

INSIDE OUR

GLOBAL

PARTNERSHIPS



In 2008, we arranged the first of many faculty exchanges with Beijing #2 Experimental Primary School (Er Xiao). Teachers and administrators from both schools had an opportunity to closely observe teaching and learning in a different context, and our Mandarin program has benefited greatly from having more native speakers visit the classroom. Our first delegation of Mark Day students visited our Beijing partners abroad in 2014. Since, we send Mark Day students to Er Xiao in Beijing to stay with host families, attend classes at Er Xiao, explore the area, and build friendships with our partners. This fall, for the second time in the history of our 10-year partnership, we welcomed a delegation of 48 students and seven teachers from Er Xiao to our Mark Day campus. They were here for three days, during which they learned alongside Mark Day students in the classroom, shared traditions, participated in local excursions, and made new friends. For our Mandarin students in particular, it's an opportunity to practice the language with native speakers and engage in a complete cultural immersion.

Beijing



In class, we made clay pandas together. The Beijing student I was working with liked my panda, so I gave it to her. Later, when I went to the mall with them, she still remembered me and I remembered her.

Justin T., 3rd Grade





Maddy J. 8th Grade

People are the same at heart, no matter where they're from. When I was with my host family, I stopped thinking about the differences, because they seemed just like me. The connection I had with Eva, my host "sister," overruled anything else because the love we shared for each other was the same. We enjoyed doing the same things. After school we would walk and play with her cousin's dog, jump rope, make dumplings, and do so many other things that we both loved.

Due to the partnership Mark Day School has with Beijing #2 Experimental Primary School (Er Xiao), I had the most amazing, life changing trip to China. We were so lucky that students on our delegation are able to have a homestay, because it is typically not common to welcome strangers into their homes in the Chinese culture. Being able to stay with one family for a whole week and going to school and shadowing my buddy really helped me improve my Mandarin and get the most genuine experience.

Eating duck tongue was one of the strangest things I've ever done, but it was having the experience that mattered most. When I traveled to Beijing and lived with a host family for a week, I was able to learn about a different culture and that made me compare what was the same, and what was different. I found that what we have in common is greater than our differences.

The language and the food were very different. I also never realized how many people and how much pollution there could be in one place. Our group delegation also learned to bargain with a row of street vendors near the Great Wall of China. It was really fun but challenging because we could only speak Mandarin since they couldn't understand English. It was so cool that I, along with my classmates, could understand and speak the language.

At school in Beijing, we introduced ourselves to all 3,000 students in English on the first day, then on the last day we did it in Mandarin. I now realize how being able to understand and speak another language is important because it allows me to interact with people who, at first, seem different than me. Once back from China, I can see how lucky I am to be able to learn a language such as Mandarin, and be at a school with a global partnership as strong as this.

Traveling to China with our school's delegation has opened my eyes to learning about and exploring new places, and making new connections. I'm so happy and excited that I also got to go back to Beijing again this year to meet up with friends from last year, whom I still stay in touch with, and to meet and make new friends. I am so thankful that Mark Day has allowed me to have this incredible experience.



In 2013, the Pan-American School (PAS) in Heredia, Costa Rica, accepted our invitation to partner. In PAS, we have found a school with values similar to ours and another avenue for linguistic and cultural discovery. Our first delegation of students and teachers visited PAS in February 2014, enjoying home stays and immersing themselves in the language and culture of our hosts. Since, a group makes an annual trip to Costa Rica, where they learn side-by-side with PAS students and immerse themselves in the culture and traditions of Costa Rica. In November 2017, we welcomed a delegation of 15 7th and 8th graders and two teachers from PAS to our campus. During their week-long trip, they shadowed Upper Division students, lived with Mark Day families, and became an integral part of our community. They also joined several SEL, music, and Spanish classes, shifting the way Mark Day students think about the language and approach to their own learning.

Costa Rica



This partnership we have between both schools is an excellent way to strengthen the community of our school. When I visited Costa Rica, my host buddy and family were so welcoming and inclusive to me. I felt like I was actually a part of their family. One of my favorite experiences was playing video games and conversing with them because it really helped my Spanish improve.

Aydin U., 8th grade

“The Costa Rica delegation last year was eye-opening and definitely a trip to remember. My host family welcomed me graciously into their home and we instantly had a connection. I learned many Spanish phrases and other lessons that I would not have been able to learn inside the classroom. Overall, this trip has inspired me and many others to boost our Spanish comprehension and look for opportunities to learn wherever we go.”

