

# TRIP FOSTERS A LINK WITH CHINA

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## China and Oklahoma will swap teachers and pupils in a five-year agreement.

The United States can learn a lot from China, says Jessica Stowell, program coordinator for the Oklahoma Institute for Teaching East Asia at the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa. "A strong family can produce a well-educated society, and that is something that the United States has to learn from China," Stowell said. Thanks in part to Stowell's work, Oklahoma is the first state that has received the opportunity to learn Chinese culture and language firsthand in public schools through educational exchange programs. Stowell was one of more than 50 educators, business people and government officials in Gov. Brad Henry's educational and economic mission to China on June 17-27. The mission was funded by the Freeman Foundation, which promotes secondary and higher education about China in the United States. During the mission to China, Oklahoman education leaders established a five-year renewable agreement to strengthen existing relationships between public schools in Oklahoma and key schools in Chengdu, the capital of China's Sichuan province. The agreement means Oklahoma will receive Chinese teachers and students and will send state students and faculty to China, Stowell said. "It gives us all kinds of possibilities," she said.

In addition to being the world's most populous nation, China has the fastest-growing economy. Seven of the nine Oklahoma public schools participating in the exchange program have introduced Chinese into their curriculum, Stowell said. Grissom Elementary School in Tulsa is the first school in Oklahoma to add Chinese at the third-grade level, and will have a full-time Chinese teacher starting this fall, she said. Education and business go hand in hand, so it is vital that U.S. students learn about the Chinese culture and language if America wants to be on the cutting edge of the economy, Stowell said. "China and the United States are inextricably linked economically, and it will make our lives a lot easier economically if we learn more about China and how to do business in China, because their culture requires a different approach," Stowell said. The main difference between Oklahoma schools and Chinese schools, Stowell said, is the students' motivation and discipline in studies. Even though Chinese class sizes range from 50 to 60 students, "when the teacher comes in the room, the children stand up and greet the teacher and class starts and that's the end of it," Stowell said.

"You don't have to tell anyone to please be quiet or quit throwing things," she said. "The students are extremely well-disciplined and motivated, but they're still kids, and they still run out on the playground and jump around and chase one another at recess, and they love to have their pictures taken, and when you talk to them they want to know about American kids and what they do for fun," Stowell said.



Flowers are given to Jean Swanson, principal of Grissom Elementary, by a student from Shi-Jia Hutong Primary School in Beijing. Oklahoma business and education leaders accompanied Gov. Brad Henry on a trip to China on June 17-27.

*Courtesy / Jessica Stowell*