

# The Birth of the GrapeSEED Curriculum and Its Achievements

The GrapeSEED curriculum, currently used in the MeySen Academy English program, marks its twentieth year since development first began.

In this winter issue, we look back at the origins and background of this curriculum—one that has profoundly transformed English education at MeySen—and highlight the achievements it has generated over the years.



Daniel Fanger, Principal

## The Evolution of English Education at MeySen

Since the founding of MeySen Academy in 1967, English education has been one of its defining pillars. At a time when early English instruction was still uncommon in Japan, MeySen Kindergarten provided daily English lessons and established the *Friends Club* program to allow children to continue learning English into elementary school. This initiative created a continuous educational pathway, enabling students to study English through the age of twelve.

The independently developed curriculum allowed children to learn in an enjoyable way while cultivating accurate pronunciation, strong listening skills, and cross-cultural understanding. Over time, however, it became evident that there were limits to developing practical communication skills, and parents increasingly expressed a desire for a higher level of English education.

## A New Challenge: Renewing the Curriculum

In 2005, as MeySen celebrated its 40th anniversary, the board made the decision to establish a new course aimed at nurturing “true bilinguals” (now known as the Premier School) and to elevate the overall quality of English education. Although the school conducted a global search for a high-quality curriculum, none fully met its vision. Ultimately, MeySen chose to take on the challenge of developing its own program.

By inviting specialists and drawing on forty years of educational experience, the school set out to create an entirely new curriculum from the ground up.

## The Birth of GrapeSEED and Its Global Expansion

The program initially launched under the name *MeySen Standard English*, but was later renamed *GrapeSEED* when the production of teaching materials was outsourced. By 2020, materials through Unit 40 had been completed, and today more than 90,000 children across 18 countries worldwide are learning through the GrapeSEED curriculum.

## Outcomes and Transformation

Introduced to the kindergarten program in 2007, *GrapeSEED* delivered results that far surpassed those of the previous curriculum.

In 2015, the first cohort of students who had studied under *GrapeSEED* for eight consecutive years graduated. These students reached a level at which they could hold basic conversations with native English speakers, representing a significant leap forward in both the quality and effectiveness of English education at MeySen Academy.

Born from MeySen’s unwavering commitment to educational innovation, *GrapeSEED* has since grown into a curriculum that now supports English learning for children around the world. MeySen remains dedicated to helping children connect globally through language and to develop the skills needed to shape their own futures.



I served as the leader of the Grade 7 U.S. study trip every year through the 2024 school year. Prior to the introduction of the *GrapeSEED* curriculum, fewer than 10 percent of participating students were able to communicate confidently with the locals. In recent years, however, I have witnessed a remarkable change. Most participants are now able to communicate from the very first day, and I have observed many students genuinely enjoying their interactions with those they meet on the trip.

Please turn to the reverse side to read the story behind the creation of *GrapeSEED*, as told by its developer, Dr. Howard.

once a week, progress can vary greatly depending on factors such as the amount of practice at home or parents’ prior experience with English. With *GrapeSEED*, children can also learn through the app, enabling families to engage in daily, repetitive practice without children losing interest. As a result, all students steadily acquire English conversation skills.

Many families whose children attend once-a-week English conversation classes begin Eiken preparation courses in upper elementary school, aiming to pass Grade 3 by graduation. In contrast, students enrolled in *GrapeSEED* often pass Grade 3—or even Pre-2—without additional preparation classes. This clearly demonstrates that *GrapeSEED* is an outstanding program that also prepares students effectively for junior high school and beyond.

By the time children currently studying at MeySen Kindergarten, *Friends Club*, and Premier School become adults, English communication skills will be even more essential than they are today. Some may believe that advances in AI and machine translation will reduce the need to learn spoken English. While such tools may suffice for basic travel communication, relying

solely on AI makes it difficult to build equal and trusting relationships with people, particularly in Western contexts, and can hinder professional success.

If children study English continuously for the eight years from kindergarten through graduation from elementary school at MeySen, they will be well positioned as adults to advance their English to a business level simply by acquiring industry-specific vocabulary. While other extracurricular activities and academic tutoring are also valuable, English acquisition is unavoidable—both for entrance examinations and for future careers. For these reasons, I wholeheartedly encourage families to continue their English education journey at MeySen.



