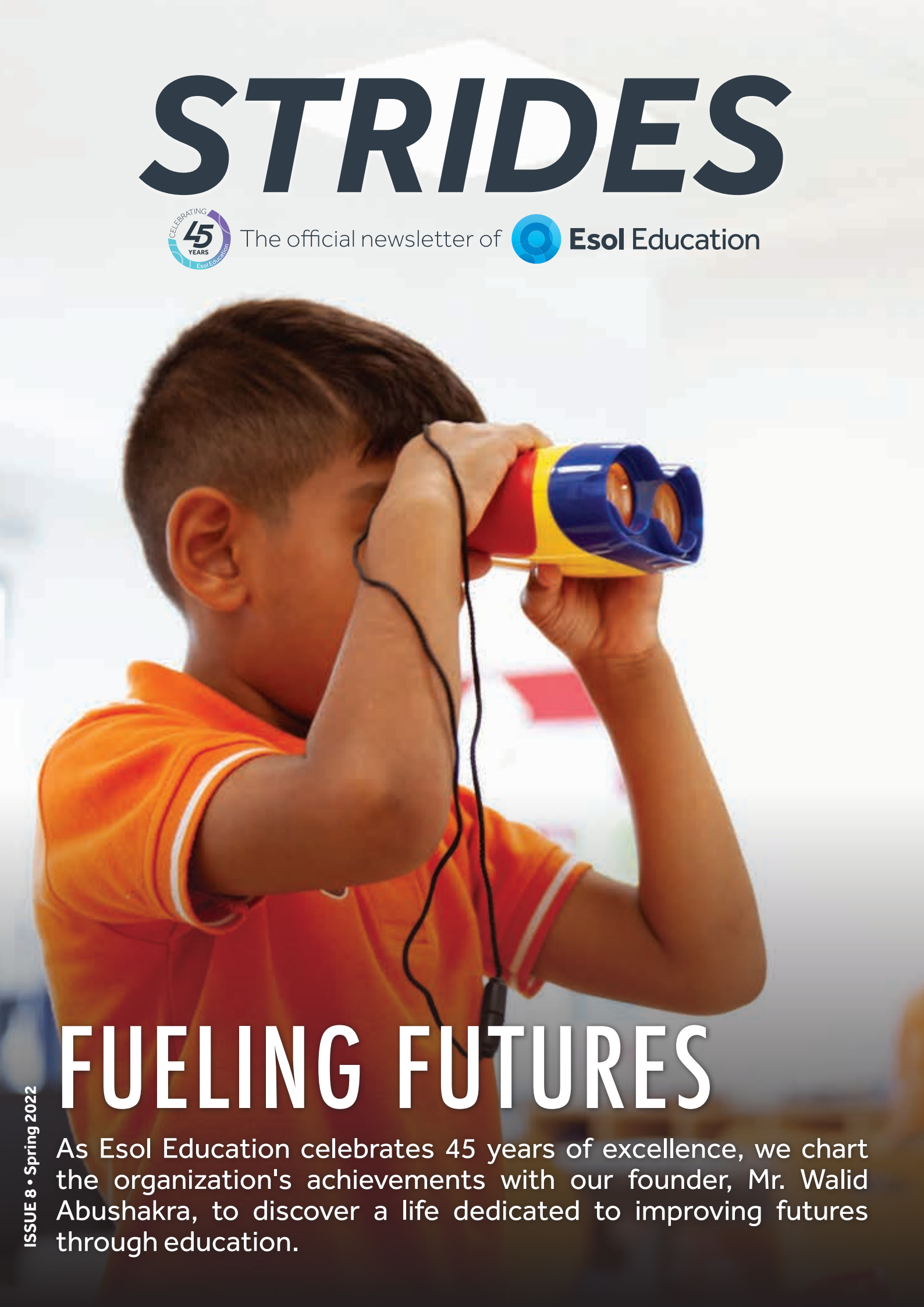
STRIDES

The official newsletter of Esol Education



FUELING FUTURES

As Esol Education celebrates 45 years of excellence, we chart the organization's achievements with our founder, Mr. Walid Abushakra, to discover a life dedicated to improving futures through education.

ISSUE 8 • Spring 2022

CONTENTS

SPOTLIGHT



12 • A Life Dedicated to Education
The cover story for our anniversary issue fittingly traces the life of our founder and Chairman, Mr. Walid Abushakra, his tireless pursuit of excellence for the Esol family of schools, and the vision for the future of education.

16 • One-to-One with Stephen Ritz
America's Favorite Teacher, best-selling author, founder of the non-profit, Green Brox Machine, and globe-trotting speaker, Mr. Stephen Ritz is always on the move. He slows down for a catch-up with *Strides* to tell us more about the importance of teaching students about sustainability and how it can impage our collective future.

22 • Get Wired
Are you ready to join the metaverse? Dr. Joseph Nettikaden, Esol Education's Chief Information Officer, tells us what it is, the technology behind it, and how it can be harnessed for education, business, health and myriad applications.

FEATURES

05• The Brief
From Hong Kong to Egypt, catch up on news and happenings from Esol Education schools.

18• In Class
An in-depth look at the exciting immersive learning happening within and beyond our classroom walls.

25• Meeting Minds
In conversation with Mr. Jeff Smith, Director at Dunecrest American School, about his greatest influences and future aspirations for the school.

26• Unexplored
Get a glimpse of The Empty Quarter, the largest continuous sand desert on Earth, simultaneously breathtaking, inhospitable, and unforgettable.

29• Last Word
As the COVID-19 pandemic rages on, now in its third year, Mr. Peter Daly, Esol Chief Education Consultant, reflects on lessons learned by schools and successes they can build on.

STRIDES
The official newsletter of Esol Education – ISSUE 8 | Spring 2022

STRIDES is published by Esol Education for a wide internal and external readership, including our students, parents and teachers. This publication covers news and developments across the organization and its schools in the Middle East and Mediterranean. Since 1976, Esol Education has specialized in providing exceptional international K-12 education. With a strong focus on educational excellence, Esol schools enjoy the benefits of experienced leadership and management, superlative facilities, and caring and dedicated teachers.

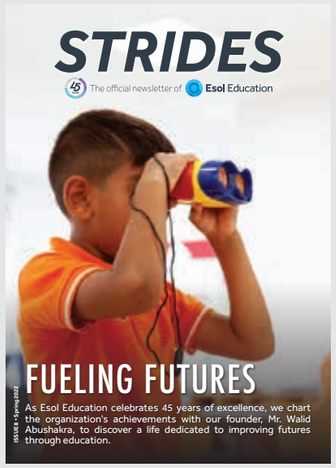
Content Director
Tammam Abushakra

Editor
Jaya Java

Magazine Design, Layout and Sub-editing
Lourdes Lanote

Photographs
The copyright for the images in *STRIDES* lies solely with the schools, students & teachers, unless stated otherwise.

© Esol Education FZ LLC, 2022



ADJUSTING THE SAILS

As school communities enter their third academic year amidst the global pandemic, the "new normal" has been less about maintaining a habitual status quo, and more about staying resilient while continuously making slight corrections to stay on course. Our teachers and leaders continue to make us proud every day by tirelessly working towards the goal of providing our students with the best educational experience with minimal disruption, and making it look like "business as usual." The Brief section of this issue, which covers news from our schools around the globe, is an excellent showcase of schools slowly re-introducing activities, events and initiatives. While adapting to comply with changing local restrictions in their host countries, educators are doing their utmost to bring about normalcy in their students' lives, and for that we are grateful indeed.

