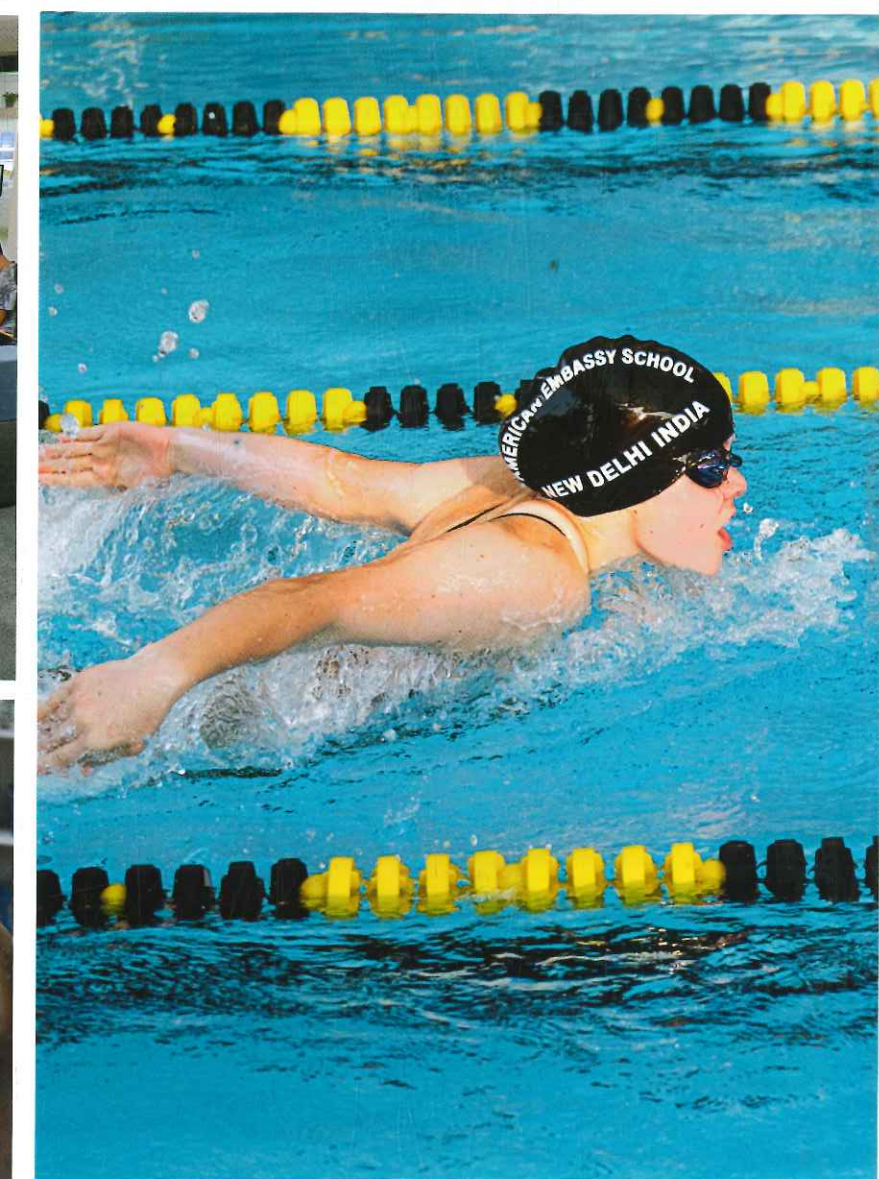


# AES: Transforming Education

By SUPARNA MUKHERJI



The **American Embassy School** in New Delhi provides American education with an international perspective to help students be responsible and compassionate global citizens.

In September 1963, SPAN featured an article on the American International School in New Delhi. It said, “American students learn with children whose homes can be found on every continent...in a well-equipped, newly constructed complex of buildings that was specially designed to create a pleasant and functional environment. This is the American International School of 1963. It was not always so.”

In the next several decades, the school would undergo many more transformations, in terms of its student and faculty strength, campus size, facilities, teaching methodologies, and even its name. It is now known as the American Embassy School (AES). But, what remains unchanged is its goal—the pursuit of knowledge and excellence to develop “responsible and compassionate global citizens.”

