to accommodate our second 6<sup>th</sup> grade section. Because we will face a similar situation when we add a second 7<sup>th</sup> grade section next year, we have already taken steps to push the district to accommodate our space needs. While the district seems intent on eventually moving us to the Hayes school site, we have clearly communicated that, per the terms of our lease, we will not acquiesce to that move unless the school has been appropriately retrofitted and refurbished to bring it up to current code.

In one important area of fundraising, our grantwriting team has successfully landed \$45,000 this year. This has included \$30,000 from the Chapman Foundation to help support ISM's Spanish and Arts programs, \$5,000 from HSBC, and another \$5,000 from Greater Bay Bancorp. The HSBC grant in support of professional development for teachers and staff came through the hard work of HSBC employees Grant Miles, a parent and board member, and Kim

Allen, also a parent. Likewise, the Greater Bay Bancorp grant for books and materials came through the efforts of employee John Tilley, a parent, board member, and chair of the ISM Foundation. We also received word last week of a very generous \$30,000 donation from the Trust of Jeanette Ayers, a Carmel Valley resident of 67 years, who passed away at the age of 93.

In the most important area of fundraising—the Family Fair Share campaign—though thanks are definitely in order for some, the numbers are not as good.

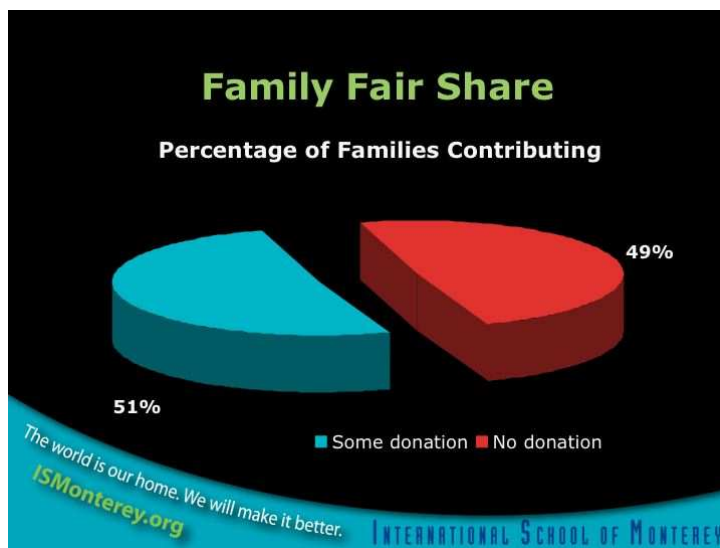
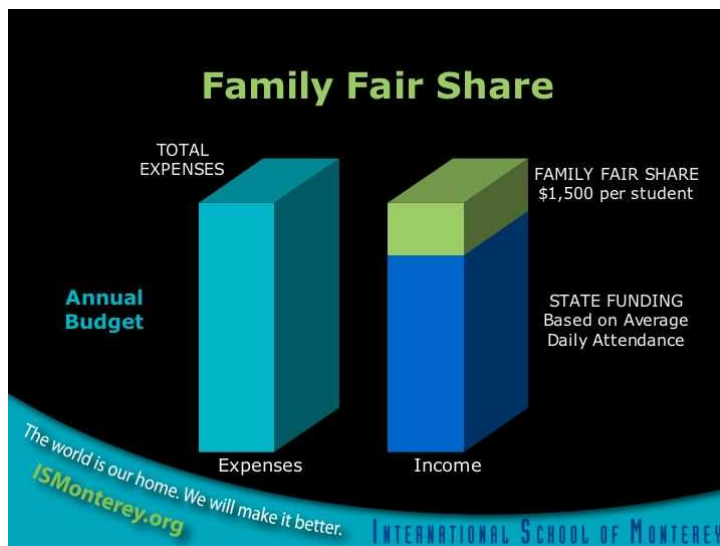
Before letting you know where we stand, I'll start with a quick explanation of what we mean by Family Fair Share for those who are new and those who need a review. (After all, review is critical to good teaching!)

