

## Russian Visitors to Mankato 2013 Report

The impact of the partnerships within the Center for School-University Partnerships (CSUP) Professional Development School (PDS) has been evident since its adoption of the formal PDS model in 2001. In addition to the nine PDS sites and 37 other districts in southern and central Minnesota, partnerships have also been established in south Texas, Australia, Costa Rica and the United Arab Emirates, as well as a long-standing partnership with North-eastern State University in Magadan in Russia's Far East region.

International partnerships give teacher candidates the opportunity to teach in and become completely immersed in a culture very different from their own. They live with host families, experience teaching strategies that may be very unfamiliar to them and have the opportunity to partake in cultural festivities, rituals and traditions. For the students who travelled to Minnesota State University, Mankato from Magadan this semester; the experience was filled with new experiences and learning.

North-eastern State University in Magadan sent six teacher candidates, a professor and two school administrators to Minnesota State Mankato from April 6 through April 30, 2013. These students and faculty members had many rewarding and challenging experiences during their time here. Students' field experiences in Mankato were at Jefferson Elementary School (Kindergarten classrooms) and at Roosevelt Elementary School (grades 1 and 2). They made presentations at the Minnesota State Mankato Undergraduate Research Conference and at the MnSCU Undergraduate Research Conference. Dr. Elizabeth Sandell, Associate Professor, also coordinated numerous activities throughout their visit to enrich their cultural experience. Their activities included shopping trips, a visit to the Museum of Russian Art and the Mall of America, the International Festival at Minnesota State Mankato, and a weekend in Winona, MN for a wedding. Dr. Sandell gathered the group together on April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013 to discuss some of their favorite memories. One of the teacher candidates, Andrew Kalugin, graciously translated many of the responses.

Tell me about some of your favorite memories and learning experiences here.

"It was a really great experience. There were a lot of different people from different countries here, so we got to learn a lot of new things about the people and their cultures. This was an unusual experience for us, because this is a really technologically advanced culture. We gained a lot of new knowledge about educational processes at this university. We had the opportunity to be in a lot of different educational environments (schools in this area), and saw many different methods that teachers used. It's always interesting to compare what we do in our country to what they do here." Andrew stated.

A fellow student, Tatiana Azarova, expressed how she really enjoyed the many different visits they had, such as to family farms in the area. The girls in the group expressed how much they loved shopping here, as there was a great deal of choice and high-quality goods.

Andrew also spoke of how it was interesting to experience the many different churches in the area and the differences in culture and religion. The students emphasized how beautiful the town was and the differences in how we live in the United States, for example the houses, which are very beautiful, “like in cartoons or American films.” They also had the opportunity to see *Legally Blonde* at Minnesota State Mankato, and they were very surprised with how beautiful and rich the theatre is here.

The group had tours of Montessori Learning Center (North Mankato), MSU’s The Children’s House, and Loyola Catholic School which, as Andrew stated, “was something you only read about it or saw it in films, but to see it with our own eyes; as they say in Russia, it’s better one time to see than 100 times to hear.”

Ekaterina Lepekhina spoke of the International Cultural Festival that they attended. All the girls got Henna tattoos! They were very impressed with the artists and musicians who played at the festival and allowed children to come up and play with them and were able to form those relationships.

Olga Pestereva emphasized how impressed she was with the people here. “Everyone smiles at you and are so friendly to you, it’s really unusual for us when you meet people and they all ask you how you are and says ‘have a nice day!’” Two students, Tatiana and Anastasia Metlina, celebrated their birthdays with the help of students from the Elementary and Early Childhood program at Dr. Sandell’s home. As Andrew stated, “I’m sure it is a birthday that they will remember for the rest of their lives.”

The students all expressed how much they enjoyed the McNabb – Withrow wedding in Winona and how beautiful it was. Svetlana Yakimchuk, a professor in the education department, stated, “It was very interesting to see the very different traditions.”

The students and faculty also expressed very fond memories with their host families. Olga, Anastasia and Ekaterina made s’mores for the very first time. “They were delicious!” Andrew remembered playing the piano. “I can’t say that it was actually playing the piano, perhaps just making noise” he joked. Anastasia Gerasimova taught her host mother how to cook a popular Russian soup, called borscht, and in turn, she learned how to cook tacos. Anzhela Shepeta, one of the administrators, planted an apple tree with her host family.

They were all very thankful to Dr. Sandell for planning everything so professionally and developing such a great schedule of activities for their free time. Svetlana expressed their excitement for continued partnership with Minnesota State Mankato and their excitement to meet their American friends again in Magadan next summer.

In terms of education, what did you see that was different between Russia and the United States?

“The methods are very different, different ways of thinking. For example, children in the United States have more freedom in their classes. Classes are held in different places and children are always doing some sort of activities,” Svetlana explained. They spoke about the technology, such as smartboards, and how much different this organizational part of education is from what they were used to.

If someone asks you, “How was your trip?” what will your response be?

Olga- “It was really cool and I will go there again. My expectations were definitely met.”

Anastasia G. - “I will remember this travel forever. I bring home only good emotions.”

Anastasia L. - “This was a really interesting trip. Every one of us got a great experience in different areas of education.”

Andrew- “I want to thank Minnesota State University, Mankato for the opportunity to be here.”

Anastasia M. - “I really want to have more experiences like this. This is a very beautiful town and you can just enjoy the sights.”

Tatiana- “I have a lot of positive emotions that I will take with me and I made a lot of wonderful friends here.”

Svetlana B. - “I am glad that I had a place in this group. I saw a lot of really great things.”

Svetlana Y. - “I am excited to continue this partnership; you come to us and we come to you.”

Anzhela- “With this experience, I have a big respect for this country.”