

## GIVE A FISH AND TEACH FISHING

SPIRAL International's Story for Building Successful International Divisions

Presented by Dr. Emily Guo and Mr. Richard Taylor

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## THE STORY OF A LEGEND



(Picture from Sohu Gongzhongpingtai)

In the fall of 2014, in Chongqing, I was asked to meet with a friend's friend to consult on a good model of an international school. After the first few minutes of self-introduction, he started to talk about his need: Planning to build an international school in the Guangdong area, he had been looking for a good model. "I talked to a very high up official in the Guangdong Education Ministry wanting to learn about the successful model of the Xiangjiang AP American School," he said. "Surprisingly, I was told 'Forget it. XJ is a non-replicable legend, and nobody knows who is engineering it.' Dr. Guo, have you heard of the XJ American School?" Now, you can imagine, who actually got surprised -- XJ American School is a SPIRAL project, and I did not know it had received such a high remark from the Guangdong Education Ministry.

SPIRAL International began to develop an American AP School with Guangzhou Xiangjiang Secondary School in May 2013. In the past four years, we have: 1) developed an American curriculum that models a successful American public school, 2) built a highly integrated faculty and administrative team of Chinese and foreign teaches and staff with advanced American educational philosophy and best practice, 3) trained administrators with American leadership skills, and 4) developed institutionalized student short and long

term exchange programs. The program success resulted in significantly increased student enrollment and its graduates' acceptance rate to American colleges is 100% to the top ranked 100 American universities with 60% to the top 50 American universities.

#### NON-LEGENDARY ELEMENTS MAKE THE LEGEND

SPIRAL brought to XJ a holistic, competency based and student centered educational vision that models successful American public schools. This vision speaks to the essence of American education and is well received by the Chinese parents and students. Before SPIRAL joined the program, XJ had trudged on a winding road searching for a way to develop international education. Since 2008, following the then trendy practice of patching American college courses on existing Chinese secondary school curriculum, XJ developed a partnership with an American Community College and received approval for offering AP courses. The XJ administration soon after discovered, in this manner, it neither offered students a coherent high school curriculum nor truly prepared students for American colleges. The recruitment in year one was as low as 10 students. This was when they came to SPIRAL for help. In late May of 2013, at the press conference for the SPIRAL-XJ Cooperative Program, I announced how SPIRAL would help to develop the international program in curriculum development, academic structure and educational administrative systems, etc.. Three highlighted areas:

1. Curriculum development. It is driven by the American Common Core Standards and American School's graduation requirements, requiring students to study 4 years of English, 3 years of Social Studies and Science, 2 years of Mathematics, Global Languages, Health/Physical Education and Fine Arts. A student will also need Vocational Education, electives, technology competency, as well as to demonstrate successful mastery of the school's Performance Standards. The goal of this curriculum is to offer a well-rounded skill and competency based education resembling the one that all American students receive in the United States.

2. Academic structure. The program develops an academic support system following that of American School's extracurricular program. For example, developing club activities, community service projects and institutionalized travel study and study abroad as an inherent part of students' learning experience for academic and personal growth.

3. Educational Administration. Following the model of an American high school, the program builds an effective administrative system that:

a) Provides sufficient professional development support for teachers through workshops and seminars taught by American education experts and through exchange activities with American school's teachers,

b) Organizes teachers to participate in curriculum development discussions and research on contemporary educational and pedagogical issues in both countries,

c) Develops and implements an assessment and evaluation system that effectively and efficiently evaluates the teaching and learning from the perspective of holistic education,

d) Organizes regular communication and exchange between students of the two schools through shared learning materials, readings, organized online discussions and international travel studies and study abroad.



(Picture from Sohu Gongzhongpingtai)

## CONNECT, LEARN, ADOPT AND ADAPT – A PATHWAY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

In the past four years, under the leadership of SPIRAL’s consulting team, XJ has made significant progress in building an AP American School. Here is how we did it.

- Connect – Look for a suitable American school for XJ to be a tangible model in all areas. First, SPIRAL identified East Lyme High School, an American top 2.5% high school, to be the partner school. We received approval from the school board and formed a three-party agreement for this international endeavor. Secondly we hired foreign teachers including a SPIRAL senior consultant to work on the curriculum and academic structure alignment between the two schools. The consultant helped XJ to organize the course work into six areas (English, Math, Sciences and Social Sciences, Arts and Physical Education), and he established a credit system following that of American schools. And the third, SPIRAL organized the administrators of the two schools to visit each other: XJ administrative teams visited ELHS to learn its infrastructure and Common Core State Standards, and the ELHS principal visited XJ and field studied the existing structure of the school.

- Building Relationships and Learn. In the past four years, SPIRAL orchestrated more than fifteen exchange trips between administrators and teachers of XJ and EL to develop relationships and to learn. For example, XJ’s principal experienced EL’s daily operation by shadowing the EL principal for three weeks and she made many changes upon return to XJ, including student advisory systems, etc. Following her, each year, there has been a team of XJ teachers/leaders that come to EL to be trained for two weeks. For another example, EL principals, both high school and middle school, brought teams of teachers to visit XJ and conducted demo classes. In addition, we have set up an online teacher mentor program that enables subject teachers of XJ through skype or via e-mail to freely learn from EL teachers, particularly in curriculum development and

instructional skills.

●Adoption and Adaptation to Meet XJ's Needs. The SPIRAL EL-XJ project consulting team worked with the XJ administration to build an academic administrative structure, whereby departments lead the curriculum development. We trained and conducted evaluations that model that of American schools, and we developed a strongly integrated faculty team of Chinese and foreign teachers with a department co-chair system. While adopting the best practices of ELHS, we also recognized the need to adapt some of it to meet XJ's needs. For example, we modeled the EL's scaffolding and differentiation tactic and its team teaching to pair up foreign teachers and Chinese teachers, but we decided to use ELHS's 9th grade English curriculum for XJHS's 10th grade students as well.

#### SHORTENING THE DISTANCE BY TRAVELING AFAR

For most Chinese youngsters, English is learned out of books and American schools are seen on TV or movies. The EL-XJ cooperative program has built students' international traveling, study abroad, distance exchange with a partner school into the extra curricula system. Each summer more than 50 XJ students come to EL for a three week summer camp, each year the entire class of 9th grade students study at SPIRAL's American schools for one or more semesters with American students, and the students of EL and XJ have organized online exchange projects that enable a selected number of students of the two schools to participate in a common research project. They study the same materials, engage in the same discussion topics and share the outcomes of their study. These built in international learning activities not only significantly enrich the school's curriculum, but also make the U.S. and American schools closer to the Chinese students study and life. English teaching and learning, taking place in actual life contexts, becomes meaningful and internalized, and no longer dry and abstract. In addition, these activities provide chances for Chinese students to gain firsthand experience of American schools and to make friends with their American peers, and thus to prepare them for future study at American universities.

#### IN SUMMARY

SPIRAL has made good progress in leading the development of the XJ AP American School. Several key factors can be attributed to the success. They are: 1) A clear mission, vision and phase by phase action plans that aim to help Chinese educators to build their own school with the best practices of American education -- "not only give a fish, but teach fishing". 2) A holistic educational philosophy welcomed by parents and students, a competency based curriculum and student centered instruction that is owned and practiced by all teachers, and an effective evaluation process that supports teachers' professional development. 3) Strong support from the American sister school by providing endless professional and heart felt training and coaching to Chinese administrators and teachers and generously sharing information and materials, and 4) A team of Chinese administrators and teachers who are yearning for learning, open to difference and willing to change.

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