



Heritage Voices: Programs

German School of Connecticut bridging cultures

German School of Connecticut

Rippowam Middle School, 381 High Ridge Road, Stamford, CT 06905

First Baptist Church, 90 North Main Street, West Hartford, CT 06107

www.germanschoolct.org

About the Director, Dr. Renate Ludanyi



Dr. Renate Ludanyi is the president, co-founder, and principal of the German School in Connecticut (GSC). The idea of founding the GSC was a reaction to the decline of the teaching of German language in Connecticut schools in the late 1970s. Since its foundation in 1978, Dr. Ludanyi, in collaboration with parents and many volunteers, has made the GSC a success and has sought to strengthen the historical and cultural ties among the local German-speaking community in Connecticut.

She also helped create a network among the many other private German schools in the United States and became the president of their umbrella, the [German Language School Conference](#). In this connection, she works with the German school authorities and government agencies in the Federal Republic of Germany responsible for German schools abroad.

Being strongly convinced that "the cultural heritage of the German-speaking countries of Europe and their language [should] not be lost among the German-speaking descendants in the United States," Dr. Ludanyi has made the GSC a welcoming place for everyone interested in studying German and learning about its cultures. Her efforts to sustain awareness about the need to strengthen German heritage culture and language in the U.S. were recognized when she received the Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Spotlight on a Student, Henry Bareiss



Henry Bareiss is a 10th-grade student at the GSC. Henry is particularly interested in developing his communication skills in German, because he wants to communicate with family members and friends in Germany. He found the GSC a perfect place to learn German (which his school does not offer) and to study in a friendly atmosphere, where “teachers are really nice.”

Henry scored in the 95 percentile on the American Association of Teachers of German (AATG) test and is considering pursuing higher education in Germany. The language proficiency he has reached, and the scores he has earned, will allow him to enroll in university classes with native German speakers. Henry finds it somewhat challenging to attend German classes for three hours each Saturday and do the homework, but he is able to also complete his school work and to play varsity soccer and lacrosse.

About the Program



30th Anniversary of the German School of Connecticut

The German School of Connecticut is a community-based program of German for learners ranging from preschool to adults. It is a private, non-profit institution with branches in Stamford and West Hartford, Connecticut, and has an enrollment of over 350 students. The school celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2009, and was awarded a special honor as “Partner School for the Future” by the Consul General, Dr. Horst Freitag of the Consulate General of Germany in New York City. The award identifies the school as a distinguished member institution.

The GSC was the first German language school in the United States to be selected by the State Department of the German Government to administer the official

Sprachdiplom I and II examinations. These exams, which are a pre-requisite to university matriculation in Germany, test the equivalence of ten to twelve years of German language study.

The program's mission is to develop students' communicative proficiency in German and increase their academic performance. This is achieved by introducing them to the cultural heritage and modern achievements of the German-speaking countries and their contributions to the U.S. The school offers students a unique experience that helps them increase their cross-cultural understanding.

Two tracks immerse all participating students in conversational German. In Pre-K and elementary school, children are immersed in spoken German with songs, games, and simple directions taught in a relaxed, friendly atmosphere. Track 1 students learning German as a foreign language begin with an introduction to the language with emphasis on comprehension and simple communication, reading, and writing skills. In Track 2, students who speak German at home improve their oral proficiency, learn the structure of the language and work on their literacy. In middle and high school (grades 5-8 and 9-12), students in both tracks continue to develop their language skills and also are introduced to literature, history, and geography. Adults can develop their communicative skills for social and business settings in beginning, intermediate, and advanced classes. The atmosphere is relaxed and includes films and cultural programs.

Students participate in the program because they seek to learn German for various reasons. Some have German relatives and think of the GSC as the ideal place to acquire the proficiency needed to communicate with them. Others plan to travel to Germany, live or work in Germany, or simply learn more about their German heritage. Many of the students achieve high levels of German language proficiency, at times exceeding the proficiency demonstrated by German students in public schools. In 2009, students attending GSC Saturday classes scored 78-88% on the AATG test versus 62-73% scored by non-Saturday school students.