This issue of *Strides* is celebrating Esol Education's 45th year, and our cover story highlights the life and achievements of Esol Education's charismatic founder and Chairman, Mr. Walid Abushakra, as he reflects on what inspired him to dedicate his life to educating children in the Middle East, and what the future holds for K-12 education.

Make sure you turn to our In-Class section for some truly innovative teaching practices emerging from classrooms across Esol Education schools. In this issue we showcase memorable unit "provocations" at American International School in Abu Dhabi; Project Sunflower, a model for creating and implementing engaging STEM projects at Fairgreen International School; and The Academy, a high-quality, accredited "learning anywhere" model for education at the American International School in Egypt.

Assume your avatar and traverse the metaverse in Get Wired with Dr. Joseph Nettikaden, Esol Chief Information Officer. The feature discusses this exciting emerging virtual space which could have enormous implications for the way humans will work, learn and play in the future. Elsewhere in this issue, meet Mr. Jeff Smith, who returns to Esol Education to lead as Director at Dunecrest American School, as he talks about his experience, background and vision for the school.

Unexplored takes us beyond the glitz and glamor of Dubai and Abu Dhabi for an encounter at the edge of Rub Al Khali, or The Empty Quarter, the world's largest expanse of continuous sand, covering a 225,000 sq. miles. Lastly Mr. Peter Daly, Esol Chief Education Consultant, reflects on the positive lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, and practices worth continuing.

Thank you for being part of the Esol Education community. We wish you relatively smooth sailing in the upcoming 2022-2023 academic year!

The Esol Education Team

ESOL EDUCATION

WELCOME TO THE ESOL FAMILY!

The Esol Education team is pleased to welcome new (and returning) members of our educational family, collectively bringing over 100 years of educational leadership experience to our schools.



Mr. Jeff Smith joined Dunecrest American School as School Director at the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year, bringing to the role over 18 years of leadership experience in international education spearheading high-performing schools in the UK, UAE and Bahrain. With a firm belief that the most important person in a school is the student, and the most important asset is the teacher, Jeff is also a strong proponent of STEAM. His appointment at Dunecrest marks his return to the Esol Education family, having served as Director of Deira International School in Dubai from 2011 to 2018.



Also in August 2021, Mr. Edward Pearce joined Fairgreen International School as Director this year. A passionate educator, has over 20 years of experience in international education, having served previously as a leader at prestigious schools in the United States, China, Malaysia, Dubai and the United Kingdom. Mr. Pearce works actively to build teams committed to delivering outstanding learning experiences for students. With a proven track record of developing high performing, results-focused education teams, Mr. Pearce is dedicated to leading the Fairgreen community with a future-forward outlook, positive energy, transparency and inclusivity.



After successfully establishing Esol Education's American School Hong Kong (ASHK) in 2016 and leading ASHK for five years, Mr. John Jalsevac is relocating to Egypt in the 2022-2023 academic year to take over the helm at Esol's American International School in Egypt – West Campus. With over 35 years of experience in the educational sector, John views his occupation more as vocation than profession. A keen advocate of a balanced, holistic approach to education, he places great value on academic excellence as well as on pure and applied arts programs, clubs, leadership activities, community service initiatives, and sports.



Mr. Christopher Coates is the incoming Director at American School of Hong Kong, starting the 2022-2023 academic year with over 30 years of experience in public, private, and international education. He has served in leadership positions for over 20 years and has a solid track record of developing and implementing leading-edge academic programs including the prestigious International Baccalaureate Diploma® Programme (IBDP) in Hong Kong and beyond. As a passionate IB educator, Christopher is always focused on student success and wellbeing. He advocates for a holistic approach to education, which includes a rigorous academic program at its core, supplemented by pastoral care, ethical leadership development, global citizenship, and service to the community.



UCA's Interim Deputy Director, Ms. Rola Malaeb, will be promoted to the position of Interim Director as of August 2022. As an indispensable member of UCA's leadership team since 2016, Ms. Malaeb has served UCA as Upper Elementary Principal, Middle School Principal, High School Principal, and most recently as Interim Deputy Director. She has proven herself to be a highly capable educational leader, and through the breadth of her experience at UCA she has become deeply familiar with all phases of the school and well acquainted with its community.

We are honored that these leading educators have chosen to serve our school communities and are excited to see how our schools develop under their headship.

WE WELCOME DR. BRADLEY J. COOK AS PRESIDENT OF AUBH

The American University of Bahrain (AUBH) welcomes Dr. Bradley J. Cook as its next President, starting in the summer of 2022 and succeeding Dr. Susan E. Saxton. Dr. Cook joins AUBH with more than thirty years of distinguished international and regional experience in higher education across the U.S. and the Middle East.

Dr. Cook is an accomplished leader that has contributed to exceptional student outcomes and institutional development. Having spent considerable time in the Middle East in his early years, he holds a Doctorate of Philosophy in Middle East Studies from the University of Oxford, as well as Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Stanford University. He is deeply committed to supporting the development of Bahrain and the region and delivering high quality higher education.

Speaking on his appointment, Dr. Cook commented: "I am honored to join AUBH at this exciting time and look forward to working closely with the university's leadership to spearhead its continued development and achieve its noble mission to students as well as



the wider community and region.

Dr. Cook joins AUBH from Snow College in the U.S., where he has been serving as its 17th president since 2019. He led it through record growth and other successes including the best ranking in the State of Utah by US News and World Report and 7th best public college in the West. In 2020, Snow College was ranked number one nationally in its class for student success. Earlier in his career, Dr. Cook served as provost at Southern Utah University (SUU) during a period where it achieved record high student success rates, created over 25 new academic programs and centers, and elevated SUU's academic reputation as one of the premier public regional universities in the Intermountain West. Dr. Cook has also previously served as president of the Abu Dhabi Women's College and worked at the American University in Cairo (AUC). Additionally, he served as a Commissioner for the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, a highly reputed U.S. institutional accrediting body.

AUBH Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Mr. Hisham Al-Saie stated: "We are incredibly pleased to have Dr. Cook join us to lead the university through its next phase of growth, and are confident that he will be an effective ambassador of our shared values and our deep commitment to students, Bahrain, and the region."

"President Cook went above and beyond in his role to serve Snow College and its community during his tenure with the Utah System of Higher Education," said Harris H. Simmons, chair of the Utah Board of Higher Education. "The American University of Bahrain is acquiring a most capable leader who led Snow in many great achievements and will be missed among his friends, colleagues and students across Utah. We wish him the very best in his new role."

Esol Education has joined the American University of Bahrain (AUBH) as a strategic partner, supporting the university's development and participating in its governance. Esol Board Members serve on the AUBH Board of Directors, participating in the university's strategic planning and decision making processes. Esol's role in AUBH will be its second collaboration with Elm Education, the Bahrain-based education investment platform, with the organizations having already partnered on the establishment of American School of Bahrain (ASB), opening in September 2020.

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BAHRAIN



THE AUBH PRESIDENT'S RUN

Under the motto, "One Team, One Run", the American University of Bahrain (AUBH) endorses this symbolic, youth-oriented annual event marking the beginning of every academic year. More than 200 runners, 200 attendees and visitors come together at this dynamic event surrounded by a lively atmosphere with live entertainment, a wellness market, kids' activities and a "Meet and Greet" with the AUBH Community.



