

# Fraternal twins: tales of NCSSM's Chicagoland sister school

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GUEST WRITER

It's Monday morning, an A-day, at the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy. Some scurry to their math elective - Multivariable Calculus (MVC) or Differential Equations (DiffEq), to name a few - while others make their way to science - Calculus Based Physics: Energy and Magnetism (EnM) or Microbes and Disease (MCB). Acronyms permeate the curriculum.

The students delve into the precise and atypical high school curriculum that is bred in investigation, thrives on application, and fosters intense student collaboration. It is time to advance the human condition.

Sophomores, the newest students, begin their first math project of their IMSA career, working in hexagonal wood. They are taught by teachers with doctorates and masters, qualified to create and play with the curriculum and make content innovative, lively, and challenging.

On the other side of the school, students learn in foreign language classes where all English is forbidden from day one.

Nearby, elective humanities classes feed every creative mind. IMSA students, not simply renowned for their STEM expertise, but moreover their consistent passion for learning, investigate various works in their chosen English elective, ranging from 20th Century Poetry to Victorian Fiction (VicFic).

History electives, ranging from Ancient World Religion and Philosophy (AWRAP) to World in the 20th Century, give students the opportunity to explore and critically analyze details of the past.

School is in session four days a week: A, B, C, and D-days. Every Wednesday, an Inquiry (I-day) occurs. Sophomores, new to the school, utilize the day to catch up on work, attend study sessions, or meet with teachers, while upperclassmen have the opportunity to conduct research as part of the Student Inquiry and Research (SIR) program.

Each I-day, at 7 a.m., juniors and seniors clamber into buses and head around Chicago and its suburbs to places like FermiLab, Feinberg, Argonne National Laboratory, Northwestern, University of Chicago, and the Field Museum.

There, they work with a professional of the field they're interested in, eventually presenting their work at a small research conference that cancels classes for a day and gets the whole school out of bed - IMSAloquium. Students not involved in SIR have the alternative



photo courtesy of Education Week

Above: A hallway in the main building of IMSA, showcasing some quirky interior decoration.

option to take internships at 1871, a business incubator in Chicago, or simply take the day for extracurriculars and schoolwork.

Altogether, the feeling of accomplishment that comes with I-day programs stems from more than just participation in meaningful work. Even with distinctly different projects, all students relate in their sacrifices for the work and rewarding outcome.

With such a diverse student body from across the state, one thing is integral: cultural awareness. IMSA's Peer Multicultural Educators (PME) specialize in combating racism, sexism, stereotyping, and cultural segregation, as well as regulating culture clubs.

In these clubs, students celebrate Indian, Asian, African, and Latino culture with interactive programs and thrilling events. Culture shows are the most popular, where students represent their culture through dances, skits, musical acts, and fashion shows.

These are huge events with a cast of one hundred and audiences of many hundreds. They are not only an opportunity to represent IMSA's enthusiastic dance culture, but to take pride in the diverse and accepting community.

After a long day, students return to one of the most trademark aspects of the IMSA experience: residential life.

Residence halls, i.e. buildings, have four wings with 24 students per wing, making 94 students in each building. This is topped off with four adults in each building, the Resident Counselors (RCs). Wingmates stick together, whether it's to goof around or buckle down on math problem

sets. Meanwhile, the RC's task is not only to be a parental figure to students, but to maintain order in the hall and run curfew checks. Each wing has two guides who act as leaders for the wing, planning events to promote unity, and maintaining a welcoming atmosphere.

But things don't stop there. Wings and halls eventually develop their own identity. Students are proud of the hall they live and the strong bond with fellow hallmates. To prove their worth, every year, each participates in a Clash of the Halls. The prize? Bragging rights and an awesome trophy.

It might not sound like much, but Clash season is undeniably the most exciting part of the year. Each hall adorns a color and theme, which they implement into different events, including talent show, movie trailer, and drill team routine.

A pep rally, not solely used as the climax of competition, but rather as a moment of school unity, concludes the eventful week, leaving students proud to call themselves IMSA Titans.

Ultimately, IMSA is many things. It's an incubator for genius, a hub for innovation, and a community of people who grasp every opportunity and thrive on action.

So how do you capture life at IMSA?

Is it in the unique teaching style, the residential lifestyle, or the investigative curriculum? Or rather the almost 75 extracurricular activities and student-run programs?

In actuality, the essence of the Academy can be captured in two words: constant motion. It's the community that never sleeps; a microcosm of discovery, hustle, and passion.



Andrew Adams is the Editor-in-Chief of the Acronym, the student-run news publication at the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy. His work can be found online at [sites.imsa.edu/acronym](http://sites.imsa.edu/acronym).

Above: A lab at IMSA, stocked with state-of-the-art technology and displaying distinctive design with exposed architectural features, not unlike the chemistry and biology labs at NCSSM.

## The Stentorian

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