Our History
Our Mission

The mission of IMSA, the world’s leading teaching and learning laboratory for imagination and inquiry, is to ignite and nurture creative, ethical, scientific minds that advance the human condition, through a system distinguished by profound questions, collaborative relationships, personalized experiential learning, global networking, generative use of technology and pioneering outreach.
1982
IMSA idea inspired by Dr. Leon Lederman, Dr. Walter Massey and the Valley Industrial Association

1983
Friends of Fermilab and the Corridor Partnership for Excellence in Education convene curriculum design workshop; participants propose IMSA

1984
Dr. Leon Lederman and Governor James R. Thompson lead efforts to establish IMSA

1985
IMSA established by Illinois General Assembly to “offer a uniquely challenging education for students talented in the areas of mathematics and science” and “serve the school system of the State as a catalyst and laboratory for the advancement of teaching”

Board of Trustees appointed
Mayor’s Task Force leads efforts to locate IMSA in Aurora
1986
Dr. Stephanie Pace Marshall named Founding President
Charter students recruited and selected, Charter staff hired
Charter Class of 210 students enrolls; a pioneering educational community is born
IMSA Fund for Advancement of Education, a not-for-profit foundation, established

1987
Students and staff hold class in the State Capitol to underscore the promise of Illinois’ investment
Supplemental appropriation by Illinois General Assembly sustains IMSA’s growth
IMSA launches programs for other Illinois schools, teachers and students
Furnas Foundation becomes IMSA’s first private sector donor
Academic program emphasizes “apprentice investigation”

1988
IMSA reaches three-class capacity (sophomores, juniors and seniors); 509 students enroll
Annual recognition program started to honor students’ home school teachers
Budget authority transferred to the Illinois Board of Higher Education

1989
Mentorship program established
First senior class earns top ACT scores in the nation, captures many academic, cocurricular and scholarship awards (subsequent classes earn similar honors)
Charter Class graduates
IMSA dedicated to the People of Illinois
1990
First longitudinal study of IMSA graduates reveals positive results
Board approves revolutionary strategic plan for curriculum, instruction, assessment and statewide alliances
IMSA goes online with the world, establishes a direct Internet connection

1991
IMSA unveils Integrative Learning System for curriculum development
Academic program emphasizes “integrative ways of knowing”
Student enrollment grows to 650

1992
IMSA students named only pre-college presenters at the National Conference on Undergraduate Research
State and national experts conduct unique accreditation review; cite IMSA as leader and exemplar
Minority student enrollment doubles
IMSA establishes Center for Problem-Based Learning

1993
Board approves innovative system of faculty development and accountability
IMSA embraces bold mission to transform mathematics and science teaching and learning through connections
IMSA identity evolves from “school” to “educational laboratory,” research and statewide service programs increase

Dr. Leon Lederman and IMSA Fund Directors James Pearson, James Thompson, Robert Maleff and Michael Birck join IMSA President Dr. Stephanie Pace Marshall to commemorate the Academy’s achievements at the 10th Anniversary Gala in September 1996.
Each year, thousands of Illinois children participate in IMSA summer and school-year programs.

1994
IMSA pilots school-based partnerships to transform teaching and learning in Illinois
Calculus-based Physics Study advances national understanding of gender issues in math and science
IMSA Alumni Association established

1995
Students launch CD-ROM interactive science magazine for elementary students
Integrated Science, Mathematical Investigations, Problem-Based Learning and other initiatives serve Illinois educators and IMSA students

1996
Reinvention process increases program personalization, flexibility, rigor and coherence to enhance student learning
The Harris Family Foundation becomes first million dollar + donor
IMSA commemorates 10th Anniversary, launches second decade

1997
Business Plan for second decade developed to advance IMSA’s capacity for growth and influence
IMSA increases teaching and learning resources available online at www.imsa.edu
Young IMSA graduate gives $500,000 to IMSA Fund for Advancement of Education to “contribute back to IMSA’s success”
1998
Nobel Laureate Dr. Leon Lederman becomes IMSA’s first Resident Scholar, leads IMSA Great Minds Program
Grainger Center for Imagination and Inquiry and Tellabs Studio for Professional Development open
IMSA Kids Institute creates Science Explorers camp for young students
Problems as Possibilities, authored by IMSA staff, published by Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