Senior officials in the Kingdom, students, youth from national high schools and universities, experienced runners, faculty, and influencers join the AUBH Community at this fitness extravaganza.

This Annual AUBH President's Run highlights the University's ethos of a "Sound Mind, Sound Body" and emphasizes that the AUBH Community is vested in each student's unique journey. The event underscores the confidence, positive thinking, and resilience necessary for a lifetime of success. It also celebrates the teamwork between the AUBH administration and students.

ACADEMICS VS. STUDENT LIFE

At the American University of Bahrain (AUBH), they know that life outside of study is as important as exam scores, and they want all their students to have a well-rounded university experience, that is on a par with experiences abroad.

With an active student council, the role of these bright and committed individuals is to serve as student representation in university governance, ensuring all voices are heard and amplified appropriately. Council members assist with campus events and activities, mentorship, and shaping the University's policies and culture. Overseen by the AUBH Student Council, students also have access to a plethora of clubs and societies catering to every interest, from football to photography. The clubs and societies operate with the ethos of collaboration amongst students and the wider AUBH Community. In keeping with their approach to education, students are free to conceive their own ideas for campus activities and events, to mutually thrive in a self-starting environment.

AUBH is the first comprehensive, purpose-built, American-style co-educational University in the Kingdom of Bahrain and is supported through the Elm Fund. The University offers a holistic journey for students and a unique approach to education that fosters interaction and collaboration between students, faculty, and the professional community.

GLOBAL MOBILITY: A PATHWAY TO THE WORLD

AUBH has recently finalized its academic partnership with the California State University, Northridge (CSUN). This partnership aims to connect students based in the Middle East and North Africa to the largest university system in the United States, effectively paving a seamless pathway to the U.S. for those aspiring to access a bespoke international experience. AUBH students have access to a robust curriculum focused on forefront preparation for academic success, as well as for careers in the regional and global marketplace, opportunities to study abroad, and a pathway to finish their studies in the United States.

AUBH is working with CSUN to align its high-quality curricula and create opportunities for students to experience a broad range of new programs and international experiences, including attending summer programs in California, and receiving a CSUN degree through completing one, two, or three years of coursework enrolled at CSUN, and vice versa at AUBH, for CSUN Students who wish to study in Bahrain.

AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL IN ABU DHABI (AISA)



READY, STEADY, INNOVATE!

Each week students at AISA take on the important roles of engineers to solve complex, real world problems! The Design and Innovation class is often the highlight of their day. Students are working through Stanford's d.school Design Thinking Process (empathize, define, ideate, prototype, test, and iterate) to create and innovate solutions to the problems they are currently solving.

Students apply what they have learned with their homeroom teachers in their PYP Units of Inquiry, to solve problems in an engaging, hands-on way. In Design & Innovation, students are given the chance to explore technology, engineering, science, and math through these design challenges.

Recent projects and designs included: a toy for a friend while learning about friends and relationships; a tool to help a family member be healthy while learning about health and well-being; working as a team to solve engineering design challenges; a container to showcase items for an All About Me museum; working as a team to design bridges; working as a team to prototype their design of a disaster proof building.

We are proud of our AISA innovators!

TINKER, TAILOR, READER, WRITER!

Author Celebrations are an important commemoration of learning at AISA. At the end of every unit, students publish their own books that exemplify their hard work and passion for creating literary masterpieces. Each unit has its own theme and display of learning, whether that be the "Narrative Small Moment Red Carpet" or "Starbooks Poetry Cafe".

Students always look forward to their Author Celebration, because they truly are the experts of their craft and have complete agency over their final books. Their gleaming smiles and enthusiasm to share their work is the greatest evidence of learning and growth. Parent involvement is highly encouraged and even through the pandemic the parents have been able to watch the celebrations virtually. Parents are able to take pictures, videos, and experience the special moment of their child being recognized.

The real-world context of Author Celebrations provides students with the opportunity to experience receiving feedback from an audience, as well as the importance of applying the writing process in order to enhance the quality of their books. The growth that students show is tremendous throughout the year, because they genuinely look forward to sharing their published pieces with others. Students' confidence in their writing skills and overall love for literacy is greatly enhanced through the Author Celebrations and is a tradition that students remember for the rest of their AISA journey.

EXPLORATIONS

As educators, we see the value of 'voice and choice.' We use it as a learning strategy in our classrooms and students have more freedom in what and how they learn because of it. At AISA, we've taken the concept a step further. Advanced Grade 9 students have the opportunity to take Honors Explorations as an elective this year and the response has been tremendous. Students work on multiple passion projects that they design from scratch; they set goals for themselves, plan work for each class, problem-solve independently, present their work to the school, and critically evaluate themselves in detailed reflections. These demonstrations of independence have been vital in ensuring students become better critical thinkers. Plus, it's a lot of fun! Giving students the opportunity to explore learning freely is so worthwhile, and at AISA, Explorations is establishing itself as a leap forward in guiding students to become confident scholars.

DUNECREST AMERICAN SCHOOL

STUDENTS IN CHARGE!

Grade 5 students in Ms. Carrie Zimmer's class at Dunecrest American School have changed the way they've been studying Math. They've transitioned from a teacher-directed approach into one where students have more agency in how they spend their time learning the objectives set for each lesson.

At the end of the week, students take a quiz from the iReady Math program and have the option to "Challenge the Quiz" for the following week's lesson. Based on performance, students are divided into groups for the pre-set lesson or a challenge level. Each group is given a differentiated task list using a "Must Do, Should Do, or Could Do" framework. These include completing the iReady workbook, watching videos, completing iReady online lessons, playing content-related games and attending mini-lessons. The students sign up for mini-lessons hosted by Ms. Zimmer at various times throughout the week. In reflecting on how the math instruction has shifted, students have commented that they enjoy having control of their work time and being able to work with their friends, but also noted that it's important to develop their time-management skills.

As students have more ownership in their learning, they develop more intrinsic motivation and desire to learn independently. With time, students can be asked to create their own task lists and choose the evidence that shows their successful completion of the curriculum objectives.

Ms. Zimmer has noticed that the number of students choosing the "challenge level" tasks is increasing weekly, proving that choice and agency has a direct impact on student engagement which increases overall student attainment.

NATIONAL HONORS SOCIETY INAUGURAL

The National Honor Society (NHS) is integral to a learning community because it highlights the school's appreciation of crucial values: scholarship, service, leadership, and character. The prestigious program recognizes student achievement and encourages community excellence. The Dunecrest chapter welcomed 15 new members at its inaugural NHS Induction Ceremony which included eloquent speeches about the foundational pillars from school leaders. The criteria for membership include a 3.3 cumulative GPA, extensive involvement in the community, and a majority vote by the faculty council. Being an NHS member means the embodiment of the four pillars every day, every way. Dunecrest's NHS chapter is quickly making a difference by adding another layer to our school culture through academic excellence and school-wide initiatives. NHS members have hosted charity events to raise money for the Red Crescent, created a Student Charter, and continue to get all members of the learning community working together to achieve their goals. *By Laila Aljuhany, Grade 10 Honors*



DUNECREST'S FIRST TEDxYOUTH EVENT

This academic year, Dunecrest held its first ever TEDxYouth event, a creative local TEDx event that is organized by and tailored towards the youth. The topic chosen was "How the Past Shapes our Future." Members of the Dunecrest community, including students and Mr. Pat Hould, Secondary Principal, had the opportunity to share their experiences and personal journeys. They spoke about how their past choices or actions affected the course of their lives, shaping them into the person they are today and will continue to evolve into. Tenth grader, Kiyan Ouejian, discussed his victorious battle against cancer and how the effects that it had on his lifestyle and well-being made him the person he is today. Eleventh grader, Shams Jabouri, shared her experience with social media and the toll it had on her identity and mental health, as well as how she grew to avoid relying on the internet for validation. With the great audience reception and talent of the speakers, the school is looking forward to holding many more TEDxYouth at Dunecrest in the future. *By Zoya Raza, Grade 10.*

FAIRGREEN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

IMPACT INCLUSIVITY RUN

2021 was particularly poignant as a historical moment, marking the 50th anniversary of the union of the Emirates forming the UAE. The country witnessed celebrations and expressions of gratitude for an unprecedented rise in development and innovation within its native and expatriate communities. As part of this, students from Fairgreen were selected to partake in the Impact Inclusivity 50km Run, organized by Team Angel Wolf (TAW).