The 35 teachers in the program are mostly native speakers of German or English, and are often proficient in other languages as well. Most of them are also employed at local schools, colleges, or universities, where they teach German and receive professional development. As a result, the teachers are well prepared and well trained.

Cultural and Exchange Activities

The school promotes participation in the cultural activities of the German-speaking community. Each year, teachers and students participate in the Steuben Parade in New York City. Students learn about Advent and other German pre-Christmas customs. Christmas calendars are sold. At Christmas, students present a festive program for their parents and the community. The West Hartford school participates in the Reimfest of elementary students in Connecticut. The school year ends with a poetry recitation contest in Stamford and a picnic at both schools.

Students between the ages of 12 and 15 are encouraged to participate in a summer program in Germany. A three-week homestay with a German family, school visits, excursions to castles, old cities, the first printing press, and a chocolate factory offer exciting experiences for adventurous youngsters.

A Spirit of Cooperation

The German School of Connecticut is made up of a group of cooperative and dedicated teachers, students, and parents who meet every Saturday morning during the school year to teach and learn German and support a variety of school activities. Parents take great interest in the school and serve on a pro bono basis. They perform most of the administrative work and constitute the Board of Directors and the Board of Officers. On Saturday mornings parents set up an elaborate spread of food and drink for the morning break, which both creates a festive, collegial atmosphere among the students, teachers, and parents, and also helps raise money to support the school's activities.

Parent Testimonials



Parent volunteers in the program: Urs Klarer (left) and Annette Bareiss (right)

Urs Klarer, a Swiss citizen and father of four children at the GSC, is a volunteer who handles advertising and public relations for the school. Urs stresses the importance of the GSC in helping the young generation "learn proper German so they can talk to their grandparents and cousins" in German-speaking countries.

Annette Bareiss, another parent and a school board member, summarizes the importance of the work of the GSC when she says, "I am a German citizen who has lived in Stamford for nearly 20 years. Two of my children have been enrolled in the school for 12 years and have successfully completed the program; my youngest is still at the school. The GSC has been invaluable in broadening our family's horizons and cementing our connections to Germany and our relatives. I am a member of a dedicated group of German/Americans, directors, officers, teachers, and parents of the GSC who strive to secure the future of the German language and traditions in the United States. An attorney by training, I am responsible for fundraising for the school. The recent financial crisis in the U.S. and abroad has made this work more difficult than it was before, but it is clear that the German School adds greatly to the culture and diversity of our community. Because the German language is often cut from the curriculum in American schools, the work of the GSC is becoming more significant as our students enter the world of international politics, business, and art. It is my belief that German-speaking countries have an important place not only in the European Union, but also in the advancement of human affairs."

One parent, Sabine Gruber, runs the school's library, which is open every Saturday morning and contains books and videos for student and teacher use.

To learn more about the German School of Connecticut, [read the program profile](#).

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About the Author: Ezzeddine Saidi



Ezzeddine Saidi teaches general and applied linguistics at the University of Gabes, Tunisia. In the summer of 2009, he spent two months at the Center for Applied Linguistics working as a resident scholar for the Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages. At CAL, Mr. Saidi also worked on a research project, "Toward an integrative approach to EFL teacher education." Ezzeddine is also a Ph.D. candidate in the Applied Linguistics Program at the Higher Institute of Languages, University of Tunis, Tunisia. His Ph.D.

research project is on "Evaluation of Tunisian pre- and in-service EFL teacher training: Exploring the form and content of teacher development and its impact on classroom practice."

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The Heritage Voices Program Profile on the German School of Connecticut (GSC) was prepared by Ezzeddine Saidi for the Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages, Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), Washington DC.

The Heritage Voices Collection is designed to spotlight individual heritage language speakers and programs. The information presented does not necessarily represent the views of the Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages or the Center for Applied Linguistics.



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