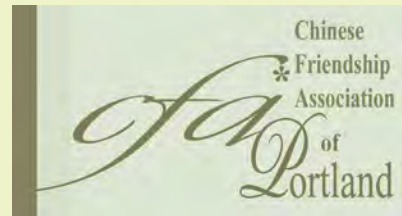


IT'S A PLACE TO BELONG:

Connecting Summer Learning to Community for Portland Metro's Chinese Youth

RESEARCH INSIGHTS FROM PORTLAND METRO'S CHINESE COMMUNITY FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE IN OREGON EDUCATION



THIS RESEARCH PROJECT WAS COLLABORATIVELY DESIGNED AND PRODUCED BY THE CHINESE FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION OF PORTLAND AND FOUNDATIONS FOR A BETTER OREGON.

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Summer 2021: CFAP Builds On Youth Development



During the summer of 2021, the Chinese Friendship Association of Portland (CFAP) accelerated its community-led youth programming in response to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth in the Portland metropolitan region's Chinese community. Months earlier, the Oregon Legislature made a historic \$250 million investment in summer learning and enrichment, including \$40 million dedicated to culturally specific and community-based organizations through a grant program administered by the Oregon Community Foundation. CFAP successfully leveraged Oregon's investment to meet the urgent needs of Chinese community youth, deepen its approach to youth development, and launch unique summer programming that connects youth to their cultural identity and community.

Building on the community's rich assets of Chinese language and culture, professional expertise in innovative pedagogy, and a commitment to elevating youth voice and leadership, CFAP provided robust bilingual and bicultural summer learning for young people from elementary school to high school. For K-8 youth, CFAP provided a four-week summer camp to 60 children integrating Chinese language and culture through project-based learning, offering a contrast to traditional classroom-based learning. For older students, CFAP invested in youth leadership development, including four-week teaching assistant internships, an innovative dual-credit course at Portland Community College designed by youth, and youth-led virtual courses in computer programming and artificial intelligence.

About CFAP

The Chinese Friendship Association of Portland (CFAP) is among the largest and most active member organizations serving the Chinese community and Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community in the Portland metropolitan area. As a volunteer-led nonprofit organization, CFAP's presence in the community is fueled by the passion of its leaders to cultivate community, preserve Chinese language and culture, and generate solutions to the challenges experienced by the region's Chinese and AAPI communities. Driven by values of service and bridging cultures, CFAP provides cultural, educational, and civic engagement activities to all ages.

CFAP routinely demonstrates how strong partnership between culturally specific organizations and state government agencies or mainstream cultural organizations can address inequities facing historically underserved communities. For over 20 years, CFAP

has organized the Chinese and AAPI communities to participate in Portland's annual Rose Festival Parade, and more recently partnered with the Portland's Centers for the Arts to produce the Oregon Lunar New Year Celebration. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, CFAP entered into a partnership with the Oregon Health Authority to lead culturally specific outreach, testing, and vaccination efforts, as well as programming for youth and seniors to address the effects of social isolation. By expanding youth programming into an immersive summer learning experience with support from a historic public investment, CFAP is again demonstrating the capacity of culturally specific and community-led efforts to meet the needs of their community while simultaneously pushing for systems change that leads to increased representation, greater access to opportunity and services, and equitable outcomes for Chinese and AAPI youth and families.

A Community-Centered Research Partnership

This research effort is a partnership between CFAP and Foundations for a Better Oregon (FBO), a nonprofit organization and project of Oregon philanthropy seeking to collaboratively rethink and reimagine how Oregon supports every child to learn, grow, and thrive. By co-designing and co-leading research grounded in the perspectives, experiences, and truths of youth and community leaders, CFAP and FBO aim to elevate insights that help Oregon's philanthropic, state, and legislative partners understand the expertise, strength, vision, and opportunity within our communities to better support children and young people—especially those who are historically underserved by public systems.

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Research Insights

INSIGHT 1

Moving from Youth Development to Youth Leadership

There is a saying that youth are like the morning sun, full of energy and potential. The world belongs to us all, but in the end it is theirs. That's why we say that youth are the future. This country—the whole world—belongs to our youth now and in the future. By doing youth activities, we let them know their roots and culture, so they can build a better future.

BOSHA LIU, CFAP BOARD VICE-PRESIDENT



YOUTH ARE THE FUTURE OF OUR COMMUNITY

When considering why youth programming is important to the CFAP community, virtually every response yields a clear and resounding answer: We invest in youth development because youth are the future. Far from cliché, this genuine response reflects community and cultural values.

