



THIS (*French*) SCHOOL ROCKS TOO!

BY LIZ ROTH AUS BERTRAND

It's a sizzling June day in Sorgues, a small town in the South of France, and the cicadas fill the air with their distinctive chh-chh-chh sound. Tomorrow is the end-of-year celebration at Elsa Triolet elementary school, and the students have been rehearsing their dance numbers all morning.

Frederic Bernardelli's third-grade class buzzes with excitement when they see us, the American visitors who have come to chat with them. It's a special day for us too, especially for my son Noah, a first-grader in Waddell Language Academy's French immersion program. We're visiting the school where his grandfather taught for more than 20 years!

The smiling kids in front of us look a lot like American 9-year-olds – dressed in shorts and T-shirts with English slogans. Dozens of hands shoot up with all sorts of questions: "How far is Charlotte from the White House?" a girl asks. "Can you get there by

boat?" another boy asks. It makes me smile but also wonder what American kids know about France.

They are surprised to learn Noah has only 30 minutes to eat his lunch at school. While many kids here also eat lunch at school, about 25 percent of them go home for a relaxed meal with their parents or grandparents during the two-hour lunch break.

Noah notices the cafeteria tables are already set with plates, glasses and baskets of bread. Kids eat "family style" here, with cafeteria staff bringing the day's lunch to the table.

"We always eat a well-balanced meal," says a girl with long blond hair.

Student schedules are also different. French kids go to school for four full days and a half day on Wednesday mornings. They also have more vacation scheduled throughout the year. "On average,

we do seven weeks of work, followed by two weeks of vacation," says Mr. Bernardelli.

French students have the option to stay after school for fun and creative activities like soccer games or origami lessons. The cost to parents is 30 cents per day. The kids are proud to

share English phrases they have learned at school. In France, learning a foreign language is required beginning in first grade. They already put it to good use at home, as they love listening to American or British pop songs on the radio. It seems some things are universal after all.

FUN FACTS ABOUT *France*

PROVENCE:

A region in the southeast of France, known for sunny weather and beautiful fields of sunflowers, lavender, tomatoes, melons and other crops.

CAPITAL CITY:

Paris

PRESIDENT:

Francois Hollande

HIS HOME IS:

The Elysée Palace

NATIONAL HOLIDAY:

July 14th

FRENCH MONEY:

Euro

TYPICAL FRENCH FOODS YOU CAN FIND IN CHARLOTTE:

crêpes, croissants, macaroons, brie cheese, baguettes