Educo Co., Ltd.  
President & CEO, James English School  
Director, National Association for the Promotion of Foreign Language Education

Mr. Kenichiro Kigawa  
(Takamori Friends Club, 21st Graduating Class, Ken)

# Bible verse

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

1 John 4:9–10

聖書  
せいしょ

Dr. Howard,  
Developer of  
*GrapeSEED*

## A Moment That Still Shines After 20 Years My Greatest Joy in Curriculum Development

In late 2005, I received a call from a close friend who told me to expect a call from MeySen Academy, Sendai, Japan. Being pressed for time, I expressed frustration that he had given out my phone number, but he assured me that I would want to take the call. That call led to a 9-hour meeting in Seattle, WA, where I was persuaded to visit Sendai and provide some consulting. I soon found myself in the most amazing school I’d ever seen, and that’s saying a lot since I’d visited upward of a thousand schools! MeySen’s leadership, faculty, and facilities were second to none, and I quickly fell in love with those beautiful students who always met me with a smile and a strong desire to learn English.



▲ Dr. Howard (center, wearing a white shirt and speaking)

After numerous creative meetings and months of research and strategizing, I printed out a lengthy conceptual design for a new curriculum. Handing it to my wife for mailing, I said, “I sincerely hope MeySen doesn’t ask me to develop this, because it’s the biggest ‘wish list’ I’ve ever seen!” A short time later, I signed on to what became a 15-year project that we affectionately call “*GrapeSEED*.”

MeySen leadership didn’t simply want a new curriculum; they wanted RESULTS—speaking ability in months, not years! The new curriculum needed an effective and exciting process that enabled students to learn English in the same way they had learned their native language. Students would learn to think, speak, read, and write English *without* the traditional grammatical structure and *within* a fun, enjoyable experience: listening to stories and participating in songs, chants, and other activities.

The best learning format for *GrapeSEED* was an idea called the “functional-notional structural approach.” It had been utilized for products, but we couldn’t find a full curriculum that prioritized *language functions* and *general notions* above vocabulary and grammar. MeySen’s leadership made the bold decision to be the first!

Three months after implementing *GrapeSEED* at MeySen Academy, I had the privilege of spending hours in the classrooms, evaluating the curriculum in action, and observing the success of the program. It was obvious the students understood what they were learning by their quick responses to what they heard, meaning their *receptive lan-*



guage was growing as necessary to reach our “wish list” objectives. Their *productive* language was also above expectations. I watched 4-year-olds during recess speaking to each other in basic yet natural English, using the language functions they were learning to express their thoughts. It’s impossible for me to adequately describe the joy I felt while talking with students who enjoyed practicing their new English on me. And surprisingly, they understood most of what I said in return, even though I didn’t always limit my vocabulary to what they had learned.

What an amazing and rewarding adventure! Twenty years later, I still say that the greatest joy of my curriculum development career is *GrapeSEED*—and the beautiful children of MeySen Academy, who will always have a special place in my heart!

## Seamlessly Continuing from Enrollment

### Curriculum and Materials

At our kindergarten, we use the *GrapeSEED* curriculum for English learning from the Kindergarten Nenchu Class (age 4) through Elementary Grade 6. Through a natural language acquisition approach, the program provides lessons that help children gradually develop communicative English and genuine speaking ability.

In 2019, we introduced *LittleSEED* for the Kindergarten Nesho Class (age 3). *LittleSEED* is a curriculum designed specifically for three-year-olds, enabling them to experience essential English sounds, vocabulary, and basic expressions through a variety of engaging activities. At this age, children do not perceive English as a “difficult foreign language”; instead, they enjoy English time naturally alongside their teachers.

Beginning in the 2025 school year, we also implemented *GrapeSEED Baby* for the Kindergarten Toddler Class (age 2). *GrapeSEED Baby* is a picture-book-based program created to build a strong foundation for both children’s first language and English. With an emphasis on exposure to English and rich listening input, it supports the development of early listening skills that are essential for future English-speaking skills.

With the expansion of the *GrapeSEED* curriculum and its instructional materials, children are now able to develop their English skills naturally and seamlessly from enrollment in kindergarten through Grade 6.