CFAP is evolving the ways in which it engages and includes young people in the organization. “Since day one, we have been focused on youth development,” recalls Hardy Li, a former CFAP Board President and current CFAP Board Member. Looking ahead, he believes that engaging youth as leaders will be a catalyst that brings CFAP to the “next level.” Creating structures, roles, and programming for young people to assume leadership within CFAP is essential to the organization’s current and future work for Portland’s Chinese community.

To better support youth who lacked opportunities for social connection and community service during the pandemic, CFAP recognized an inroad to go beyond

youth participation and create opportunities for youth leadership

“Youth have always been important to CFAP events,” reflects Kai Zhang, a longtime CFAP Board Member, as he recalls how youth had primarily filled roles as event volunteers or were seen as the beneficiaries of CFAP-led seminars for parents. Now, CFAP has adopted models where youth are identifying, designing, and leading projects for their peers and the community with the support and mentorship of CFAP leaders.

This shift in approach is informed by a set of important understandings that CFAP has articulated about the function of youth development for the organization:

- Culture, language, and identity are assets for youth that should be actively developed.
- Supporting positive mental health and social connection among youth is essential and must be actively pursued.
- Youth agency and leadership is transformative for both the individual and organization.



When the pandemic hit, I really felt this sense of urgency around creating the Youth Council to generate more support for youth in the community, and also training them to be in a leadership role: to design programs, do [public service] infomercials, host movie nights for youth, or other youth activities. That was important.

IRIS ZHAO, FORMER CFAP BOARD PRESIDENT AND CURRENT ADVISORY BOARD CHAIR

PANDEMIC CONDITIONS ACCELERATED INNOVATION FOR BUILDING YOUTH LEADERSHIP

As Oregon transitioned to virtual environments with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the disruption of routines opened an opportunity for CFAP to test and build out its new approach to youth leadership. Zhang and Dr. Wei-Wei Lou, a retired Portland Public Schools administrator and CFAP volunteer, were invited to transition CFAP’s youth programming to the CFAP Youth Council, a youth-led forum that draws from best practices in developing youth agency and leadership. With many after-school activities suspended and limited opportunities to socialize, Zhang and Dr. Lou convened a group of young people in late 2020 to form the Youth Council. “The pandemic really pushed us to officially incorporate the Youth Council within CFAP,” recounts Zhang, “so that kids have a place to show their leadership.”

The CFAP Youth Council first co-designed youth-led seminars during the 2020-21 winter break. Council members sourced topics of interest from their peers and offered courses in subjects ranging from origami

and taekwondo to Python language and artificial intelligence, with youth either leading workshops themselves or inviting other community members to collaborate. “During the pandemic, it was youth actually providing activities for other youth, just as we hoped!” celebrates Zhang. “Through [elevating] community learning and youth-led activities,” he explains, “the Youth Council will project a positive image and involve more kids; and the youth leaders will become role models to others.”

In early 2021, the Youth Council moved to action when it received a grant from the Lake Oswego City Council to organize a community event in response to a surge in anti-Asian hate. The Council also supported the leadership of one of its members, Alicia Li, as she joined the Lake Oswego School Board as a Student Representative.

“The fact that the Chinese Friendship Association is organizing these opportunities for me [to lead] gives me insight into what my potential is, and they are thinking about my future. That’s really important to me,” shares Cindy Huang, a Youth Council member.

YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROFILES

KYLA ZHANG, JUNIOR,
LAKE OSWEGO HIGH SCHOOL

When COVID-19 interrupted Kyla’s plans for an in-person clinical summer internship, she organized a medical trainee-ship course at Portland Community College (PCC) for herself and peers interested in health sciences. With the support of a mentor, Kyla recruited a PCC faculty member to co-design a virtual course and reached out to Asian American healthcare professionals to guide weekly problem-based learning sessions.

JENNY QIAN, SENIOR,
ST. MARY’S ACADEMY

Jenny’s experience as an intern during CFAP’s four-week summer camp solidified her interest in pursuing a career in teaching. Interns served as teaching assistants in classrooms and managers of camp operations to ensure arrivals, lunch, and recess conformed with COVID-19 protocols. Jenny enjoyed helping 5th through 8th graders bridge language learning with cultural understanding.