1999
U.S. Department of Education awards federal grants to IMSA-Chicago Public Schools partnership to improve teacher quality
IMSA and American Association for Advancement of Science Project 2061 join forces to help Illinois teachers align curriculum with standards
Smithsonian Research and Diffusion Network established to help schools implement IMSA innovations

2000
New core science program, Scientific Inquiries, engages students in investigating significant questions
IMSA plays leadership role in creating and deploying Illinois Virtual High School; IMSA Internet Toolkit named IVHS search engine of choice
IMSA Excellence 2000+ math and science enrichment program for Illinois middle school students begins

2001
Prometheus Books publishes Portraits of Great American Scientists, authored by IMSA students
IMSA-Benedictine University pilot alternative teacher certification program
Seven IMSA faculty recognized for National Board of Professional Teaching Standards certification
IMSA launches Illinois International Career Academy for high school students
Inspiring Minds: The Illinois Promise public-private partnership campaign begins
Two of 10 top winners in the 64th Intel Science Talent Search are IMSA students.

In 2004, the State of Illinois invests in a new state-of-the-art science complex.

2002
U.S. Department of Education funds IMSA’s 21st Century Information Fluency program to improve Internet-based research skills of Illinois educators and students
IMSA names its first residence hall – Harris Hall – to honor Bette and the late Neison Harris, the largest donors to the IMSA Fund
Unprecedented reduction in state funding forces significant staffing and program cuts; IMSA trailblazers rally to preserve academic integrity and distinctiveness, rebuild and continue meeting critical state needs

Science Literacy for the Twenty-First Century, published by Prometheus Books and edited by IMSA leaders, honors Dr. Leon Lederman’s legacy with featured essays by noted scientists and science educators

2003
IMSA hosts International Problem-Based Learning Symposium for educational leaders and practitioners in Illinois and beyond
Illinois State Board of Education awards grant to IMSA to administer rapidly-growing Illinois Virtual High School
IMSA President’s Alumni Advisory Council established to provide strategic counsel on “next generation IMSA”
Five-member U.S. team, including an IMSA student, ranks first of 54 nations in 34th International Physics Olympiad

2004
IMSA embraces a new strategic goal – to be the chosen provider and partner for innovative programs that develop talent and leadership in mathematics, science and technology
State of Illinois invests in new state-of-the-art science complex that includes laboratories, classrooms and a multipurpose atrium
The Wall Street Journal names IMSA among the top educational institutions in its ranking of schools with high success rates in sending students to Ivy League and highly competitive colleges and universities

2005
IMSA is the only educational institution in the nation to produce two of the top 10 scholarship winners in the 64th Intel Science Talent Search
With a major gift from Virginia B. Cherry, IMSA launches Total Applied Learning for Entrepreneurs (TALENT), stimulating and supporting students’ entrepreneurial projects
Student Inquiry at IMSA featured in the National Science Teachers Association book, Exemplary Science in Grades 9–12
2006
IMSA named to “Public Elites” list in Newsweek’s Best High Schools in the U.S. special report
Bayer Corporation honors IMSA Excellence 2000+ as best practice program for helping girls and underrepresented minorities participate and achieve in STEM
IMSA Board of Trustees Alumni Awards program established to recognize alumni who deliver outstanding contributions to their fields of endeavor, to IMSA, and to the citizens of Illinois, our nation and world

2007
IMSA Fund for Advancement of Education establishes endowment program featuring Stephanie Pace Marshall Endowment to Ignite Innovation; early major gift donors include alumni
New strategic plan charts bold course for IMSA’s third decade; mission: “to ignite and nurture creative, ethical, scientific minds that advance the human condition”
Dr. Stephanie Pace Marshall steps down as President, Board names her President Emerita
Board selects second IMSA President, prominent Illinois education leader Dr. Glenn W. “Max” McGee
IMSA and University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign establish formal institutional partnership

2008
Residence Hall 1503 renamed Alumni Hall recognizing cumulative alumni donations exceeding $1,000,000
Students and faculty launch IMSA Energy Center, engineering and research projects on alternative energy sources and conservation
IMSA is the first secondary institution in the world to form a chapter for One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) initiative
Supported by a federal grant, Golden Apple Foundation and IMSA join forces to prepare future mathematics and science teachers for Illinois schools
IMSA tapped as lead site for national study by American Psychological Association, funded by National Science Foundation, on impact of specialized public high schools of science, mathematics and technology