Each spring the ISM Board carefully sets a budget for the following year. We then determine the difference between anticipated expenses and income from the state based on Average Daily Attendance. Next, we divide that difference by the total number of students to determine the additional cost to educate each child. Because the amount has come out to right around \$1,500 each year, we have settled on that as the Family Fair Share figure. Your personal Family Fair Share—the amount you should contribute as a matter of responsibility—is \$1,500 times the

number of children you have in the school, or, for those who have very limited financial means, the maximum amount that you can afford without impacting essentials such as food, housing, transportation, and medical care. We believe that quality education for your children must rank along with those essentials given its tremendous impact on their future.

To cover for families who really can't afford to contribute the full \$1,500 themselves, we raise money through board contributions, grants such as the ones I just talked about, Foundation fundraisers like the World Neighborhood Gala held each spring, and the philanthropic giving of parents and others who believe in this school.

When it comes to the Family Fair Share campaign for this year, many of you in this room have done the right thing by contributing the full \$1,500 or the maximum amount that you can afford. Thanks! Unfortunately, of the 251 families with children in the school, only 129—about half—have contributed. Last year at this time, two-thirds had given something. The dollar total is also falling behind last year. As of Saturday, Fair Share



donations and pledges totaled \$121,764 compared to \$156,983 same time last year. We have a long way to go to get to the target of \$538,500 by the end of the school year. So, thank you for what you have contributed already, and thank you in advance for the spirit of community, respect, kindness, and giving that will get us to the target.

### ***The Spirit of Community, Respect, Kindness, and Giving***

Though some cultures do it at another time of year, it seems that every world culture sets time aside each year to celebrate community and to promote kindness and respect within that community. Often, as with Hanukkah, Christmas, and Kwanzaa, the celebration includes an exchange of gifts.

No matter your cultural background, and preferred celebration, you have made the choice to bring yourselves and your children into this school community—a community focused by its mission on conscientious, compassionate, and responsible citizenship. Tonight, in the spirit of the season, the board and I call on every member of the ISM community to recommit to these principals, and to the respect, kindness, and giving that marks this holiday season.

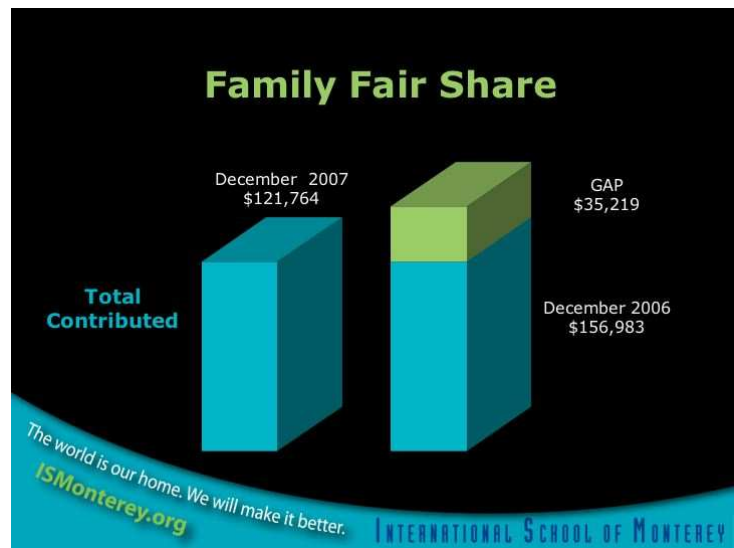
Why do we ask it?

First, as a response to several reports that we have received this fall regarding students who have failed to display these traits. While the school staff has worked to address these individually, the incidents have made it clear that we need to collectively remind ourselves that this school is built around something even more important than traditional classroom subjects—character development.

Second, we ask it because this fall we have had some parents and staff members pursue courses of communication and action that were less than respectful, compassionate, and kind. These have been more difficult to address, because we can't just send each other to the office for disciplinary action.

Third, and most importantly, we ask it because good citizenship is fundamental to internationalism. All of us—trustees, administrators, teachers, staff members, parents and guardians, and students—need to promote, teach, and model the traits of good international citizens. These include respect, compassion, kindness and giving. As members of a community, all of us should check our actions against these marks of character.

Good character is foundational to our success. Every one of us has a choice—to be part of the problem or part of the solution. When we see a problem, we can get caught up in criticism, or we can contribute to positive change. The former is easy; the latter hard. There are no cut and dried answers; solutions bloom from creativity and conscientious and responsible action. Yet, if we work together, we will get closer to the perfection that we all desire for this school.