BEN WANG, JUNIOR,
CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

With a passion for technology, Ben developed and taught courses in Javascript to build familiarity and confidence in the basics of computer programming for community members of all ages. He wants to give other youth in the CFAP community a head start in developing the foundational skills in computer science and the confidence to lead.

Culture and Identity Form the Foundation of CFAP's Approach to Youth Development



Because it was organized by the Chinese community, I feel like CFAP's summer program brings me closer to my community. It's a place to belong.

CINDY HUANG, CFAP YOUTH COUNCIL MEMBER

ROOTING SUMMER LEARNING IN IDENTITY AND CULTURE

With the establishment of the Youth Council and positive response from both young people and the broader Chinese community, CFAP expanded its approach to community-based education in the summer of 2021. The centerpiece was a K-8 summer learning camp led by a team of bilingual and bicultural educators. The team created an immersive experience to accelerate participants' Chinese language skills through developmentally appropriate play-based and project-based learning.

Building on research-informed best practices, summer camp co-director Dr. Lina Lu remarks that "this program and way of learning is unique" in comparison to traditional approaches in Oregon public schools. The summer curriculum drew from rich aspects of Chinese culture to create a natural and applied setting for language learning. Children were invigorated to learn and practice Mandarin as they reenacted the fables that underpin Chinese idioms, studied the Chinese Zodiac, explored China's regional culinary traditions, practiced the arts of Chinese calligraphy and paper folding, and performed Chinese traditional waist drumming and gong fu fan dancing.

"I wanted to create an interesting, relaxing, and joyful environment for students to learn language," explains Dr. Lu. "So we combined language learning with play, including hands-on cultural projects. It's important to me that kids learn by singing, by dancing, by listening, speaking, drawing."

Inspired by the Youth Council's approach to leadership, the CFAP summer camp integrated eight high-school aged summer interns into the camp's operations. Intern responsibilities ranged from serving as teaching assistants to providing technology support, and above all to be mentors and models for the younger children. "Interns experienced profound individual and collective growth during the four-week experience," recalls Dr. Lou, who also served as a summer camp co-director. "It was truly transformative."

From assuming leadership roles and working as a cohesive team to improving their own proficiency in Mandarin, the summer camp interns developed their self-awareness and self-confidence through leading cultural learning to younger peers. "I felt like I've been really separated from my own culture for a long time," said one summer camp intern. "This experience and interning made me remember who I actually am along with the kids here too."

CONNECTING LEARNING TO HOME AND HERITAGE

The CFAP summer camp's approach was designed to extend learning into the home and encourage families to build on camp curriculum through their unique family traditions, culture, and experiences. Every day, camp participants returned home with specific questions or activities to explore with their family. Simultaneously, children applied their Mandarin language skills while exploring their family's story, identity, and connection to different places, foods, traditions, and art. Families became actively engaged in camp through the regular invitation to put their children's learning into personal context and make meaning with their children through dialogue and discovery.

"When my students started this summer camp, they did not speak Chinese at home," said one of CFAP's lead educators at summer camp when reflecting on the children's growth over the summer. "Now they start speaking Chinese at home, which makes me feel so proud. They try to use what they've learned in school, and put it into practice with their families."

Parents also reflected earnestly on the value of deepening their children's interest in Chinese language and culture:

- We teach Chinese at home, but we don't do a good job introducing Chinese culture. I'm so impressed with what you've done!
- My children are very reluctant to write [in Chinese characters] at home. Camp made learning Chinese more than just repeating words. You made it about real and interesting experiences that enhance their sense of self-identity.
- We are Chinese, but my husband and I are not fluent. Getting culture and linguistic exposure is important to us.

Parents felt connected to the summer program because learning transcended spaces. It brought learning home in fun and active ways that promoted intergenerational sharing, dialogue, and deeper understanding. Of those who participated in an evaluative survey, families rated the focus on Chinese language and culture (91%) and the opportunity for play and fun (94%) as the most important components of the summer camp.

CFAP's camp model amplified the unique ways that culturally relevant learning can connect the classroom to the home and engage families in meaningful learning. While the in-depth and applied Chinese language and culture learning offered at CFAP's camp is unique, this approach to incorporating family knowledge and experience is rich and applicable in all learning settings.



