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CONTENTS

Table of Contents 목차

01 KOREAN LANGUAGE & CULTURE
Meet Nesja: Finding Joy in Learning Korean
By Hailie Chun | Korean Teacher, Northwood High School
PAGE 3

02 KOREAN LANGUAGE & CULTURE
Making Songpyeon, Making Memories: Chuseok at Northwood High School
By Hailie Chun | Korean Teacher, Northwood High School
PAGE 4

03 STUDY IN KOREA | COLLEGE & CAREER FAIR
Beyond K-Pop and K-Dramas: Discover Your College Future in South Korea!
By Hae Min Park | Manager, Korean Education Center in Los Angeles
PAGE 6

04 EDUCATIONAL POLICY HIGHLIGHTS
Weaving It Together: Literacy, Biliteracy, and the Arts in Buena Park
By Dr. Sandra Song | Director of Educational Programs, Buena Park School District
PAGE 8

05 EDUCATION PERSPECTIVES | GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP
Multidimensional Citizenship: Preparing Youth for Global Competition for the Twenty-First Century
By Dr. Suzie K. Oh | Educational Consultant & Former Principal, LAUSD
PAGE 10

06 HERITAGE EDUCATION | STUDENT VOICES
Finding a Voice in Two Strings: A Conversation with Andrew Oh
Andrew Oh | Dartmouth College, Former Haegeum Student and TA, KECLA
PAGE 12

— **Publication Information** 14

KOREAN LANGUAGE & CULTURE | NORTHWOOD HIGH SCHOOL, IRVINE

Meet Nesja: Finding Joy in Learning Korean

By Hailie Chun | Korean Teacher, Northwood High School




Students in Hailie Chun's Korean class at Northwood High School.

For one of the students in the Korean class I am currently teaching, an interest in Korean began with K-pop. While she was in middle school, an art teacher who spoke Korean helped her learn the basics of Hangeul, a few simple expressions, and Korean numbers. By the time she began studying Korean in high school, she already had a genuine interest in the language.

During my time teaching her class, I have tried to build on that curiosity by making Korean feel approachable, memorable, and connected to real life. I often use pictures, sound associations, games, conversations, and interactive activities to help students remember new words and feel comfortable using the language.

When I asked her what she enjoyed about Korean class, she mentioned the visual vocabulary activities and said they helped put her in "a better brain space" for learning and remembering new words. She also enjoys the interactive nature of the class and the games we use to practice Korean.

What stood out to me most was how she used Korean outside of school.

She told me about visiting a Korean restaurant with her family. The first time, she ordered her own food in Korean. On another visit, she ordered for everyone at the table. Later, when her family needed more water, she asked for it in Korean as well.

The restaurant staff were surprised that she knew Korean.

"It was fun," she said.

It may seem like a small moment, but this is the kind of experience that makes language learning meaningful. Korean was no longer just something she practiced in class. She was using it to communicate in a real situation.

Those are the moments I hope students experience: when something they learned in class becomes something they can actually use in their own lives.

KOREAN LANGUAGE & CULTURE | NORTHWOOD HIGH SCHOOL, IRVINE

Making Songpyeon, Making Memories: Chuseok at Northwood High School

By Hailie Chun | Korean Teacher, Northwood High School



A Chuseok-themed mural showing a family making songpyeon together.

Teaching Korean is my second career. Before immigrating to the United States in January 2025, I worked as a child psychologist in Korea. That experience continues to shape how I connect with students and support their learning.

This fall, I am teaching Korean at Northwood High School while the regular teacher is on maternity leave. I entered the classroom with excitement and a clear goal to make Korean engaging, practical, and meaningful, helping students connect what they learn with life beyond the classroom.

On September 24 and 25, our Chuseok celebration provided an opportunity to put that goal into practice. I believe in the power of hands-on learning, and I wanted to give students a memory they could carry with them for years. Whether they had grown up with Korean traditions or were discovering them for the first time, I hoped making songpyeon together would help them build a personal connection to Korean culture.

I prepared the songpyeon dough early each morning, and each class welcomed a Korean-speaking parent or grandparent as a guest teacher. Our guests shared their own experiences of Chuseok, bringing family stories and traditions into the classroom.

Together, we made songpyeon, the traditional rice cakes enjoyed during Chuseok. Students also learned about the holiday's history, significance, and traditions, including the special role of songpyeon in the

celebration. With parents and grandparents helping guide the activity, the lesson became a shared experience across generations.