TAW is a non-profit foundation created to encourage inclusion of people with disabilities and for society to embrace their own health, headed by Rio - a person of determination and his father Nick. Whilst partaking in many athletic runs and triathlons with his sister, he has been profiled regionally by many senior figures for his work. The purpose of the run was for students to collectively run pushing Rio's wheel chair the distance of 50km (1km for every year since inception.) The event took place with the local community of The Sustainable City and served as a reminder to the students how resilience, perseverance and embracing differences are critical parts of Fairgreen's pillars and a growth mindset.



A MINDSET WORTH CELEBRATING

With a strong focus on Character and Wellbeing as part of its pillars , Fairgreen International School was able to celebrate two key accolades this year. The first, receiving a certification for a National Online Safety school - reiterating its commitment to online safety, a topical subject for parents with the proliferation of online social and learning platforms as well as collaboration tools. The second accolade was being awarded as Flagship Status School for Jigsaw in Dubai (with a total of 50 worldwide). This recognizes the school's commitment to learning through mindfulness, with an accreditation through a professional body.

WEAR IT WITH PRIDE

"*I have learned you are never too small to make a difference.*" Greta Thunberg

As the school approaches its fourth year since inception, the team incorporates the school pillars in all they do. When reviewing our uniforms, Fairgreen was approached by Kapes, a homegrown Dubai-based brand that helped the school in reducing its environmental impact by switching to a sustainable solution. By giving students the ability to become far more conscious consumers they feel connected to the items that they wear. It also allows the school to lead by example in promoting its sustainability mandate, while also celebrating innovation and supporting a local SME.

AMERICAN SCHOOL HONG KONG (ASHK)

SMILES FOR EVERYONE

For the 5th year running, American School Hong Kong participated in the Box of Hope charity project. As part of our mission, we empower students to become responsible global citizens and offer different activities to encourage our students to give back to the greater community. Box of Hope is a charity that collects useful and educational gifts to donate to underprivileged children in Hong Kong and Asia. This donation is usually made close to the festive season, allowing the children to celebrate and experience the Christmas season like everyone else. Our students thoughtfully wrapped and decorated their gift boxes, sharing the happiness and warmth during this time of year.

We are so proud of the enthusiastic support that the ASHK community has shown towards this campaign. Every year we exceed our goals and strive to achieve more the following year!

INSPIRING STUDENTS TO BECOME THE FUTURE ELITE

Within all Esol Education schools, individual and team sports play an important part of student life. In addition to physical well-being, sports programs develop students' self-confidence, competitive instinct, teamwork skills, and leadership abilities. At American School Hong Kong, a cultural element is also included in our Sports and Athletics Program. The ASHK Wushu Team was established as a reflection of the Chinese culture in Hong Kong while enabling students to experience new pursuits and explore existing passions.

We believe that the ASHK sports program reinforces self-discipline and dedication. This was demonstrated by one of our ASHK Wushu Team members, Kashu. With his hard work and determination, he has been selected to be in the Hong Kong Wushu Team and started his professional training at the Hong Kong Sports Institute.

ASHK hopes to continue to inspire students to pursue their passions in all areas!

THE TERRY FOX RUN HAS LANDED AT ASHK!

A group of dedicated American School Hong Kong (ASHK) students and staff were inspired by Terry Fox's heroic run across Canada and his enduring legacy of finding a cure for cancer. A proposal was made to bring the Terry Fox Run to our campus and to raise funds for cancer research projects.

On November 25, 2021, the ASHK community united together to host the First Annual ASHK Terry Fox Run! The enthusiastic participation of everyone in the school community created a very special atmosphere. At a time when COVID restrictions have removed some of the steam from normal school functioning, this event was the perfect antidote to boost morale and raise our spirits! The Run also reinforced our commitment to service projects and demonstrated how ASHK extends its warmth beyond the school grounds to reach the greater community.

At ASHK, we are proud of the effort made by all stakeholders who are dedicated to maintaining the strong sense of community we enjoy. We also remain dedicated to an aspect of our mission which is to empower students to reach their full potential and become engaged global citizens. The Terry Fox Run was truly a successful event in this regard and a powerfully positive experience that the school will adopt as an annual tradition!



AMERICAN SCHOOL IN EGYPT-MAIN (AISE-M)

WORLD ART FORUM

AISE's own Middle School Art teacher, Mrs. Shereen Badr, was CEO and Curator of the recent World Art Forum in Cairo, Egypt's first and largest international contemporary art event held at the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization. The World Art Forum sets itself apart from any other art fair or exhibition by adopting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) at the core of its mission. Communicating through the global language of art, WAF gathered 150 artists from more than 30 countries. Mrs. Badr explained that "through this event we connect art and sustainability for a better future because we see art as a solution for the world's problems. We invite organizations to join us to play a role in pushing forward the agenda of UN SDGs through art in Egypt and the world." These 17 goals are woven into the curriculum of AISE students including Mrs. Badr's Art classes. Mrs. Badr is planning for AISE students to take their works to a larger stage: "I will continue working with them on their skills until I have them presenting their art pieces in such a form as WAF. That will make me a happy teacher."



THE POWER OF WORDS

In Early Childhood at AISE, students are elevated and encouraged to realize their endless potential by teachers changing the way in which they speak to them. When students write, they are called "authors." When they read, they are "intellectuals." When they explore, the become "scientists." Using generic terms such as "boys & girls" and "ladies & gentlemen" limits students' vocabulary acquisition and self-awareness. In contrast, using diverse descriptions with the children builds their vocabulary and helps them understand that they fit into more than one or two pre-determined categories. In other words, if we tell a young child every day that they are an engineer, a poet, a coder, an actor, or a meteorologist, not only are they learning the meaning of these words, but we are now implanting the idea that these goals are within their reach. Changing our language changes their perspective – and it could even change our own perspective as well!

HOLY GUACAMOLE!

AISE alum, Nabil Attalla is making delicious waves with his own taco food truck in the North Coast of Egypt, with thousands of clients hungry for more of his delicious Mexican food. Attalla graduated from AISE in 2019 and while studying at university, he launched Holy Guacamole in the summer of 2021. When asked how he juggles being an undergrad student with being a business owner, Nabil referenced his "AISE IB Business class [which] has more than helped me up until now. Also, spending a lot of time in Student Council, MUN and many more activities really helped as well. IB helped me manage and organize my time. When I got to university, I realized I was ahead of the game with what I had learned". Nabil was also able to make the most of his university's switch to online courses, taking on a full-time job to save up capital, while attending class remotely, sometimes from his car! Holy Guacamole started as a food truck in North Coast, expanded to New Cairo, and is now delivering across the city. Having sampled his delicious food at a local fair, Egypt's Prime Minister featured the business on his Facebook page, giving it a huge boost! Nabil was recently invited to share his entrepreneurship journey and inspire current AISE High School students!

