

STRENGTHENING GLOBAL UNDERSTANDING

Academy for Academic Excellence partners with sister school in China

Pen pals, exchange programs coming soon

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PHOTO COURTESY OF ACADEMY FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

SISTER SCHOOLS: Rick Piercy, center, and Gordon Soholt from the Academy for Academic Excellence spend time at the Hangzhou Anji Road Experimental School in Zhejiang, China. The two schools signed a 'Sister School' agreement that will share and exchange educational information and services.

APPLE VALLEY • Students at the Lewis Center's Academy for Academic Excellence will soon not only have pen pals in Zhejian, China, but they will also swap strategies, resources and even homes with students on the other side of the world.

"We live in a global society," said Gordon Soholt, chief academic officer AAE in Apple Valley, "and meaningful, personal contacts with educators from other countries can only strengthen our students' and staff's understanding of the world and their position in it."

Soholt and Qiuxing Chen, deputy director of the Hangzhou Education Bureau in Zhejian, met in Walnut on June 20 to sign a memorandum of understanding to become sister schools.

AAE students and staff hosted four teachers and administrators from China last year for approximately six weeks and found it a promising way to learn about Chinese culture and language, according to Soholt.

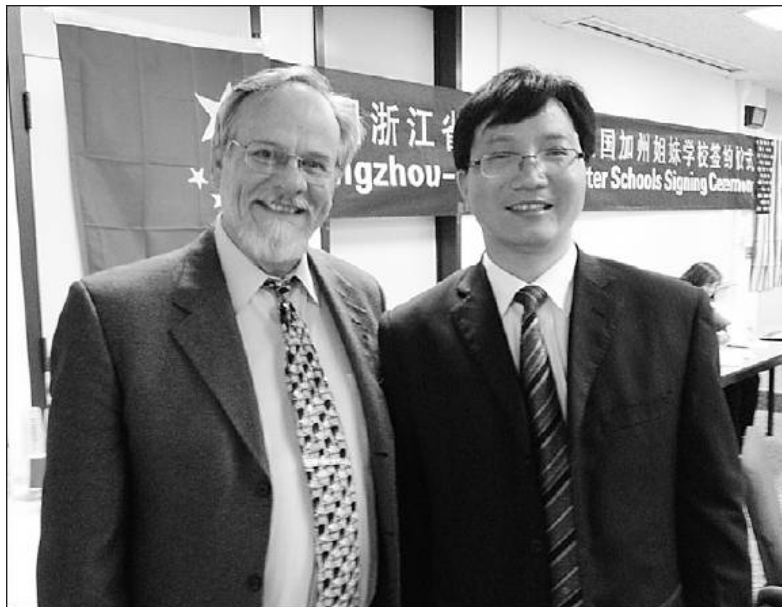
Then in May, as part of an educational delegation sponsored by the California School Boards Association, Soholt and AAE President Rick Piercy took a trip to China to observe schools in Hangzhou and Shanghai. That was when they found Hangzhou Anji Road Experimental School.

After touring the school and visiting classrooms, they decided to enter into what Soholt described as a simple agreement, non-binding on either party, encouraging educational and cultural sharing between the schools.

One of the major differences between the Chinese and American educational systems is rote learning. Soholt explained that in the Chinese system, teachers ask questions expecting specific responses. The answers to these questions come from memory, rather than problem solving.

"This gives Chinese students a great speed advantage over most American students," Soholt said. "But Chinese educators also realize that their students need to learn to solve problems through critical thought and not mere memorization, or rote learning."

Soholt said AAE will be instituting a pen pal program this fall between the sister schools that will hopefully include video conferences between students, staff and parents in this developing partnership. Eventually, teachers and students from both schools will participate in an exchange program, letting them see the best of both worlds.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ACADEMY FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

SIGNING: Gordon Soholt, left, of the Academy for Academic Excellence, and Qiuxing Chen, deputy director of the Hangzhou Education Bureau in Zhejian, China, pose for photos at the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the two schools in Walnut. The MOU will allow the two schools to act as 'sister schools.'