To Thrive in a Globalized World, Learning Must Interweave With Culture, Language, and Identity

STUDENTS EXIST IN AN ECOSYSTEM OF LEARNING

The conditions in which young people learn, grow, and thrive are complex and dynamic. Children learn at home, within many configurations of family, language, and culture; they learn in their communities, through connection, interaction, and traditions informed by the diverse groups of people, organizations, and institutions around them; and they learn within school settings, where they engage with peers, teachers, and others from diverse backgrounds through curriculum and school cultures. Together, these mutually reinforcing settings create a rich ecosystem of learning that is truly unique to every student.

In practice, however, Oregon often fails to build strong links between learning at home, in community, and at school. Young people in CFAP's youth programming recognize how the traditional K-12 education system does little to connect academic learning and personal development to their Chinese identity, heritage, and community. "Part of being connected to CFAP is exposure to my culture and language. In a school setting, I don't get that much exposure, and I'm surrounded with people I don't feel much connection to," says Cindy Huang, a member of the CFAP Youth Council.

Adults in the community share a similar perspective and hold up CFAP's expansion of youth programming as an important strategy to help youth connect their learning to their culture, language, and identity. They also believe that Oregon's public education system—not just the community—has a responsibility to create culturally responsive learning environments that nurture both academic and personal growth. "The community really needs this," reflects Dr. Lou about the positive reception to CFAP's summer programming, "and we need more than this."



The community really needs this,
and we need more than this.

DR. WEI-WEI LOU, CFAP SUMMER
LEARNING PROGRAM CO-DIRECTOR

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INSIGHT 3

BEYOND EMBRACE: INTEGRATING CULTURE, LANGUAGE, AND IDENTITY INTO LEARNING

Too often, culture is understood as the outward-facing traditions that communities hold and practice, such as languages, foods, or holiday celebrations and festivals. As a consequence, institutions and systems fail to understand and account for how culture informs our inward-facing processes, such as how we communicate or relate to one another, the value systems that guide us, and the worldviews we hold about people, places, institutions, time, and beyond.

Young people benefit from learning environments that actively integrate their identity, language, culture, and the lessons they learn at home and in community. CFAP's urgency and approach to create engaging, developmentally appropriate, and culturally relevant programming is a direct response to what the Chinese community and other culturally specific communities see and experience in Oregon's education systems:

an indifference toward students' identity during their pursuit of education, the lack of a global perspective across subject areas, and too few opportunities to learn by doing and experience discovery through project-based, play-based, and arts-inspired learning.

Beyond providing summer and extracurricular experiences, CFAP leaders are seeking to spark systemic change for youth through partnership with Oregon schools and other community-based organizations. The CFAP board seeks to present their model for high-quality, culturally responsive enrichment for youth in the Chinese community, and as a model for K-12 classrooms and other community-based programs to provide innovative, globally informed, and culturally relevant learning experiences. By recognizing and designing for the rich breadth of children's identities and their learning ecosystems, schools and youth-serving programs can deploy richer social, cultural, and pedagogical approaches and bolster how all children can learn, grow, and thrive.

I feel like I've lost
a lot of
my culture.

CFAP SUMMER CAMP INTERN

I feel separated
from my
own culture.

CFAP YOUTH COUNCIL MEMBER



Research Implications for Systems Change



Oregon's efforts to ensure that children receive a rigorous and culturally relevant education remain incomplete. CFAP's approach also shows us ways forward for Oregon's public education system: an approach that interweaves community, identity, and culture throughout every child's learning, especially for those in historically underserved and culturally specific communities.

I am very thankful for the success of our summer youth programs and their impacts for our community, reflecting CFAP's nearly three decades of dedication to cultural promotion and youth development. We sincerely welcome new partnerships with Oregon's education leaders, legislators, and philanthropy in this effort.

DR. XING LIANG LIU, PRESIDENT, CFAP

INTEGRATE COMMUNITY-CONNECTED, CULTURALLY RELEVANT LEARNING PRACTICES INTO PUBLIC EDUCATION

Building on their approach to youth development, and supported by the findings in this study, CFAP’s leaders seek to partner with the Oregon education system and philanthropy to integrate the principles and strategies that underpin rigorous, culturally relevant learning into traditional K-12 classrooms and out-of-school time programs. Key components of this approach include:

Rich learning experiences that emphasize inquiry, play, and project-based learning, and spark meaningful engagement by inviting students to draw connections to their identity, culture, family, and community, throughout the learning process, such as young people experienced this summer at CFAP. When young people feel connected to, challenged by, and in control of their learning tasks, they develop identities as capable, generative, and active learners that can apply knowledge across the learning ecosystem, from home to community to school.