AMERICAN SCHOOL IN EGYPT-WEST (AISE-W)

THE CODE GAME

Tarek Baghdady, in Grade 7, had always wanted to design a video game, but when he tried to do so by himself, he couldn't understand a thing, till he joined the Video Game Design elective! "When I saw the class on the list of electives for Grade 7, I was filled with joy. I immediately signed up and got it! Mr. Alejandro made learning how to code feel like a walk in the park, we mastered all types of code blocks. Then he introduced us to the MDA (Mechanics, Dynamics, Aesthetics) for popular games, like Minecraft and Zelda. He encouraged us to think creatively by making us design cardboard mazes. Lastly, we created drafts to use in creating our 9-level game." After learning all this, Tarek started to understand more complex code for his own game, and got creative ideas for it! This resulted in his designing a 2D survival game called "Dungeon Crawler!"

MIDDLE SCHOOL TAKES THE LEAD

Here at AIS Egypt (West), we are part of a team of Middle School students who are committed to community service – both within our school community and the greater Cairo community. The Middle School Leadership team (MSL) plans and hosts fundraisers; school events and activities; and promotes positivity throughout the school. In December, the MSL put on a holiday-themed fundraiser to benefit the Cairo Children's Cancer Hospital (CCH).

This fundraiser ended up generating 3,000 Egyptian pounds! We made and sold holiday cookies at school during break times. All of the money earned was donated to the hospital. The MSL actually took a field trip to the hospital to donate this money directly. The hospital staff was generous enough to give us a tour! They were quite welcoming and it was an amazing experience for us.



CCH is one of the biggest hospitals for treating children's cancer in all of Egypt; they have 360 beds and the facility can treat children as young as one day old all the way up to 18 years old. These services are absolutely free! Families don't have to worry about paying any money for treatment and they never discriminate against any children. Also, the hospital is not only a hospital; it's also a place for research and medical training.

When we visited the hospital, we had the opportunity to meet a lot of children, patients, and doctors. We even donated some of the remaining cookies to the doctors, nurses, and workers. Unfortunately, we were not allowed to give cookies to any of the patients due to their sensitivity during chemotherapy. The guide explained to us how the hospital operates on donations only. This means that water, food, medicine, sophisticated medical equipment, rooms, salaries, etc. are all paid through community donations. So, no patients have to pay to receive care. This hospital is truly a superhero to many.

We were so happy to have visited the hospital and contributed to a good cause. Overall, we all thought it was an amazing experience. Please consider helping support Children's Cancer Hospital Egypt (57375). Donate now to help!

By Leila Shahin & Malak Soliman, Grade 6

"THIN SLICING" WHAT IS IT?

According to Dr. Stephanie Affinito, author of the "The Coaching Sketchnote Book," thin-slicing is a way to pare down information so "we can make quick, yet meaningful, decisions about a set of data in front of us." The heart of the lesson is conferencing: as students work on reading and writing independently, teachers pull up a chair with each student and discuss their successes, survey the work, practice new strategies, and encourage them to take risks. Grade 3 teachers recently used this method for a persuasive writing unit. Persuasive writing and speaking were new to most students. By the end of the unit, students would draft a speech to persuade their audience, supported with facts and evidence. Katherine Purton shared, "my team had deeper discussions about our student's writing ability before we started the unit, and we added lessons in to support weaknesses." For example, teachers built in extra support in paragraphing, structure, and reasoning with facts and evidence. Another teacher shared that the process made planning and conferences easier. According to a Grade 3 student and a proud new dog owner, "My teacher loves to talk to me and help me, and I persuaded my mom to get a dog! One fact is they are good for your health!" Students loved this genre of writing and have been successfully persuading ever since.

CAIRO ENGLISH SCHOOL (CES)

SCIENCE CHAMPIONS

Cairo English School placed first at the International Science Championships last year. The competition is based on a platform of Science questions where students earn points when they answer correctly. In total, there were 4,348 students competing from 96 schools from 40 different countries answering over 1.7 million questions! 50 CES students participated spending 1000 hours answering 350,000 Science questions earning more than a total of 100,000 points. Our students achieved an impressive result by getting the top school award. They achieved the highest average of all the competing schools by scoring 1709 points per user and top student award by the highest individual score 4235. Eight students were awarded Elite certificates, while 14 were awarded Emerald, 21 Gold, 5 Silver and 5 Bronze. Well done CES!



CES ACHIEVERS

With Cambridge examinations taking place in full last June, CES students showed true determination, focus and ability to attain some of the best results in CES history. The cohort of 2021 set new heights as a whole, but within those students some shone brightest. For several of our students to be recognized and awarded in the "Outstanding Cambridge Learner Awards" is a very proud moment and truly deserved for their hard work. It is fitting that our departing Head Student and Valedictorian, Abdalla Fawzy, was recognized as he has always been a role model for others to follow. Marwan Badawi is an outstanding student who now looks to build on his achievements this year by repeating his successes in Year 12. Omar Shousha and Salma Atta are our future leaders after impressing throughout their IGCSE examinations, both excelling not just in Mathematics, Design and Literature, but in all subjects that they studied. Omar achieved 8 top grades from 8 subjects, and Salma was awarded 9 top grades in the recent examinations. Well done to our top achievers, and the rest of our students for their outstanding results.

BUSINESS FOR A CAUSE

At CES we believe in the importance of exposing students to real-life situations in order for them to be engaged. In October, CES students organized a campaign for breast cancer awareness month raising 75,000LE to support the cause. Combining Corporate Social Responsibility with commerce they employed the capability-building concept by engaging the entire campus in selling pink ribbons, pink lemonade and pink bracelets and necklaces designed by the students themselves. As a follow-up to the campaign, student ambassadors visited the newly built facilities of Baheya Foundation For Early Detection & Treatment Of Breast Cancer. There they met and visited with cancer survivors in aim to raise morale. A specialist seminar was also organized for girls in Years 10-12 in an effort to raise awareness about breast cancer, its symptoms and the importance of early detection.

AMERICAN SCHOOL BAHRAIN (ASB)

"AMERICA'S FAVORITE TEACHER" VISITS ASB

ASB was pleased to have author, educator, innovator, and urban-farming advocat, Mr. Stephen Ritz, spend one week at the school where he offered students an inspiring learning experience. While Mr. Ritz has been working with Esol schools for a few years, it was his very first visit to ASB. He mentored, advised, and inspired ASB students to live a healthier, more sustainable lifestyle. He also talked about the urgent global food security issues and the need to support local farming, and connect with worldwide movements. During his visit, ASB students explored urban farming methods including vertical farming, hydroponics, aquaponics, and rooftop planting. Mr. Ritz also taught ASB students about natural compost and compost bins and took the students on a trip to Peninsula Farms, one of Bahrain's largest growers of high-quality local produce.

THERE'S NOTHING FISHY ABOUT CODING!

