20th Birthday Address September 20th, 2025

Guten Tag und herzlich willkommen!

What a joy it is to stand here with all of you—our current families, alumni families, dedicated staff, and friends—on this very special day. Today, we celebrate 20 years of Twin Cities German Immersion School. My name is Elizabeth Zehpfennig. I am the 9th Executive Director of the Twin Cities German Immersion School.

When TCGIS first opened its doors in 2004, it welcomed around 30 students in two grades. Those early years were full of big dreams, hard work, and a vision of what a German immersion education could mean for children here in the Twin Cities. Marcy Zachmeier Ruh and Mary Fred Bausman Watkins, the school's first Directors, and dedicated German enthusiasts at the German American Institute are the reason we are all standing here today.

TCGIS started in a little spot off of hwy 280, moved to a second location as it expanded on University Avenue and then in 2013 landed at its current home in the beautiful Como Park neighborhood. In 2019, the community fought to get our students what they needed in the form of our beautiful expansion. Today we honor the St. Andrew's Church and School that first stood on this site.

Now, two decades later, we are home to over 550 students in Kindergarten through 8th grade. Together, we have become the largest German immersion school in the United States—a true testament to the passion, dedication, and perseverance of so many people over the years. From our founding families and first teachers to our current students and staff, each of you has played a part in shaping TCGIS into the vibrant, thriving community it is today.

As we honor our past and celebrate how far we've come, we look also to the future with excitement. Just as we've grown over the last 20 years, we will continue to innovate and strengthen our mission: innovative education of the whole-child through German Immersion. A mission that hasn't changed since the day our doors opened.

So today, let us celebrate. Feiern wir. Let us remember the hard work, the laughter, the challenges, and the triumphs that brought us here. And let us look ahead with gratitude, hope, and pride in all that TCGIS stands for.

Herzlichen Dank—danke schön—for being part of this journey, for believing in our mission, and for helping our school community grow. Here's to the next 20 years of learning, growth, and *Gemeinsam wachsen*.