▲ From top: *GrapeSEED* materials, *LittleSEED* materials, and *GrapeSEED Baby* picture books.

# Friends Winter 2026

「読む」とつながる。「読む」とひろがる。

MeySen Newsletter  
No. 213



Slide into Winter Fun!!



Published by: MeySen Academy Schools  
www.meysen.ac.jp

Publication Date: February 1, 2026



friends  
「読む」とつながる。「読む」とひろがる。

Friends is the MeySen Academy newsletter and publishes the latest news on everything that is happening at MeySen Academy, from Kangaroo Club to High School and MeySen Alumni. You can read it on our website too.

## Alumnus

When I was a student at MeySen, I clearly remember how much I enjoyed the English classes. Our teachers played the piano or guitar, and we sang English songs together. The classes were not only enjoyable but also deeply motivating.

When there was something I wanted to say to my teacher in *Friends Club* but could not express in English, I would go home and ask my parents how to say it. I would then challenge myself to use that expression in the next class. I still remember the strong sense of accomplishment I felt when I succeeded.



One of my fondest memories is *Friends Day*. From kindergarten onward, I loved the horses and ponies at the school. On *Friends Day*, I would wake up earlier than usual, filled with excitement and anticipation.

Today, at James English School, which I operate, *GrapeSEED* serves as the flagship curriculum for our children’s programs. In many English conversation schools where lessons are held only

# Let's Finish This School Year with Joy!

We are just a short time away from advancing to the next grade and from graduation. Even the smallest steps, when taken consistently, bring us closer to our dreams and goals. Let's finish the 2025 school year with smiles, together with our teachers and classmates!



## MeySen Academy 60th Anniversary



With your continued support, MeySen Academy proudly celebrates its 60th anniversary this year. In 2026, we look forward to bringing together our entire school community to honor this meaningful milestone. The 60th anniversary logo was created to reflect this shared spirit of celebration. Through the logo, along with a variety of commemorative events and activities, we hope to share the joy of this anniversary with parents, current students, alumni, and our partner organizations. In designing the logo, we carefully maintained the visual style of previous anniversary logos while ensuring it authentically reflects the identity and spirit of MeySen Academy. By creatively incorporating the number "6" and connecting it to our symbolic Persona mark, the design clearly conveys the significance of the 60th anniversary. Balancing vibrancy with warmth and familiarity, the logo represents our deep gratitude to all who have supported MeySen Academy over the years, as well as our confidence in the school's continued growth and future.

## 18th Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany Art Contest 2025



1st Place in the Junior High School Division  
 "Traveling Through Germany with Beethoven"  
 Nana Tashiro  
 ©German Embassy Tokyo

This year, Nana Tashiro (Leanne) from Takamori Premier High School, Grade 8, won first place in the Junior High School Division of the Art Contest hosted by the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany. Nana previously visited Germany for violin lessons during elementary school, and the wonderful memories from that experience have stayed with her ever since. Her motivation to enter this year's contest was sparked by an article in last year's Winter Newsletter, which featured another MeySen student who received an award in the same contest. After reading the article, Nana thought, "I want to try entering too," and decided to take on the challenge. On November 26, 2025, Nana was invited to the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, where she received her certificate at the award ceremony.



## Participation as Chairperson in the "World Tsunami Day" 2025 High School Summit in Sendai

**Ruka Ogura (Annie) Maruyama Friends Club, 47th Graduating Class**

Hello! My name is Ruka Ogura, and I am a second-year high school student. I had the honor of serving as chairperson at the "World Tsunami Day" 2025 High School Summit in Sendai, held on November 27-28. The summit brought together high school students from ten countries, both from Japan and abroad. During the event, participants shared their experiences with disasters and presented research conducted at their respective schools. The ideas and proposals discussed at the summit were compiled into an action plan known as the *Sendai Future Declaration*. I would be delighted if you had the opportunity to read it. As part of my responsibilities as chairperson, together with the vice chairperson, I also visited the United Nations Headquarters in New York. Standing on such a once-in-a-lifetime stage made me very nervous. However, at the reception that followed, many people kindly praised my efforts, and the experience made me feel as though my future possibilities had expanded. I believe that I was able to communicate effectively with people from different countries—from the preparation phase through the summit itself—because I learned English in such an enjoyable and meaningful way at MeySen. I also had the opportunity to study abroad in the United States for an extended period until May. After returning to Japan, I had limited chances to use what I had learned, but through this summit, I once again realized the immense value of English as a tool for communication. It also made me appreciate English even more. Going forward, I hope to continue developing my English not only as a skill, but as a means to better understand others and build meaningful connections across cultures.



