

For fourth-grader, it's been a good year

BY SUE BUCK
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Tudor Crihalmeanu, a fourth grader from Romania, says it's been a good school year.

"Tudor liked 'mainstream work' the best in the newcomers class."

"He's in a class where a third of the class is bilingual and two-thirds are mainstream students," said Bridget Dean, a bilingual coordinator.

He liked math the most but found science the hardest.

"You need to name the three characteristics of a sound," Tudor explained. "That's really hard."

One assignment was particularly enjoyable and a favorite memory. "We had a map of states," he said. "I liked coloring in the states."

Next, Tudor's father, is attending college out of state.

He's studying computer science but visits the family often.

"We might move to Troy next

year," Tudor said. Mom Samona, an engineer, works there.

It's a long drive from Farmington Hills, he said.

"You can't move to Troy, we want to keep you," Dean said. Tudor smiled.

A native of Cluj, Romania, Tudor said his hometown is much more rural than the Farmington area. The family will visit there this summer.

Tudor plays basketball for fun. "His grandpa bought a basketball hoop and took it to Romania so when he goes to Romania he can play basketball," Dean said.

With the Detroit area being the car capital of the world, Tudor is anxious to tell his old friends about American cars.

Beechview is also more modern than his former school in Romania.

"The furniture was bad, there were no computers and they didn't even have carpeting," Tudor said.



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BREXLER

Foreign exchange: Tudor Crihalmeanu is a fourth grade student at Beechview Elementary.

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than fiction.

Little or no English

When the students started school last August, each knew little or no English. They were not only new to the school but to the country. Now except for their accents, the students are indistinguishable from those who have lived here a lifetime.

One student refers to a story about a group of high school students who partied in a Farmington Hills house, trashed the house and then burned it.

"In Farmington Hills, there was a party that went bad two nights ago," Juncal said. "There was about \$1 million damage."

A student continues with news of a police officer who saved someone in an accident. Another student talks about a nurse who gave a patient the wrong medicine.

Even though they haven't been in the U.S. long, all have learned both the language and culture in part by paying attention to current events. Naoki has been in the country 10 months and has found making the adjustment a real challenge.

"It was hard," he said. "Science is very hard. I'm learning about criminals and fingerprints and hair. Math is easy."

Learning the language

He said his sister Mariko constantly asks him for help in science class where she gets a lot of homework. "Can you help me? Can you help me?" she asks of Naoki.

Aside from that, she's happy, Naoki said. Mariko said she liked Farmington last year, but she was worried because she didn't understand the words and the language everyone used.

In the first days of school in August when Naoki came to class, his electronic dictionary/translator was always at his side. His family bought it for him.

When Naoki participated in this interview, he left the dictionary in class.

Talking with his friends helped the most in learning English. "We talk about sports, computer games and funny jokes," Naoki said.

Most of his friends aren't of his nationality. Only one other boy in Naoki's class is from Japan.

"So you have to speak English," said Bridget Dean, the district's bilingual coordinator.

The students visit each other's homes. They are from Iraq, Korea and America. "I've made many friends," Naoki said.

A field trip was most memorable for Naoki this year. "We shoot each other," Naoki said.

That piqued Dean's interest. "Oh, Lazer Tag," she sighed and laughed.

Naoki will attend Harrison High School this fall and take English as a Second Language classes during the summer.

A Japanese cousin will visit one month this summer. Naoki plans to impress him with his English.

Cousins face challenges at Harrison High

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Da Ke and Chuan Chen, cousins from China, needed some coaxing from teacher Frank Ivezaj prior to doing another newspaper interview.

Ivezaj is their bilingual teacher. The cousins, both in the ninth grade at Harrison High School, have enjoyed the school year and also found it difficult.

They both came from the Fu province in China.

The hardest thing?

"The English language,"

Ke said.

Bilingual classes were Ke's favorite. Both students have the same classes and agreed math is easy. Likewise, they agreed science is hard.

Classes in America are easier than they expected but not always easy, they said.



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BREXLER

Mainstreaming: Frank Ivezaj attends some classes with Chuan Chen and Da Ke in order to help them with their English comprehension.

It's not the amount of homework that makes science difficult but the English words, Chen said. The teens live together with their uncle, who owns

the Panda Buffet Restaurant on Orchard Lake Road in Farmington Hills.

They help each other with homework.

The most enjoyable activity for Chen was a field trip. "I went to a art museum in downtown Detroit," he said, referring to the Detroit Institute of Arts. "For lunch we went to Wayne State University," Ivezaj said. "We ate lunch there and walked around. We took Woodward to the Renaissance Center."

After school, both play basketball "just for fun."

Their friends are bilingual, and they don't have many American friends. There are 28 students in the Newcomers class.

"Mr. Ivezaj goes to classes with them to help them understand the class work," said Bridget Dean, the bilingual coordinator. "He does inclusion with them."

They write well, but have trouble with conversational English, Ivezaj said. "I don't know if we can generalize but Chinese students tend to do better with writing but the spoken language takes more time. They have to do a speech for five minutes and right now, they are struggling with that."

The speech topic has to be about the weather, and all bilingual students are struggling with the assignment, Ivezaj said. Public speaking for anyone can be a real challenge, even morose when doing it in an unfamiliar language.

"Kim Adams doesn't even do five minutes on the news," Dean said.

The teens are quiet in school, but still do well in their classes.

"They are good students," Ivezaj said.

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