The festivities continued with a potluck. Students brought jeon, tteokbokki, and other homemade Korean dishes to share, filling our classroom with food, smiles, and excitement. Making something with their own hands and sharing a meal gave students a chance to experience the spirit of Chuseok together.





Left: freshly steamed songpyeon. Right: a Hangawi (harvest moon) mural in autumn colors.

For me, this celebration reflected what I hope to offer as a Korean teacher: meaningful connections between language, culture, and everyday life. I hope that when my students think of Chuseok in the years ahead, they will remember shaping songpyeon with their classmates, listening to our guests' stories, and the joy of sharing a meal.

STUDY IN KOREA | COLLEGE & CAREER FAIR

Beyond K-Pop and K-Dramas: Discover Your College Future in South Korea!

By Hae Min Park | Manager, Korean Education Center in Los Angeles

Korea is more than a cultural phenomenon—it could be the place where your academic journey begins.



Students and families visit the Korean university booths at the 2026 AUHSD College & Career Fair, including the Kyung Hee University booth (right).

What if your next big college adventure took you to South Korea?

On October 19, the Korean Education Center in Los Angeles (KECLA) joined the 2026 AUHSD College & Career Fair at the Anaheim Convention Center to introduce U.S. high school students to exciting college and study opportunities in South Korea.

In partnership with Pusan National University, Kyung Hee University, and Taejae University, KECLA helped students and families explore Korean universities, discover different academic majors, and learn more about pursuing higher education in Korea.

From AI to Engineering: Find Your Future in Korea

Think studying in Korea is only about learning Korean or experiencing K-pop culture? Think again!

Students had the opportunity to learn about a wide range of academic fields, including engineering, medicine, and the humanities, as well as emerging areas such as artificial intelligence (AI), digital technology, and global education.

Whether you're already planning your college journey or just starting to explore your options, studying in Korea offers another way to discover your interests, develop new skills, and prepare for a global future.

Bringing Korean Universities Directly to Students

The college fair was just the beginning!

From October 19–20, KECLA and participating universities also visited three Anaheim Union High School District (AUHSD) schools: Cypress High School, John F. Kennedy High School, and Oxford Academy.

More than 300 students attended the school visits, including students studying Korean and others interested in learning more about Korea. University representatives introduced study opportunities and connected directly with students and local educators.





University representatives present study opportunities to students during the AUHSD school visits.

Your College Journey Could Go Global

For many students, Korea is already familiar through music, dramas, food, and social media. But Korea can also be a place to pursue academic goals, explore new fields, and experience a different educational environment.

By connecting U.S. students with Korean universities, KECLA hopes to make studying in Korea a more accessible and exciting option for young people planning their futures.

Ready to think beyond the usual college choices? South Korea might be worth adding to your list!

Explore more about studying in Korea through ‘Sweet Korea’: www.sweetkorea.net



Dr. Sandra Song

EDUCATIONAL POLICY HIGHLIGHTS

Weaving It Together: Literacy, Biliteracy, and the Arts in Buena Park

By Dr. Sandra Song
Director of Educational Programs, Buena Park School District

State educational priorities and funding streams rarely arrive together. They trickle in from different state departments and separate initiatives—one division issues guidance on early literacy, another manages multilingual education, and another oversees expanded learning programs. At the district level, entirely separate groups often oversee arts funding and after-school care. Sacramento views these as distinct fiscal line items. But a six-year-old child walking into a classroom doesn't experience learning in line items. Reading, artistic expression, and language acquisition happen all at once.

Rather than managing these grants and programs in isolation, our leadership team focuses on braiding them—connecting structured literacy, Dual Language Immersion (DLI), Proposition 28 arts funding, and our Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELO-P) into a continuous experience for students.

We believe that literacy is the foundation of all learning and that developing strong language arts skills empowers students to think critically, communicate effectively, and engage with the world. California has shifted towards a focus on explicit, systematic, and responsive instruction that effectively helps all students learn to read, coupled with early screening. This provides educators with a solid baseline. This remains true for the dual immersion curriculum as well. For evidence-based reading practices to occur, continuous coaching for teachers and paraeducators is essential. Our paraeducators run small-group intervention blocks every day, so if they aren't receiving the same training as certificated staff, our tiers of support quickly fall out of alignment. Site administrators need that same grounding as well. When site leaders understand the research, they are far better equipped to coach teachers, evaluate instruction, and lead the learning on their campuses.