Information about the High School Summit and the Sendai Future Declaration is available on the Sendai City website: <https://www.city.sendai.jp/shinsaifukko/summit2025.html>  
 Please note that the content on the Sendai City website is subject to change or removal without notice.



Ruka shining at the High School Summit (Photo below: at the United Nations Headquarters in New York)

## A Straw Story Loved by Animals

At MeySen, we care for our animals every day to ensure they remain healthy, comfortable, and happy. One of the most important essentials in their daily care is straw. Straw serves as a kind of "bed" for the horses, sheep, goats, donkeys, and alpacas that live in our barns. It keeps the floors soft and warm, helping the animals relax and rest comfortably. In addition to their regular feed, the animals sometimes enjoy nibbling on the straw as a snack. At MeySen, we use two main types of straw: **long straw** and **rolled straw**. Because we have many animals, both types are essential, and we use a large



**Long Straw**  
 Straw that is sun-dried after the rice harvest using a traditional method called *hasagake* (rack drying).



**Rolled Straw**  
 Straw that is dried after the rice harvest, finely cut, and then rolled into a round shape by machine.

amount every day. Recently, however, it has become especially difficult to obtain long straw. If you have relatives or acquaintances who are farmers and may have straw available, we would be very grateful if you could let our staff know. Your support helps us continue providing a safe and comfortable environment for our animals.

## The Sendai Ikuei Cheerleading Team Performs!

The cheerleading team "I-LIONS" from Sendai Ikuei High School visited our October birthday party and treated us to an energetic and unforgettable performance. With the motto "Energy, Courage, and Smiles," the Sendai Ikuei cheerleading team is active in a wide range of activities, including school support, community events, and competitive cheerleading. This special visit was made possible thanks to Ms. Ikumi Miura from our school's Safety Team, who also serves as one of the team's coaches. The performance began with bright music and enthusiastic cheers as the team made their lively entrance. One impressive routine followed another, featuring perfectly synchronized dance moves, high jumps, and dynamic cheerleading stunts such as lifting and supporting teammates. The children watched in amazement, cheering loudly and clapping with excitement throughout the performance. After Ms. Yukiko Akama, the team's advisor, explained some of the cheerleading techniques, the children celebrating October birthdays were invited to take part. They had the chance to try the "elevator," a cheer stunt where participants stand on the cheerleaders' shoulders. Although the children were a little nervous at first, they quickly gained confidence, finishing with big smiles and striking wonderful poses. The event was met with cheers and applause from everyone—it was a truly memorable experience and a huge success!



## A Graduate Returned as a Member of the Cheer Team

**Nana Iwamoto (Ellen) Maruyama High School, Grade 11**

Hello, everyone. My name is Nana Iwamoto, and I am a second-year high school student. I am a member of the cheerleading team at Sendai Ikuei High School, where my teammates and I encourage and support one another as we practice for competitions. The greatest joys of cheerleading, for me, are the sense of achievement when our movements come together perfectly and the ability to energize and inspire others through our performance. This time, as a graduate of MeySen Kindergarten, I was invited to perform at the birthday party for the kindergarten children. Being able to cheer in



Nana having lunch with her former kindergarten teacher Ms. Masami, and some current kindergarten students.

front of them was a very special experience. When the children came up to me with sparkling eyes and said things like, "That was amazing!" and "I want to try cheerleading too!" it truly made me happy. It was also a wonderful opportunity to show how much I have grown—not only to my current high school teachers, but also to the teachers who taught me during my kindergarten years. Looking ahead, my teammates and I will continue to refine our skills and strengthen our teamwork as we prepare for the National High School Championship, which will be held in late January at the National Yoyogi Gymnasium. Through event performances and other activities, I hope to share the excitement and appeal of cheerleading with even more people. Thank you very much for your continued support.