American School of Bahrain Grade 5 students have been studying freshwater habitats in science class. They designed their own artistic habitats and shared them with the school community by posting them in the hallway. But what could bring freshwater habitats to life? Coding! Guided by our technology integrationist, Ms. Amber Acosta, students used Scratch programming to recreate their habitats with code. Students worked to code the fish to swim, underwater plants to move, and integrated sounds and pop-up labeling. Coding allows students to be the designers of their own universe! "Coding has opened my students' eyes to a new world. My students get the opportunity to integrate coding into projects and bring them to life. Coding is the language of the future with lots of opportunities for students to be creative, confident problem-solvers," said Ms. Bianca Briers, Grade 5 teacher.



ASB TRUNK OR TREAT!

Community is the cornerstone of any educational institution - and even more so to a new school. But how can you invite the community in when the restrictions say "stay out"? Easy - meet in a parking lot! Or at least that was the solution at the American School of Bahrain. As a community builder and sweet treat for all staff and families, the school hosted its inaugural Trunk-or-Treat over the Halloween holiday. Over 40 families came together with individual creative themes and welcomed students from ages 3-16 with open arms - and lots of sweet treats! Parents rolled into the parking lot before the school day had ended to begin a whirlwind of car decorating! When the final bell rang, students rushed out to find a carnival of candy-filled car trunks with themes ranging from Harry Potter and Finding Nemo to Jurassic Park and sporty skeletons!

AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL IN CYPRUS (AISC)

WORLD WITH|OUT WALLS

During this year's annual International Day at the American International School in Cyprus (AISC), celebrated in honor of Universal Children's Day and students explored the theme of a "World with|out Walls". They explored case studies such as the Great Wall of China, the Venetian Walls around Nicosia, the Lascaux caves in France, Mecca's walls in Saudi Arabia, the Western Wall in Jerusalem, the walls of Cuzco in Peru, the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington DC, the Berlin Wall, the Fez in Morocco, Peace lines in Belfast, the Great Green Wall in Africa, and many more. Through art, literature, poetry, games, the spoken word, AISC students created and innovated to show what walls represent to them. Students also created a wall of flowers on our rooftop, building a defense against climate change. The centerpiece of the day was an International Food Festival, provided by parents, with cuisine from over 30 countries around the world. What a way to celebrate global citizenship at AISC!

AISC YOUTH AMBASSADORS PROMOTE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

AISC's Hope for Children Youth Ambassadors were very active promoting children's rights during Fall 2021. Hope for Children is an international charity helping children stricken by extreme poverty by delivering education, health, livelihoods and Child Rights projects that benefit thousands of children and families each year. AISC's ambassadors participated in an international conference entitled, "The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Welfare of Children" which brought together children, government agencies, local authorities, academics, psychologists, and educators from Cyprus and abroad to discuss the difficulties faced by children throughout the pandemic. One of AISC's Senior Youth Ambassadors, Kasra, Grade 12, gave a speech during the conference, outlining the ways that pandemic has affected not only him and his classmates, but also their teachers, who persevered through learning new teaching methodologies and supporting students online. Subsequently the Cyprus' Commissioner for Children's Rights hosted the Youth Ambassadors to discuss the students' work on "Children's Rights Passports" which will be launched in early 2023. These passports will get information about children's rights into the hands of children all across Cyprus.



AISC ANNUAL JUNIOR AND SENIOR RETREAT

AISC held its annual Juniors and Seniors Retreat in person in October 2021. Students in their House groups gathered information through a map trail activity leading them to tour the ancient village in Pano Lefkara in a quest to answer specific questions regarding history and culture. They collaborated to create presentations, which they presented on the second day of the retreat. The presentations were judged by a panel of teachers, who in turn questioned and scrutinized each House team's presentation in the style of the the Dragons' Den/Shark Tank television programs. Students also took part in team building activities at the Sayious Adventure Park and had TOK and Research Writing workshops. Through these activities and more the retreat aimed to highlight the AISC Graduate Learner Profile and the necessity in cultivating a growth mindset. A great time was had by all involved!

UNIVERSAL COLLEGE - ALEY (UCA)

BUILDING TOMORROW'S LEADERS TODAY

One of the foundational tenets of the Universal College-Aley has been the growth and development of each individual team member. Walter Day, UCA's founding director, established a distributive leadership model that has led the way for continued strong leadership at the school. Simply stated, UCA has built a culture of opportunities for team members to grow, develop and have their unique skill sets utilized in meaningful ways that improve the organization. For example, Janna Chehayeb's journey at UCA has seen her develop into a leadership position as Upper Elementary Principal and Interim Dean of Curriculum and Instruction, having started at the school as a classroom teacher. "UCA identified my abilities and welcomed my creativity, initiatives and proposals. By doing so, I was given the opportunity to develop and expand in the roles I was selected for," remarked Janna. Similarly, Farah Sayegh, Secondary Math Coordinator has completed her professional and research Master's degrees in teaching Math for High School and is in her second year of completing her PhD in Math Education. She shared, "The family atmosphere that is present in UCA helps every member of the team to flourish. UCA leadership believed in me and were watching my performance closely. After they discovered my potential, they didn't miss an opportunity to help me grow!"