In our dual language classroom, instructional clarity is non-negotiable. Being intentional with setting aside time for cross-linguistic transfer, called The Bridge, is where we focus on how English transfers to the partner language and vice versa. Across the campus, we embrace the pedagogy of translanguaging as young emergent bilingual and multilingual learners acquire proficiency—whether in DLI or Structured English Immersion environments—drawing on their entire linguistic repertoire.

And the community has responded overwhelmingly. When we launched Spanish Dual Immersion in Preschool and Kindergarten, every seat filled immediately, leading us to expand to Transitional Kindergarten and First grade the following year. Again, we have filled our seats, and have waitlists. That momentum is now guiding the development of a Korean Dual Language Immersion program in Buena Park. Buena Park is home to Orange County's second Koreatown and a strong Korean community, so that fit is natural. Research

and development are underway as we take a deliberate approach with an analysis of longitudinal data, curriculum models, and community needs to ensure long-term success and quality. Offering Korean DLI is not just about linguistic equity for heritage speakers; it also provides every student in our district a doorway to a globally influential language and culture.

Crucially, to protect sacred instructional minutes during the core school day, we are shifting how we use after-school time. Through ELO-P, we offer visual and performing arts, along with enrichment classes that incorporate traditional culture and dance. And we plan to expand this offer even further, giving students rich, creative, and cultural exposure without sacrificing core instructional minutes.

When we stop viewing state priorities as disconnected programs, and start weaving them together, training everyone from paraeducators to principals, and rethinking after-school hours, we build public schools where academic rigor, biliteracy, sociocultural competence, and creativity thrive side by side.



Dr. Suzie K. Oh

EDUCATION PERSPECTIVES | GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

Multidimensional Citizenship: Preparing Youth for Global Competition for the Twenty-First Century

By Dr. Suzie K. Oh
Educational Consultant & Former Principal, LAUSD

Because students in schools today will spend their adult lives in the 21st century, we cannot continue to give them a 19th century education. We educators are committed to the development of all children's potential so that they can become responsible, knowledgeable, literate, and contributing citizens to our changing global society.

Dr. John Cogan, professor at University of Minnesota, shared his summary of study findings and recommendations to educators from all over the United States and Canada. He reports that policy experts from a broad range of fields were invited to identify the challenges and issues which citizens would have to cope with and manage during the 21st century. They were asked to suggest the citizen characteristics required of people to cope with and manage these trends and to suggest educational strategies which might best implement these citizen characteristics.

These policy experts reached consensus on eight citizen characteristics which they believe will be necessary if people are to cope with and manage their lives during the next 20 years. They include:

- ability to look at and approach problems as a member of a global society
- ability to work with others in a cooperative way and to take responsibility for one's roles/duties within society
- ability to understand, accept, and tolerate cultural differences
- capacity to think in a critical and systemic way
- willingness to resolve conflict in a non-violent manner
- willingness to change one's lifestyle and consumption habits to protect environment
- ability to be sensitive towards and to defend human rights
- willingness and ability to participate in politics at local, national, and international levels

Economic growth in the 21st century will be fueled by knowledge, ideas, innovations, and inventions more than by natural resources. Citizenship is a social activity. It involves people living and working together. Citizens must be able to work and interact with other people in a variety of settings and contexts.

We educators believe that the task of preparing citizens for the future can best be addressed by structuring schools in such a way that they become a model of multidimensional citizenship. The school structure and organization, its faculty and staff, the curriculum, assessment measures and the general atmosphere within the school, must be focused upon:

- the development of cooperative working relationships
- the development of critical and systemic thinking
- the development of appreciation and tolerance for multiple perspectives
- the willingness to participate in civic and public affairs at multiple levels

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Dr. Suzie Oh retired as principal at Third Street School, Los Angeles Unified School District. She can be reached by email at drsuzieoh@gmail.com.

HERITAGE EDUCATION | STUDENT VOICES

Finding a Voice in Two Strings: A Conversation with Andrew Oh



Andrew Oh, Dartmouth College | Former Haegeum Student and TA, KECLA Heritage Education

Andrew Oh began studying the haegeum at KECLA's Heritage Education program at the age of twelve, and later returned as a teaching assistant for the class he once attended. He shares what the instrument has taught him.

