



Heritage Voices: Program



Iran Cultural and Educational Center

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About the Program Director



Dr. Iran Arbabi Amin is a K-12 world languages educator with nearly thirty years of experience in the field. She graduated from the University of Tehran, Iran, and continued her graduate studies at the Sorbonne in Paris, France, where she obtained a Ph.D. She moved to the Washington D.C. area in 1982 and started her teaching career in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), Maryland, in 1984. She taught for seventeen years before becoming an instructional specialist in the Office of Curriculum and Instruction at MCPS. Her teaching career spans elementary and middle school immersion programs to the high school International Baccalaureate program. In her position as the world language instructional specialist for MCPS, she was involved in teacher training and curriculum development and assessment, particularly in the Arabic, Chinese, French, and Spanish languages. Throughout her career in Montgomery County Public Schools, she worked on curriculum adaptation and assessment at all levels, from elementary through high school.

As an educator, Iran A. Amin has been actively involved in the Iranian community since she moved from France to the United States. In 1991, she founded the Iran Cultural and Educational Center (ICEC), a non-profit organization in Rockville, Maryland, that offers language and culture courses to students of all ages interested in learning Persian/Farsi and in gaining an in-depth understanding of the Iranian culture.

About the Program

The Iran Cultural and Educational Center (ICEC), is a non-profit organization under section 501(C)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code registered in the State of Maryland. The ICEC is an independent institution with no affiliation to any group. The ICEC is open to all students interested in learning the Persian language and culture. The ICEC's core mission is to create an environment that fosters appreciation of cultural diversity among young learners and helps them become ambassadors for cultural awareness.



Kaveh the Blacksmith (Kevah Ahangar) adapted from the epic of Shahnameh performed by Young Iranian Performers

Since its establishment in 1991, the ICEC has grown considerably. Today, it offers thirteen classes to over 200 K-12 students from across the greater Washington metro area. Classes are held on Saturdays from 9:30 to 12:30 at Ritchie Park Elementary School in Rockville, Maryland. In addition to regular language classes that run from September to June, students who are interested in cultural activities, such as dance, music, and drama, may take part in these extracurricular activities from September to March. Currently, the ICEC has sixteen staff members and twelve student helpers.

There are several reasons for the ICEC's success and exceptional growth. The ICEC has one of the most dedicated, talented, experienced, and stable teaching staff. The majority of staff members have been with ICEC for more than a decade. Their dedication to students' learning has earned them the respect of the students and parents alike. The low student attrition rate is in large part to the time and care that the staff members devote to their students.

The ICEC also enjoys the support of vibrant parent volunteers, who assist in many ways. The Community and School Association (CSA), composed of current and former parent volunteers, works with the administration to organize and run registration, collect and analyze registration data, and organize cultural celebrations. These include Mehregan (celebration of friendship and harvest in the fall), Yalda (celebration of Winter Solstice), and Nowruz (Iranian New Year that is the celebration of renewal, or spring).

The CSA also organizes the ICEC booth at local festivals such as Imagination Bethesda and Silver Spring Festival. In addition, parent volunteers help with the ICEC's library, security at the door and in the hallways, reproduction of teaching materials, Saturday refreshments for adults, and the student store. Because of this close collaboration, the ICEC has been instrumental in forming a true community that brings the families together, strengthens cultural ties, and often acts as a support system.

The ICEC is also supported by a dedicated Board of Directors composed of five founding members and two at-large members elected by the Community and School Association members. All officers and administrative staff work as volunteers. The Board of Directors sets the overarching guidelines and makes decisions about issues affecting the Center's short- and long-term goals. The administrative staff run the school every Saturday, oversee the curriculum and its implementation, determine student placement, assist the instructors by providing them guidance and instructional materials, communicate with the parents, act as a liaison between the CSA and the Board of Directors, organize cultural and literary events such as the craft show and writers' exhibit, and coordinate yearly class and school pictures.

One of the unique aspects of the ICEC is the active role played by former students. Those students who complete the highest level offered by the ICEC become teacher assistants. Many students look forward to the time when they can assist the instructors in their classes and mentor younger students. The teaching staff also value the presence of these students in their classes and eagerly seek their assistance.

Furthermore, former students lead the extracurricular activities that are an important part of the Nowruz celebration. These college-age leaders who, as students, took part in the same activities, now take the responsibility for practicing with the students to prepare them for the celebration. Each year, the Persian Dance Troupe, Young Iranian Musicians, and Young Iranian Performers attract close to one hundred students who, during the Nowruz celebration, showcase the best of Persian folkloric dance, traditional music, and plays adapted from Persian literary works, new and old. They mesmerize the audience with their enchanting and flawless performances.

Photos from the Nowruz Celebration



Miniature Dance performed by the Persian Dance Troupe at the Nowruz Celebration



Iranian National Anthem sung by upper-grades students at the Nowruz Celebration



Kurdish folkloric dance performed by the Persian Dance Troupe



Young Iranian Musicians performing a traditional piece of music

Empowering young learners and widening their worldviews are at the center of every ICEC curricular and extracurricular activity. The parents, instructional staff, officers, and administrators work together to provide students with a rich environment that prepares them for today's world; a world in which multiculturalism and multilingualism are not only valued, but are also the underlying factors that bring about peace and mutual understanding among nations. These learners and countless others like them are the future of the world and are certainly well-equipped to make it a thriving and peaceful one.

To learn more about the Iran Cultural and Educational Center, read the [program profile](#).

This Heritage Voices Program Profile on the Iran Cultural and Educational Center was prepared by Silvia Koscak for the Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages, Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), Washington DC.

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