

American Sign Language (ASL)

Melissa de Jesus-Vasquez is an Irving mom of two fluent in American Sign Language (ASL). She was first introduced to ASL at a young age. She has an older sister, who is deaf, and her parents learned ASL to communicate with her and taught their younger children. Did you know there are more than a million deaf people in the United States? Knowing just the basics of ASL, such as the alphabet, can make a difference when you are in the company of a deaf person in the USA, Canada and parts of Mexico. She promises it will be a great experience and a lot of fun!

French

Lori Robert is D97 parent and a fluent French-speaking mother of two. She completed a French minor at the University of Arizona and spent a year living and teaching abroad in Paris. This is her sixth year teaching French at Whittier and her fifth year at Lincoln. She has also taught French at Hatch, Irving, and Mann. Her classes focus on speaking and comprehension through fun songs, games, and stories.

German

Lauren VanderBerg is an Irving mom of three. She has studied German for 30+ years and has a BA in German from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. She has lived in Germany for over 2 years combined. She worked for the US Commercial Service in Germany as well as the German American Chamber of Commerce in Chicago for 5 years. This will be her 7th year teaching at Irving. Her students return to her year after year. She teaches fundamental German through videos, songs and games. Sprechen Sie Deutsch?

Greek

My Name is Elena Kontos. This is my 14th year teaching in Oak Park and my 11th year as a 1st grade teacher here at Irving. I am a first generation Greek American. Growing up my culture and heritage were a big part of my upbringing, as they continue to be with my own children today. I attended six years of Greek School, where I learned to speak and write the language. I was very lucky to have spent my summers growing up in Greece alongside my grandmother and extended family. I look forward to teaching the language, cultures and traditions in the World Language Program.

Japanese Grades 3-5

Sign up for Lunchtime Japanese! Learn the basics of reading and writing in 3 alphabets, how to introduce yourself, and have basic conversations. We will also learn about Japanese arts and culture, do small crafts, and play games played by kids in Japan. Mr. Deaton has lived in Akita City, Sapporo City, and Aichi Prefecture and worked in Japan as a teacher before moving back to Oak Park.

Mandarin Chinese

A native Mandarin speaker, Paul Chen received formal education in Taiwan, has lived/worked in Beijing and traveled extensively in China for work. He speaks Mandarin with a neutral accent, has a practical vocabulary for different audiences or social settings, and is proficient in both traditional and simplified Chinese characters. Paul is enthusiastic about creative writing and translation, and is passionate about sharing his love of languages and cultures. He regularly gets compliments from native speakers on his accent when he tries other languages, and he loves to advance his French!

Portuguese

Carrie's early years as a Peace Corps Volunteer and subsequent work at a school on Chicago's West Side Chicago gave rise to her career at Rotary International, where she has worked for the past 15 years. She learned to speak Portuguese when she lived in Cape Verde, West Africa for two years, and continues to use it in her personal and professional life. She has a Master's degree in Anthropology, and also speaks Cape Verdean Krioulo. In her spare time, Carrie enjoys listening to Brazilian and Cape Verdean music and dancing, hiking, and spending time with her two boys, Emerson and Tiago, who are Irving alums.

Spanish

¡Hola amigas y amigos! My name is Natalia Rodriguez Bazzi. I am from Argentina and came to the United States 22 years ago. I have a Masters in Piano and Music Theory, and an endorsement to teach Spanish in elementary and middle school. Currently, I am completing an endorsement in Special Education at National Louis University. I've been a teacher for

more than 25 years; first in Argentina, now in Oak Park. This is my fifth year in District 97 (Irving and Whittier). I am looking forward to sharing "lunch in Spanish" with your children!