2009
IMSA opens Field Offices in Chicago and Metro East to expand programs and services for educators and students in these communities
Robust, multifaceted platform CoolHub.IMSA created to support and scale collaborative innovation projects and networks
Student Inquiry and Research at IMSA featured in National Science Teachers Association book, Inquiry: The Key to Exemplary Science
IMSA captures Intel Schools of Distinction Star Innovator Award, top honor in nation for science excellence
Problem-Based Learning expands to schools in Central and Southern Illinois, Rockford and Chicago thanks to three consecutive Innovation Generation Grants from the Motorola Foundation

IMSA History 2006–2012
In 2009, IMSA opens Field Offices in Chicago and Metro East to expand programs and services for educators and students.

In 2007, Dr. Glenn W. “Max” McGee becomes IMSA’s second President.

IMSA captures the 2009 Intel Schools of Distinction Star Innovator Award. Aurora Mayor Tom Weisner presents President Dr. Max McGee and IMSA Principal and Vice President for Academic Programs Dr. Eric McLaren with a city street sign, recognizing IMSA’s achievement.

IMSA Fund Board Treasurer John Hoesley ’89 and IMSA Alumni Association President Andrea Croll ’97 unveil the new Alumni Hall plaque at 2008 renaming ceremony.

IMSA Board of Trustees establishes Alumni Awards program in 2006.

IMSA Fund Board Treasurer John Hoesley ’89 and IMSA Alumni Association President Andrea Croll ’97 unveil the new Alumni Hall plaque at 2008 renaming ceremony.

IMSA opens Field Offices in Rock Island to expand programs and services for educators and students in this region.

In 2008 renaming ceremony.

IMSA and the High School Affiliated with Renmin University (RDFZ) in China join forces to advance student research in sustainable energy, teacher professional development, intercultural understanding and global collaboration.

Inspired by Dr. Eric McLaren, principal/vice president of academic programs and charter staff member, IMSA embraces the cause of orphan diseases and partners with Project A.L.S.™ to fight “Lou Gehrig’s disease.”

The Harris Family Foundation pledges $1,000,000 to the IMSA Fund’s Stephanie Pace Marshall Endowment to Ignite Innovation.

IMSA begins 25th anniversary year, inviting and challenging all to go “beyond knowledge.”

2010

In his State of the State Address, Illinois Governor Pat Quinn recognizes “world-renowned” IMSA and its alumni who “certainly have made their mark on our economy and on our world.”

Two IMSA teams received the highest ranking possible in the 12th annual international High School Mathematical Contest in Modeling (HiMCM), placing IMSA among the top eight schools in the world in this prestigious competition.

Abbott Fund awards 2nd major grant to IMSA Fund to support IMSA’s science program, professional development for Illinois teachers, online mathematics and science brainteasers and word problems for Illinois students, and collaborative innovation projects.

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and IMSA’s Problem-Based Learning team partner to develop and facilitate the Illinois Innovation Talent Program which fosters partnerships between industry and Illinois high schools.

2011

IMSA opens a Field Office in Rock Island to expand programs and services for educators and students in this region.

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2012

IMSA dedicates Lederman Science Wing for Creative Inquiry, honoring Dr. Leon Lederman’s extraordinary leadership and achievements in science and education.

STEMworks! Change the Equation, corporate leaders dedicated to mobilizing the business community to improve the quality of STEM learning in the U.S., recognizes IMSA FUSION as exemplary program.

IMSA alumnus from southern Illinois receives the Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers, highest honor given by the U.S. government for science and engineering professionals in their early research careers. Alumna from Englewood in Chicago is named a Rhodes Scholar.

IMSA partners with 1871, Chicago’s incubator for digital tech start-ups, to advance regional innovation and economic development and expand opportunities for entrepreneurial students.
The internationally recognized Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy® (IMSA) develops creative, ethical leaders in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. As a teaching and learning laboratory created by the State of Illinois, IMSA enrolls academically talented Illinois students (grades 10–12) in its advanced, residential college preparatory program, and it serves thousands of educators and students in Illinois and beyond through innovative instructional programs that foster imagination and inquiry. IMSA also advances education through research, groundbreaking ventures and strategic partnerships. (www.imsa.edu)

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