Q1. Could you introduce yourself and share how KECLA's Heritage Education program has become a part of your daily life or routine over the years?

My name is Andrew Oh. I am a current student at Dartmouth College and a former haegeum student at the KECLA's Heritage Education program. I found myself in my first haegeum class right before the pandemic when I was just twelve years old. Though I was only able to attend classes and learn about the haegeum for a few months before the lockdown, I was immediately hooked and knew that I wanted to continue learning, despite the difficulties of remote classes. As I slowly honed my haegeum skills, I found myself at weekly classes, practicing every day, and even performing at cultural showcases and competitions. Eventually, I even ended up as a TA at the KECLA, helping to teach the haegeum class that I had once been in myself. Though I did not know it when I started, haegeum became a defining aspect of my life.

Q2. Korean traditional instruments have a distinct voice. What was your initial impression of the Haegeum, and how has your appreciation for its heritage changed as you practiced?

The haegeum is perhaps one of the most unique-looking instruments in the world. With just two strings and a horse-hair bow placed in between, the haegeum caught my eye immediately. However, the distinctiveness of the haegeum is what gives it its beauty. The haegeum allows players to produce beautiful sounds impossible to produce with any other instrument. It also has incredible range and diversity in the kinds of sounds it can produce. In one song, the haegeum might serve as a jovial and lively voice, while in another, it might sound longing and almost sorrowful. Though I admittedly found the process of learning the haegeum difficult and slightly tedious at first, I came to love its unique voice and by extension the larger Korean traditional culture.

Korean traditional performance is a dying art in the age of modernization and globalization. I am now honored to play a part in continuing its legacy, as generations of masters have done before me.

Q3. Learning a traditional instrument requires patience and dedication. How has this long-term journey influenced the way you overcome challenges in your academic life or prepare for your future goals?

When first starting to learn the haegeum, I quickly learned that it is a very difficult instrument to master. At first, I could only make high-pitched, unpleasant screeching sounds. Even once I had learned to make smooth sounds, I had to learn East Asian music systems and styles, much different from Western music. With no fingerboard, every note depends on the muscle memory of the placement and pressure of the fingers with no spatial frame of reference. Having only two strings may make the haegeum seem simple compared to other stringed instruments, the limited number of strings only serves to tighten the margin of error. One slight misstep and an entire piece can be thrown off. Time and time again, I found myself stuck and frustrated.

Learning the haegeum definitely helped me learn to love the process of trying something new, failing, and continuing to work at it. With the haegeum, there is no avoiding practice and repetition, and I think that translated to my life outside of the instrument.

"Take a class! Learn a language! Meet someone new! Listen to others' stories!"

Q4. What is one key lesson you learned from Heritage Education that you wish every younger student could experience?

I hope that everyone learns the value of learning not only about Korean traditional culture, but about all kinds of world cultures. We live in an exciting age of technology, but it also makes it easy to get distracted and retreat inward, surrounded only by what is familiar. I encourage the students at KECLA to step out of their comfort zone and engage with cultures firsthand. Take a class! Learn a language! Meet someone new! Listen to others' stories! There is so much to learn and grow from available right in front of you, and one such community that provides this is the KECLA.

Many of you reading this may be Korean. I encourage you to ask yourself this: what does it mean to be Korean? Does it mean being born in Korea? Having Korean parents? Speaking the language? There are so many aspects that might form the Korean identity, and I encourage everyone to explore what makes YOU Korean and what makes OTHERS Korean. Understanding and appreciating your own culture can help you understand and appreciate other cultures.

Many of you reading this may not be Korean. This doesn't mean that you don't have a place at the KECLA! Learning about Korean culture and how it compares and contrasts to your own can help you appreciate all kinds of different cultures around the world.

Q5. Is there anything else you would like to add or share with our readers and the KECLA community?

Don't be afraid to start a class you don't know anything about! I definitely had never heard of the haegeum before I started classes, and I had no idea whether or not I would like it. At KECLA, there is such a wide variety of valuable and interesting classes. You never know which one could become a defining aspect of your life just like haegeum became one of mine. If you don't like a class, that's fine too! Naturally, it's impossible to like every single topic you come across. Having an open mind and a thirst for knowledge can take you very far in life, so I encourage everyone to start this mindset at the KECLA!

COLOPHON

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