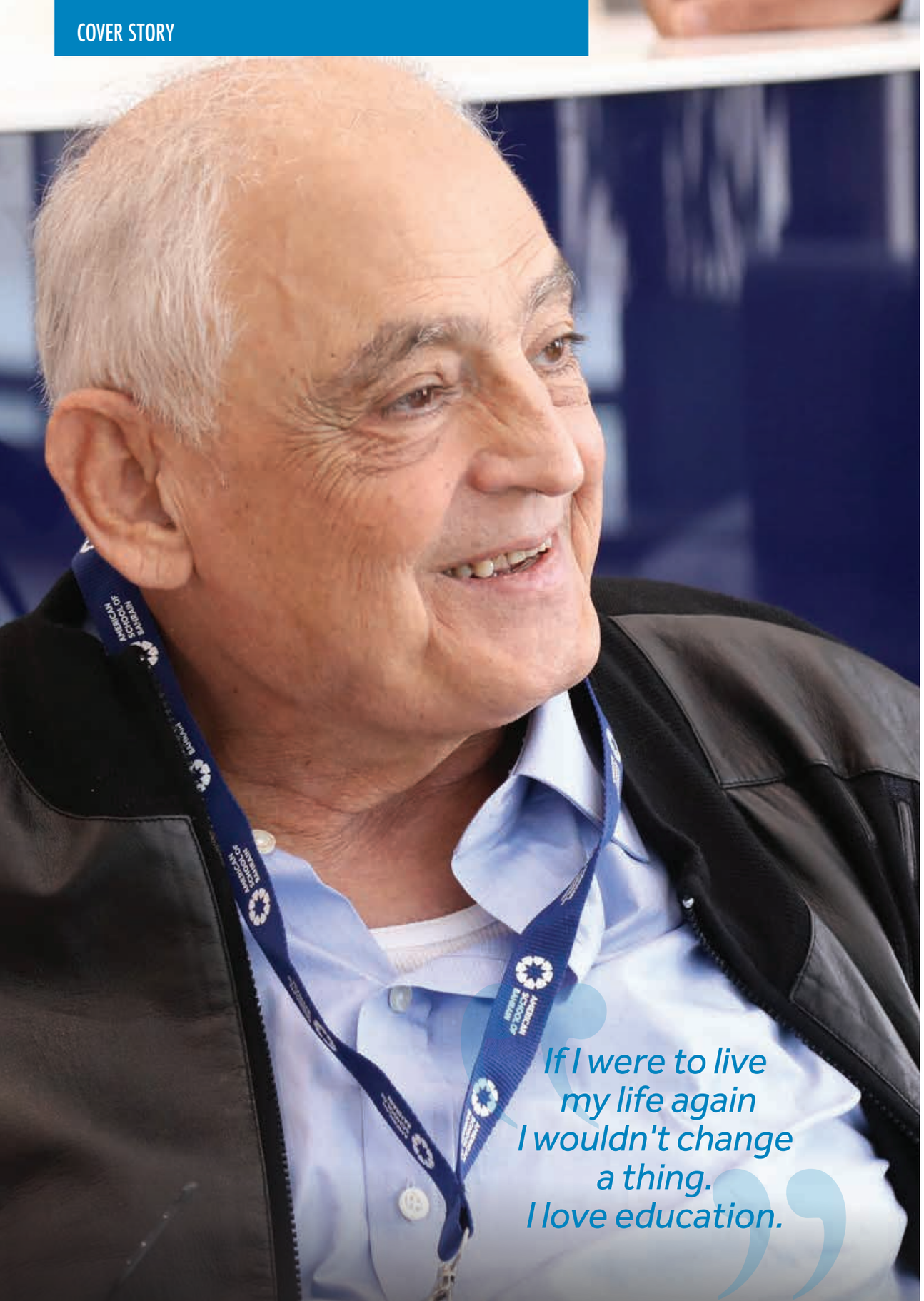
HEALTH AND SAFETY TEAM LEADS THE WAY

The COVID-19 pandemic, more than ever before, has put health and safety at the forefront of schools strategic planning. The 2021-2022 school year saw UCA opening its doors to students for the first time since the spring of 2020. Prior to the beginning of the school year the UCA Pandemic Response Team, under the guidance of UCA Nurse, Mrs. Nadira Wehbe, developed a robust reopening plan to safeguard the UCA learning community. Mrs. Wehbe, a 22-year healthcare veteran, has led a team whose efforts have resulted in zero transmissions on campus at the time of this writing. "We launched a robust plan that gained the commitment of the entire UCA community, and has been incredibly successful. We have seen UCA thrive in safeguarding our learning community while other schools in the area have struggled. I'm incredibly proud of the work the team has done thus far and I'm excited to see what we will accomplish together over the course of the school year," remarked Gerald Redd, UCA Director

NATIONAL FOOTBALL TEAM, NATIONAL PRIDE

Proudly representing the Lebanese flag, UCA students Haya Najjad, Leyna Chehayeb, and Reem Abdelkhalek were selected to the Lebanese National Football Team and recently participated in the 1st Women's Western Asian Football Championship under 14 years of age, held in Lebanon from January 8, 2022 until January 14, 2022. Being chosen as captain of the team for her commitment, hard-work and determination, Haya, a centerback depicts her experience as a dream come true, saying: "It was a lifetime experience I was blessed enough to be a part of." Reem, a left-wing, describes her experience as inspiring, and is determined to focus on both athletic and educational improvement. "To represent my country in an international event as a goalkeeper was a major achievement of mine" expressed Leyna as she describes her unforgettable experience; believing that discipline and persistence help her succeed in her sport and education.





If I were to live my life again I wouldn't change a thing. I love education.

A LIFE DEDICATED TO EDUCATION

This year as Esol Education celebrates 45 years, the organization's story is very much the story of its founder, Chairman and Superintendent, Mr. Walid Abushakra. For the *STRIDES* anniversary issue, we asked him to reflect on his journey and achievements, and his inspiration for continuous progress.

At age 85, Mr. Walid Abushakra is intensely passionate about his schools, which have grown to a network of 11 institutions. Despite his status as award-winning educator, he has no time to rest on his laurels. Dividing his days between Cairo, Dubai, Bahrain, Cyprus, Hong Kong, Lebanon and the United States, he continues to work urgently, late into the night, whether evaluating new project invitations from governments or the private sector, advising his team, or working on refining a small detail he may have noticed at a school campus. Whatever task occupies his present focus, it is always geared towards offering a better educational experience both to his beloved students as well as Esol schools' host countries.

For one, the ongoing world pandemic only strengthened his conviction that distance learning is the way forward, leading to the launch of The Academy, an online study track at American International School in Egypt (AISE), in record time. "The human race cannot afford to forever keep teaching students in classrooms. You can imagine the cost of roads and freeways for everybody to start school at the same time and get dismissed at the same time! In distance learning, you save so much in the road system, just as one of the economic advantages," says Mr. Abushakra. Now entering its second academic year in 2022, The Academy at AIS Egypt offers an accredited American program that uses cutting-edge AI technology, paired with 1:1 mentorship and a globally connected campus, in partnership with Arizona State University (ASU), with dual university credits for High School students. "Eventually, I believe distance learning is going to prevail, it is the system of the future, and when mastered, it will be wonderful," he adds.

With collaborations with universities such as ASU, as well as longstanding relationships such as that with California State University Northridge (CSUN), foraying into higher education has long been an ambition for Mr. Abushakra. When asked why, he smiles and remarks with characteristic simplicity, "I'll be frank. I believe we can do it better!" He sees that there is a clear gap that can be fulfilled with the organization's capabilities, with its unique understanding of international K-12 education, and what its students need to be successful and to contribute positively to their home countries. This wide breadth of experience, and deep insight into the needs of students, has led to meaningful opportunities to create real impact. Three years ago, Mr. Abushakra, upon invitation from a country he loves, was attracted to partner in American School of Bahrain, and



AIS Egypt Early Childhood campus in Heliopolis, circa 2001



subsequently, in The American University of Bahrain. The CSUN association was then cemented into a partnership with The American University of Bahrain (AUBH), in which Esol Education also acquired a strategic stake, working to support the university's future development.

Throughout the years, Mr. Abushakra's and, by extension, Esol Education's unwavering belief in the value of an international and American education has driven the organization's growth towards being the largest operator of high quality international American schools in the world. The first step was understanding the need to level the playing field for the people of the Middle Eastern region on the world stage, and education was the key. As a 19-year-old teacher in Lebanon, Mr. Abushakra saw that in order to pursue progress, the country's education system needed to be vastly improved, "I thought that a Mathematics program was the basis for progress, and the strength of the Mathematics programs in Lebanon have today proved to be handy for technological developments." At the invitation of the then Director General of the Ministry of Education, a call to fulfill "a national duty," Mr. Abushakra co-authored a series of twelve High School Mathematics textbooks, after completing five for the lower grades. His work introduced the discipline of modern Mathematics in Lebanon, and has had a lasting influence on the country's education system. Years later in Cairo, while setting up AISE's first campus for his students fleeing the occupation of Kuwait, one of his goals was to also raise the standards of English language instruction for the people of Egypt.
In the meanwhile, as a young educator teaching within the framework of the Lebanese and British curricula, Mr. Abushakra was also exposed to, and recognized the benefits of, the fledgling International Baccalaureate (IB) program early on. "I loved the International Baccalaureate (IB)! I was with them when they were at the experimental stage," he shares. He subsequently went on to introduce it in Cairo, Abu Dhabi and Cyprus.

The need to teach students critical thinking and analysis also drove the quick adoption of the American standards of teaching, that lend themselves particularly well to the inquiry-based learning approach that forms the basis of the IB program. Esol Education, today has worked with the Office of Overseas Schools at the US Department of State for a number of years, offering its AERO (American Education Reaches Out) Common Core Plus program at Esol schools. Mr. Abushakra states it simply, "I believe in American education because the students are trained to think and analyze so they can cope better with new problems. At this point in time, the mass of knowledge is doubled every six months, making it impossible to memorize. We have to be able to analyze to survive and our graduates are very successful because they are trained that way. Now I think we are ready for the future."

