

Meet the New VPs!

BY ELISE BLAND

Canadian International School of Hong Kong (CDNIS) is back in session, with plenty of exciting developments for 2025/26 – and some new faces in the faculty too. We chat with two of them: CHARLES WU, Upper School Vice Principal of High School, Academics, and PATTY LEE, Lower School Vice Principal, Student Life.

Tell us a bit about yourselves; where are you from originally, and how long have you been in Hong Kong?

Charles: I was born here, but I grew up, until grade six, in Toronto, Canada, before returning to Hong Kong and attending the Diocesan Boys School (DBS). After studying at the University of British Columbia, I began my teaching career in Japan, where I taught for 15 years. When DBS contacted me in 2009 about starting the IB programme, I returned to HK and to DBS, where I've been for the past 16 years. There, I was a DBS "old boy", parent and teacher all at once.

Patty: I originally came to Hong Kong 20 years ago as a trailing spouse, thinking that it would be a great place for us to raise a family overseas. Obviously, it agreed with us, because we are still here! Both of my parents were born in China, raised in Taiwan, and met and married in Japan. They later emigrated to the United States, where I was born in New York City and raised in San Francisco.

What motivated you to join CDNIS?

Charles: I'm Canadian, so in a way, it feels like a homecoming. This is a great school, and it's always nice to be able to join a strong team. I feel there is something of value that I can contribute to the school, with my experience in the IB and education generally.

Patty: I was interested in the school because of its vision to develop its own unique, bilingual experience for students. Having spent more than 18 years at a then-young bilingual school in HK, where I helped support their programme, I recognised a lot of the same energy, hopes and optimism.

A further draw was CDNIS's definition of excellence; the school believes that students are more than just an accumulation of numbers. Excellence isn't limited to an exam or to the classroom; rather, the focus is on developing the whole person. It's a holistic approach that isn't just put into writing, but also put into practice – and it permeates the whole school. Even in the CDNIS Early Years Centre (EYC), this unique definition of excellence is promoted, as it's critical to the school's DNA.



What are some important characteristics of a good Vice Principal, in your opinion?

Charles: It's important to listen to people and understand their varying perspectives. One critical component is to identify people's strengths and play to them. I identify who the expert is and help guide the school accordingly, so that the best people are in the best position to run the place.

Patty: It's critical that there is deep engagement in order to develop the kind of relationships and trust that isn't superficial or performative. Relationships, especially in schools, are like gardens. They need to be cultivated, you also need to accept that there are different seasons; not all things in the garden bloom at the same time, and they require nurturing. Students, parents and teachers come for advice and direction; our jobs are not always to find ready solutions, but to empower and equip them to find their own solutions.

How would you say CDNIS stands out from other international schools in Hong Kong?

Charles: Many schools stand out for one defining characteristic, be it academics, sports or happy students. At CDNIS, you can check all those boxes; it's the ideal well-rounded school – you have athletes, people who excel at academics, people who embody the IB learner profile, and others. As an IB school visitor and evaluator, I have had the privilege of observing the inner workings of many schools and their faculty. Based on my experience, I can confidently say that CDNIS is home to truly exceptional teachers. While many admire CDNIS's stunning campus and outstanding IB scores, the real pride of the school lies in its extraordinary educators – they're the true foundation of CDNIS's success.

Patty: I admire the school's intentional focus to revisit its programmes to ensure they are serving students' changing needs – for example, its willingness to regularly fine-tune, improve and revise aspects of its curriculum to make sure that teaching pedagogy and classroom experiences are relevant to our learners. CDNIS is a place where personal and professional reflection and the drive for continuous improvement is prioritised.

What's your favourite spot on the campus?

Charles: In my first few days, I went and had lunch in the sixth-floor cafeteria, and I was just enjoying listening to the sound of students talking with each other and laughing. It wasn't until later that I was told there was a teachers' lounge in the back! The lounge is fine, but I still enjoy sitting among the students and taking in all the happiness around me.

Patty: The ninth-floor outdoor play space highlights the campus's beautiful real estate; it's been very thoughtfully laid out. Just last week, industrial grade sun shades were installed to give an added layer of protection from the elements, allowing kids to play safer, while maximising space.



What do you think students enjoy most about CDNIS?

Charles: After speaking to students last year, it was clear that they appreciated how much the teachers truly care about them. Care is something you can't fake; students will see right through that.

Patty: There's a place for everyone in this community! Students feel like they are provided the opportunity to safely take risks. Teachers and students alike are learning together and there's a real ethos of and interest in continuous learning. I think students enjoy being in a learning relationship, too, where dialogue and exchange are encouraged, rather than teachers just talking at students. Ultimately, it's about making learning more engaging, interactive and effective.

What's some advice you can give the students as they prepare for this new school year?

Charles: If you're in the lower grades, keep exploring and trying new things, finding what your passions are. Join in as much as you can – CDNIS has so much to offer. For senior students, try to pick and choose something you're passionate about to focus on.

Patty: Learning is a journey; mistakes are opportunities to grow and learning is for a lifetime.

What is something outside of school that you're passionate about?

Charles: I enjoy cooking, and shopping for ingredients at the wet market (all the local vendors know me)! I also love sports; I'm the HKSSF Tennis Convener and also a committee member of the HK Ski Association.

Patty: I love travel, and I enjoy journaling when I travel – that intentional practice of putting pen to paper, writing about places I've visited and that have made an impression. e

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