

JAPANESE STUDENTS FORGE BOND WITH ORLANDO SCIENCE SCHOOLS

Courtesy of: Orlando Science Schools

Across the globe, "sister cities" span cultural differences to build friendships that promote peace, understanding and cooperation. Orlando and Orange County, for example, have an official relationship with 14 cities on four continents.

In much the same way, Orlando Science Schools (OSS) marked a new educational partnership Dec. 11 by hosting 20 students from Meizen "Super Science" High School in Kurume City, Japan. The two are now sister schools, sharing a mutual commitment to excel in the STEM-related fields of science, technology, education and math.



"OSS is honored to establish a connection with Meizen High School," OSS Principal Necati Sahin said during the ceremony. "Together, we recognize the value of nurturing young minds to become the thought leaders of tomorrow."

In addition to sharing information about their country and high school, the Japanese students attended OSS science classes and presented research on the freezing point of water. OSS students demonstrated their award-winning robot, gave a tour of the robotics workshop and threw a pizza lunch for their new friends.

At day's end, both schools exchanged gifts and commemorative plaques. Kathy DeVault, director of strategic partnerships for Mayor Buddy Dyer, also presented Meizen students with pins bearing Orlando's city seal.

"These types of relationships are important because of the value students get from exchanging ideas," said Maribel Barea, a computer science teacher who advises the robotics club at OSS. "When students from diverse backgrounds come together as a team, it sparks creativity and social development. And that translates into adulthood, when the ability to work with others is such a big part of life."



On their weeklong trip, the Meizen students also visited the White House, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Kennedy Space Center. This was the first time they chose to visit a high school during their annual journey to the United States.

"The kids from both schools were so excited," said Misa Eto, Meizen's English teacher. "There was a respect for one another, a passion for learning and a genuine interest in each student's world. Plus, it was great practice for our students to present in front of an English-speaking audience. We made many friends here."

As part of its mission to offer K-12 students in Orange County a high-quality education, OSS aims to share knowledge and best practices through partnerships that help spark interest in STEM education. OSS has operated as an A-plus charter school each year since opening in 2011, and its students have won multiple awards on the regional, state, national and international levels.