Now, don't get me wrong. Lack of respect and kindness are the exceptions. Good character continues to be the rule for this school. Consider the recent efforts by Lisa Wichal-Loomis, our After School International Coordinator, and her daughter Raven. Raven discovered that a family in our ISM community didn't have a bed for each child in the home, let alone the means to furnish the rest of their house. She wanted to do something to help. Lisa jumped in and coordinated donations that have changed living conditions for that family, and, not wanting to stop at helping one family in need, she has lined up support for others in difficult situations, financial or otherwise. This is what community, respect, kindness, and giving are all about. If we can achieve it locally, at the family level, there is hope that we can achieve it internationally.

Two years ago, when I spoke about financial support of the school, many told me after that I was preaching to the choir. Last year, more said the same thing, and asked what I planned to do about those who didn't attend the meeting. Tonight, my guess is that I'm preaching to the choir again when it comes to a spirit of community, respect, kindness, and giving. I'm pretty certain that the parents who regularly put in their family hours are here tonight. You are conscientious, and you understand responsibility. I'd bet that the parents who have contributed their full family fair share are also here. You give, and you show respect.

So, why am I talking to you? Because you are the choir! And I want to drive you to sing out as the chorus. You see, until every parent and guardian makes the same commitments that you have, this school will be at risk. As long as it is only the board that is calling for financial responsibility and a culture of family giving, we will struggle to stay afloat. We cannot have 101 families giving nothing to the Family Fair Share campaign as is the case right now, and we cannot continue to ask a handful of Foundation volunteers to try to change that. No, we need this choir to sing as one voice.

Earlier I delivered thanks... Now, I'm asking please... In the spirit of the holiday season, please rally as a community to collectively impress on those who aren't here the importance of responsibility, respect, kindness, and giving within this school community. Talk to the other parents from your classes. Promote the idea of giving to ISM now and throughout the year. Make it clear that, while we know that some families can't afford to contribute the full Fair Share amount, we believe as a community that every family can and should give something. Spread the word that one family's failure to contribute something—even just \$10 per month—could cost us the opportunity to get \$50,000 or more from private donors or through foundations that look at internal community support as a primary factor in their decision to give.

Let me make this risk very real for you! The most generous donor to this school has contributed nearly a quarter million since the school started. That donor has told me and the rest of the board that if the participation of the parent community does not go up appreciably—getting close to the 100 percent that it should be—she will withdraw her support and direct it to other schools where the parents seem to care. This donor is not saying that every parent has to sacrifice. She is simply saying that every family has to care enough to give, and she believes that everyone can give some amount each month. She is right! And we all know it! You need to help spread that belief!

Please help to impress upon the others who aren't here, who don't do their hours, and who don't contribute their fair share that choosing to be part of this school community to take advantage of its broad curriculum that includes camps and fieldtrips and the SEM program; its award-winning instruction in science, math, history, and language arts; its small class sizes; its emphasis on internationalism and individual character; and the many other extras that lead to

student success comes with a responsibility to help fund all of these costly features through a budget that relies on voluntary family contributions.

If you are part of the fifty percent who haven't given anything, please get in the spirit of the season and do it tonight. The first family to step up to contribute at least \$500 dollars will double their impact, because one parent among you who wishes to remain anonymous has offered a challenge match in that amount to motivate a first time giver.

If you've given the full \$1,500 per student, and are fortunate enough to be in position to give more, consider putting up your own challenge gift to motivate your fellow parents. Do it at your classroom level to help make sure the parents you see every day are helping you ensure that this school succeeds.

If you have given but you haven't done your full fair share—I mean the amount that you can look in the mirror and say “that's all we can possibly give”—then please do not let this season of giving pass without changing that.

## **Conclusion**

I wanted to deliver a state of the school address this year focused on the thanks deserved by so many of you in our community, and on the marks of character displayed by you. So, here I am sandwiched between Thanksgiving and the holiday season doing that while hoping that I won't have to deliver another pronouncement of financial danger and budget realities as tax day approaches this spring. Please help make sure that I don't! I'd rather stand up at our next parent meeting to deliver all good news about our finances and our progress on important initiatives.

Once again thank you to all who contribute to making the International School of Monterey a model of effective charter school education. May your holiday season be filled with the blessings of this community and the many other communities to which you belong, and may you experience the deep fulfillment that comes with kindness and giving.