

5 MINUTES WITH

Sunhoo Chung and Shelly Wille

One School, Two Campuses 6,000 Miles Apart

Drawn by rapid economic growth and an education-focused population, a new independent school with American roots is winning over a different culture.



Sunhoo Chung and **Shelly Wille** are chief financial officer and head of school, respectively, of Chadwick International School, a prek-12 nonprofit day school with 1,204 students in Incheon, South Korea. It is operated by the Roessler-Chadwick Foundation, which also operates Chadwick School in Palos Verdes Peninsula, California. Just under 11,000 South Korean primary- and secondary-school students went abroad for study in 2014, according to the Institute of International Education. The population of South Korea exceeded 51 million in 2016. chadwickinternational.org



Chadwick International School is located on a 17-acre site in the heart of downtown Incheon, South Korea. Facilities include two performing arts theaters, an outdoor amphitheater, two gymnasiums, an aquatics center and two dining halls.

Net Assets: When Chadwick International opened in South Korea in 2010, Chadwick School in California was 75 years old. What were the origins of the new school?

Sunhoo Chung and Shelly Wille: We were the beneficiary of an amazing opportunity to create a second campus in a brand new city with a brand new innovative property. The opportunity aligned with the original vision of our founder, Margaret Chadwick. She had a special place in her heart for Asia and always imagined Chadwick students and schools to be in places distant from California.

When an opportunity to establish a Chadwick School in South Korea presented itself, it was important to ensure the fulfillment of the school's mission ("Chadwick Schools develop global citizens with keen minds, exemplary character, self-

knowledge, and the ability to lead") and its long-term financial sustainability.

Net Assets: Tell us about the due diligence that went into exploring this possibility. What assurances were needed to invest in such an ambitious undertaking?

Chung and Wille: From the beginning of the project, we tried to secure full responsibility for operating the school independently from the NSIC (New Songdo International City Development LLP), our financial sponsor, to provide an uncompromised Chadwick education. When the school opened in 2010, we capped the highest grade at 7 even though the facility can easily accommodate up to 12th grade. The board thought the first graduates of CI needed to be educated under the Chadwick philosophy for at least five



Learn more about the two Chadwick schools
chadwickinternational.org
chadwickschool.org

years, though it implied a financial burden. Developing a business model to ensure long-term financial sustainability was another important consideration when we negotiated startup operating funds, lease terms and conditions of the school property with NSIC.

Net Assets: How many years went into developing and establishing CI? Who were the key players, and what were their key contributions along the way?

Chung and Wille: It took about six months, after the signing of a memorandum of understanding for establishing a new Chadwick School in South Korea, to get a permit from the Ministry of Education. At the time of the MOU, the facility was in place, and NSIC needed an established school or foundation they believed could provide a truly world-class education. The school project team was formed, and key players were hired including the head of CI, the external affairs director, the CFO and the communications director to work with the government to get licensing and prepare for the opening of the school.

Net Assets: What is CI's employment structure?

Chung and Wille: CI hires foreign faculty from the international school community and follows local labor regulations. We also employ local staff and administrators to support school operations. Currently, we employ individuals with passports from 40 countries. Employment conditions are solid, as we can offer excellent salaries and benefits. Employees are responsible for the local taxes of their home countries, and for many this is more favorable than working in the home country. We offer mandatory local retirement and severance benefits and offer a 401(k) for foreign faculty as an optional benefit. The biggest benefit we have found is the opportunity to create a culture of respect, ownership and engagement across all facets of the organization.

Net Assets: What were the biggest bureaucratic challenges of establishing a school in a different country?

Chung and Wille: The biggest challenges involved understanding the local culture and people. South Korean law governing private schools is complex and may or may not apply to international schools. Relationships are important, and we have worked collaboratively with the local Ministry of Education specifically on education programs, student teaching partnerships and other educational dialogue. This partnership has supported the government in understanding the complex needs of international schools and has helped us understand how the local schools are run.

Additionally, we were established in a new city, and waiting for the population to grow has been a challenge. There were years in the beginning when there were few resources for our community. The upside is that we have been able to watch the school and the city grow and change dramatically in a relatively short period of time.

Net Assets: What is the relationship between the two Chadwick schools?

Chung and Wille: RCF (the Roessler-Chadwick Foundation) runs both the original campus, Chadwick School in Palos Verdes, California, and Chadwick International School Songdo under the philosophy of "one school, two campuses." We work as collaboratively as possible. Each school has its own governance, employees and students. We share a mission, educational philosophy, core values and our expectations for excellent teaching through our Chadwick Teacher Traits. Though there are many differences between the school communities, culture, environment, etc., the two campuses engage each other and collaborate to render world-class education to our students in both countries.

Net Assets: How do the two schools help one another? What role does Chadwick International play in the long-term financial sustainability of Chadwick School?

Chung and Wille: We certainly do work together and offer support however we can. Initially, CI benefitted greatly from the history and established practices of Chadwick School. We also relied heavily upon the expertise of Chadwick School and other local international schools

"We work to be as collaborative as possible and consider our colleagues across the ocean as true partners."

to establish practices, develop policies and guide curriculum. As both campuses continue to grow and develop, each has developed specific expertise that we share between the communities. We work to be as collaborative as possible and consider our colleagues across the ocean as true partners.

Net Assets: What is the competitive environment like in South Korea? How are families, parents, expectations different?

Chung and Wille: It is well known that education is the number-one priority of parents in all situations in South Korea. Many parents send their children to overseas schools, as they are not satisfied with local public education. Most foreign schools are not able to admit local students, as they are designed to educate the children of international families. CI is established in the Economic Free Zone of Incheon and designed to educate foreign children, but we are also allowed to accept a certain percentage of local students. Parents are quite happy that CI is providing a mission-appropriate education that could not be provided elsewhere and that allows families to stay together. It is wonderful to be able to see our families also engaging in the mission and core values of CI. Ultimately there are more similarities between our parents than differences, as the common theme is wanting the best for one's children.

Net Assets: What would be your top advice to other U.S.-based independent schools considering venturing into South Korea?

Chung and Wille: Fully understand the legal requirements and the Korean educational system, and understand how important the local history and culture are to the people. Any time we look to work in places away from our homes it is important to approach the endeavor with a great deal of respect and empathy. **N**