Mia S., 8th Grade





Mark Day School first established contact with teachers and leaders from eSibonisiweni Primary School in South Africa in 2000. More than a decade later, our partnerships with eSibonisiweni and Kliptown Youth Program (KYP) have blossomed into an incredible relationship marked by the exchange of ideas, deep friendships, and co-learning and teaching. We are fortunate to have sent seven delegations to South Africa, and have welcomed five delegations to our own campus. Mark Day students have learned side-by-side with students from KYP and eSibonisiweni, and hosted them in their homes during their visit. Thando Bezana from KYP, a recurring artist-in-residence and teacher at Mark Day, brought authentic South African culture to our 2017 spring musical, *The Lion King, Jr.* and enlivens our music program. Our South African partners continue to bring such life and incredible opportunities for learning to our community, in addition to impacting individual students and families on a more personal level, as you'll see on the following pages.

South Africa

The Kalafatas Family

Dan, Hadley 88, Avery '17, Drew '23, Ellie '26

**“The gladdest moment in human life, me thinks, is a departure into unknown lands.”
- Sir Richard Burton**

Having never touched African soil, we were thrilled to join Mark Day’s 7th delegation to South Africa. As we boarded the July 2016 flight from SFO to Johannesburg, we and our kids (Avery 11, Drew 7, and Ellie 4) knew we were in for a momentous couple of weeks. Having never traveled internationally with the children other than a short jaunt to Mexico, we looked at our sleeping children on the long plane flight to Africa with a heightening sense of excitement and uncertainty. “What would the next few weeks have in store for us? How would it change our perspectives on the world? How would it change the kids?”

We had been lucky enough to get to know Thando and Thulani a bit as part of Mark Day’s Artist-in-Residence and Kliptown Youth Program delegation visits. However, visiting them in their home country was entirely different. The journey afforded access to a South Africa impossible to be a part of unless accompanied by a local (and as anyone who has met Thando and Thulani knows, these two locals are adored in their communities, and we were met with open arms wherever we went). To see where these men were raised, meet their family and friends, and participate in their community allowed us to understand their country, culture, and community in a way that an African Safari simply can’t do. It literally took our breath away to talk to some rural eSibonisweni children who had never spoken to a Caucasian person before, a gift to both parties, a gift that changed us each a little bit from the experience.

It is these personal exchanges, the one-on-one dialogue, that are the center of Mark Day’s approach to its partnerships—both parties giving and receiving, teaching and learning. Drew (now 9) reflected, “It felt weird when I first got there, but then I made friends and realized people might look different on the outside, but they are the same on the inside” and went on to observe, “I realized we have a lot more than we need.” Meanwhile, Ellie (now 6) still recalls fondly “her friends in Africa” especially visiting the crèches (preschools) she insisted we not enter with her! She didn’t want us intruding on “circle time.” And Avery (nearly 13) still texts eSibonesweni and Lilydale t(w)eens. When we asked her for her thoughts for this article, she noted that “meeting other similar age students at their school, learning about their lives, and staying in touch has made the world feel smaller.”

The trip also made us reflect even more on race in our own country. This happened through innumerable and constant moments before, during, and after our time in South Africa – reading Mathabane’s *Kaffir Boy*, taking in the terror of the apartheid police state at the Hector Pieterse Memorial and Museum (and meeting Hector’s sister!), and seeing the squalid conditions Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela lived in at the only jail in the world with the ignominious superlative of having imprisoned two Nobel Laureates. Seeing the Flame of Democracy means something different after this journey and further contextualizes #BlackLives-Matter #Ferguson and #ICantBreathe. As we examine these important issues in our personal and professional lives, we now do so with an expanded global lens.

What did we get out of this? In retrospect, this trip was the journey of a lifetime, unlike any we have taken. We came back a little different than when we left, and we feel gratitude in a deeper and more profound way. The trip has stimulated diversity, inclusivity, and equity work in our own lives and left us with a richer appreciation for the obligation that we all have, as global citizens, to promote equality and justice in our communities and beyond. As we look ahead, we couldn’t be more excited to have our children participate fully in Mark Day’s cross-cultural programs from the many on-campus and off-campus moments, whether local or global. In fact, Avery went to Beijing this spring! As we reflect back, Henry Miller’s quote on travel comes to mind, “One’s destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things.”



“It was nice to get to know our South African partners and learn how they lived. My family hosted Mo, one of the teachers. He was really nice, and taught us a lot. He told us that they didn’t have electricity, only at KYP. He also taught us about South African apartheid and what it was like for the people who experienced it and how hard it was. Having them on campus also made school a little more fun because we could play soccer with them at recess.”

Roshan B., 5th Grade