AES provides students, from pre-kindergarten through grade 12, American

education with an international perspective. “About 80 to 85 percent of our teachers have international experience,” says Jim Laney Jr., director of the school. “We have a very small percentage of local students...We do have many Indian-heritage students, but they are from Los Angeles or London or Australia or other places. So, they also bring in their international perspectives.”

## Change at heart

The school started as a small set-up on Janpath in 1952 as the American School, moved to a new campus in Chanakyapuri in 1963, and is now spread over nearly five hectares.

“The facilities have developed since the 1960’s,” says Laney. For instance, “The school started with one small gymnasium in the early 1960’s and, now, we have one very large gymnasium and one smaller gymnasium, plus other outdoor spaces like a swimming



**Above left and above center left:** Flexible learning spaces at the American Embassy School allow students and teachers to move around through the day in different tasks in different groupings.

**Top, above, left, center left and above far left:** Through its various activities, facilities and resources, the school nurtures the intellectual, physical, social and emotional development of its students and community members.



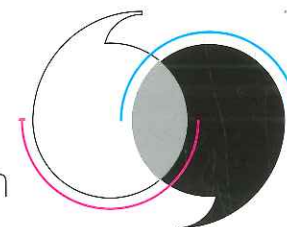


Left, below left, right and center right: Glimpses of various activities at the American Embassy School. These celebrate the diversity among its students from about 56 countries as well as the international perspectives of its faculty members. Far Right: Jim Laney Jr., director of the school, with students.



Photographs courtesy American Embassy School

It's more important than ever before to be able to work with people from diverse backgrounds with different experiences.



American Embassy School  
<https://aes.ac.in/>

SPAN September  
1963 edition  
<https://bit.ly/2VUqRTc>

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pool. We have a beautiful theater for students' performances. Libraries are really important for us; we have two now. We have robotic spaces and makerspaces, where kids with creative spirit get involved. We have the space, the tools and the teachers who can guide them." AES also has many other facilities, including indoor and outdoor stadiums, playgrounds, meeting areas and art studios.

### Modernizing practices

While the buildings and facilities were being adapted to meet the growing needs of the school's community, so were the educational practices.

"It's more important than ever before to be able to work with people from diverse backgrounds with different experiences...to understand cross-disciplinary connections," says Laney. AES, for instance, has an India Studies Program, which helps students learn about the host country. Its recent India Week celebration featured Indian music, dance, food and activities like yoga. "We also had artisans, who came from different parts of India, to

teach the kids and give them firsthand experience of working on those arts and crafts," says Czaee Chagla, the school's marketing and communications manager.

AES builds in ways for students to collaborate and learn together and from one another, as well as give back to society. "Eighty percent of our high school students...are part of community service. And, it's really at the core," says Ylva Kovacs, the school's director of admissions. Thus, the school motto: Enter to Learn, Leave to Serve.

"Another aspect we emphasize is giving kids tools and opportunities to develop their critical thinking skills, find ways to think together about a problem and to encourage those kinds of conversations from different perspectives," says Shirley Droese, the school's director of curriculum and professional learning.

Technology plays a huge role in supporting the new ways of teaching and learning. "It's a way for students to personalize their own learning," says Droese. "It brings the world into the classroom more authentically, especially

for teachers to utilize some of these resources that wouldn't necessarily be available otherwise, except maybe through an encyclopedia or a book."

### The road ahead

AES is now experimenting with flexible learning spaces, where students and teachers can move around through the day in different tasks in different groupings. "We divide kids up not based on a roster, but on what we are teaching and on what they need. And the most important part is the emphasis on what they need," says Susan Vernon, a grade 5 homeroom teacher. "We typically have them working with peers or with teachers in smaller groups, so that there's equity and access to the materials by all, not just a few who are confident."

"We are talking about collaboration and creativity and communicating with one another and just following your own passions," adds Laney, "while you are learning the mathematics and the science and the reading and writing that we want you to learn if you're 10 years old or 16 years old."