Globally aware curriculum and content that takes a de-Westernized view of society and highlights the interconnectivity and interdependencies of a

globalized world across subject areas, ranging from language arts and history to economics, sciences, and beyond. Developing and implementing globally aware curriculum creates more inclusive learning environments that support youth from diasporic communities—such as those who CFAP serves—to discover and maintain their familial, cultural, and place-based ties. Teaching curriculum with an intercultural lens further helps all Oregon children develop empathy, humility, and the essential skills necessary to live, work, and thrive in a globally connected state and world.

Leverage community wisdom to reframe standards, curriculum, and content in ways that integrate culturally and globally relevant knowledge into formal learning settings in the learning ecosystem. Oregon schools, policymakers, and philanthropic leaders cannot and should not do this alone. To make lasting systemic changes, leaders must recalibrate their relationships to Oregon’s youth and families, community leaders and elders, and culturally specific organizations like CFAP through collaborative processes that meaningfully realign our public education system’s values and approaches in ways that incorporate knowledge and voices from Oregon’s diverse communities.

INVEST IN BOTH COMMUNITIES AND SCHOOLS TO DELIVER CULTURALLY RELEVANT LEARNING

Oregon’s historic 2021 investment in summer learning allowed CFAP to meet the immediate needs of youth during the COVID-19 pandemic and rapidly expand its youth development programming at no cost to families. For many CFAP leaders, this investment also represents a new bridge between Portland’s Chinese community and Oregon’s public education system: an acknowledgment by the state that Chinese and AAPI youth matter, and an opportunity to instill community-connected, culturally relevant learning in public schools.

Integrating community voices, wisdom, and practices into Oregon’s public education system is critical to advancing culturally relevant learning and improving academic and social outcomes for all youth—especially those who are not well-served by the status quo. By investing in robust community-school partnerships and a cohesive ecosystem of learning, Oregon can promise a better future for children in Portland’s Chinese community and in every community.



Oregon can build on its 2021 investment in community-based summer learning by:

Sustaining public and philanthropic investments in culturally-specific, community-based organizations like CFAP that elevate the transformative power of connecting young people and their learning to their identity, community, and the modern global world. Access to resources for this type of programming is uneven across the learning ecosystem. Each year, only a limited portion of public and philanthropic funds are directed towards community-led and culturally relevant learning experiences, like CFAP. Community-based organizations must often compete for limited resources, while public and private funding systems perpetuate a fragmented and unstable learning ecosystem that relegates culturally relevant programs to the periphery. With reliable and regular investment, culturally-specific community-based programs can become incubators of innovative, community-connected, and culturally relevant learning practices that directly inform Oregon's public education system.

Investing in meaningful partnerships between education and community leaders that integrate community-connected, culturally relevant learning into public schools. Culturally specific communities, such as Portland's Chinese community, hold a broad range of ancestral, cultural, place-based, academic, and professional knowledge and lived experience. To create an equitable and racially just public education system, community voices must move from the periphery to the core of educational design and accountability. This shift requires schools, school districts, mainstream out-of-school time programs, and state agencies to specifically invest in partnerships and processes with culturally specific communities that intentionally move toward co-creation and shared accountability.



Process & Methods

This project is a collaborative research inquiry co-designed and implemented in partnership between FBO and CFAP. FBO believes authentic evidence emerges through authentic partnership that honors community wisdom and perspective at all stages of the research process. FBO operates as a project facilitator and research guide so that community partners are able to engage as experts rather than subjects.

The research design for this project was developed in a parallel process to CFAP's design and implementation of summer programming in 2021. The research aims and questions that underpin these findings attended to the joint objectives and genuine interests, concerns, and curiosities that arose among both CFAP and FBO about the way youth experienced community-based summer learning opportunities. Research methods were qualitative in nature, composed primarily of thirteen interviews and two focus groups with CFAP's organizational leaders, youth leaders, and community-based educators, as well as a parent survey with primarily open-text responses. This study utilized a descriptive coding structure informed by the values and objectives guiding CFAP's summer programming, and then applied a thematic analysis to refine a coding approach for group sense-making. The development of findings emerged through a two-part participatory sensemaking protocol, and CFAP and FBO collaboratively refined research "insights" through the co-development of this report.



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