Esol Education's growth over the years has always been measured and deliberate, despite the many invitations and offers Mr. Abushakra receives to establish new schools. His stance is clear, "I have never wanted to build a huge chain of schools where we own the campuses and all the money goes into real estate. I wanted the investment to go into educating children. And whenever we admit a student we do our maximum best to do the best for that student and in fact, we are very proud of our graduates, and you find them going to top universities in the world." He attributes this also, in no small measure, to Esol's ability to attract the best teaching talent around the globe. "Without good teachers there is no way a school will succeed so, of course, my first goal is to get the best. And better than that, longevity is important, so they have to be challenged and satisfied. Longevity at our schools is amazing and many who leave do return later. With good teachers it becomes easier to provide a better education - the kind of education that our children deserve."

Having dedicated his entire life to education, Mr. Abushakra is fundamentally still a teacher at heart. "There is nothing more exciting to me than seeing the spark in the eye of a student when he or she understands a concept, especially in mathematics," he shares humbly. "That is most rewarding for me. I feel that I have impacted the future of a child in a very positive way and that's my mission and my duty. My duty is to help the child think and succeed and so far, I have been very successful, thank God." His advice to parents is to focus on giving their children the gift of a good education, and encouraging them to be lifelong learners, applying critical thinking to all situations, and facing new challenges with resilience and adaptability. "A good education is educating students with the skills to think and to appreciate fairness and honesty so that we improve the world. If everybody is honest and knowledgeable we'll have no problems!" It is this earnest belief, and deep passion that education can truly make a positive change in the world, that has been the driving force behind Mr. Abushakra's life's work, "I have worked hard, and I have done almost everything in education. If I had to live my life again, I wouldn't change a thing, I love education."





















A GREEN EDUCATION

A man on a mission, award-winning educator and best-selling author, and founder of the non-profit Green Bronx Machine, Stephen Ritz, has inspired thousands with his work in sustainability education. With a long-standing relationship with Esol Education, our schools and our students, offering innovative solutions to a cleaner and greener world, Mr. Ritz talks to *STRIDES* about the importance of a "green education" and what gives him hope for the future.

1. Why do you think gardening and caring for plants has such a transformative effect on students?

In an increasingly digital world, caring for anything alive has a transformational effect on children and adults; it moves us all to a sense of nurture, to interconnectedness with other living things and serves to remind us that our daily actions connect to other living things and ecosystems both large and small. When we teach children about nature, we teach them to nurture; and when we teach children to nurture, we as a society embrace our better nature. Seeds represent genetic potential and the process of gardening teaches children about genetic potential. Gardening teaches people that a seed well planted can yield a crop of epic proportions. Gardening teaches people patience, perseverance and hope – when you place a seed in the soil, you are betting on the future and your potential to see that seed grow to fruition. Most importantly, all the data in the world indicates that when children grow food, they will eat it. Driving healthy living and sound environmental practices are critical to the collective work we as educators need to instill and embrace.

2. What do you think are the top three most urgent issues in sustainability and food security that we need to communicate to our students?

Number One - reducing food waste is critical to the health of the planet and people; it is the easiest problem we can fix, literally overnight, with huge impact. We need to regard and respect food as the nourishment and total sum of human and environmental inputs that it is rather than a simple commodity to be bought and sold – that concept can and will change the world and spark empathy and compassion on a multitude of levels that will help to heal all that ails this planet and our race. Number Two – eating less animal protein, specifically red meat. I say this from an environmental perspective and a human health perspective. Simply put, the way we produce and consume animal proteins is neither healthy nor sustainable – for people or the planet. I take great umbrage with factory farming of animals from humanitarian and environmental perspectives – and I believe children who are exposed to this reality respond equally with outrage. Further, the food itself is creating a health crisis of epic proportions. Number Three – moving away from processed foods and returning to whole foods. The issues here include the overconsumption of sugar, salt, chemicals and even carcinogens which are impacting health exponentially as evidenced by diabetes, obesity, heart disease, early on-set of puberty and other health issues. Let food be thy medicine and let thy medicine be thy food. With processed food also comes the realities of plastics, packaging, trash and other pressing environmental concerns that are plaguing our planet and spoiling our nest. By voting with our fork, we can save ourselves and the world.







> *The solutions I am most excited about involve courage, compassion and collaboration – the willingness and ability to cooperate, work together, and to coalesce for a greater global good.*

3. What motivated you to come to the Middle East and to work with Esol Education?

Simply put, the Abushakra Family and Esol Education have a reputation and legacy second to none. The opportunity to work in an intimate family setting with global players and impact is the dream of a lifetime. While I am very committed to public education, the opportunity to work in a private school committed to public service enables me to grow something greater and connect with students all around the world – thus, a multiplier effect. My work has always spoken to my ability to connect with and treat my students and colleagues like they are my family, similarly, to work with the Abushakra and larger Esol Family allows me to experience that amazing feeling in return. It bears noting that the Abushakra Family has visited my school in the Bronx which speaks volumes to who they are as well. If you attend an Esol Education school, your children and their children will attend an Esol Education school. Coming to the Middle East is the perfect culmination of my career to date. I have always been committed to innovation – despite a lack of resources and opportunities. Here in the Middle East, there is an absolute commitment to innovation – it is part of the culture here - and a willingness to commit resources. Indeed, I feel as though I am home!

4. What kind of solutions do you hope to see your students innovate for the future?

The solutions I am most excited about involve courage, compassion and collaboration – the willingness and ability to cooperate, work together, and to coalesce for a greater global good. The work at The Sustainable City and Fairgreen International School, for example, speak to that future. We are growing happy, healthy, high-performing children with a sense of empathy, global and human ecology and a commitment to leaving the world better than we found it; that excites me!

5. What keeps you positive and hopeful about our future?

That we can innovate, iterate and ideate into the future towards solutions and opportunities in line with the best interests of people and the planet while living responsibly, ethically and happily speak to adding days to our lives and adding life to our days. Simply put, the children keep me positive and hopeful about our future. Through them and with them, I believe we can turn outrage into optimism, tough-mindedness to tender-heartedness and crisis into opportunities that build value for all. When I walk through places like The Sustainable City in Dubai I see how forward thinking the world can be and how bright our future is.

GET TO KNOW MR. RITZ

1. What is your favorite children's book?
It's so hard to pick one, Able's Island is right up there

2. Favorite healthy meal?
I love a good fatoush and here in UAE, I'm referred to as the "The Hummus Snob." I also love a good bowl of soup! I really enjoy simple, whole, food.

3. 3 top plants to plant with kids at home?
Basil, arugula (rocket) and carrots. By myself, I love growing heirloom tomatoes and Asian eggplant.

4. Who is your superhero?
Robert Shetterly – the author of "American's Who Tell the Truth" and also my Dad.

5. If you could have a magic power, what would it be?
I do have a magic power! I grow children and vegetables! And I wear a magic bow-tie, cheese hat, and green shoes!

LEARNING ANYWHERE

While the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift to online learning, the case for having a flexible K-12 learning option has long been building over the past decade. From high-performing student athletes and artists with demanding practice schedules to globally mobile families seeking a steady education for their children, the necessity for an effective, high-quality, accredited "learning anywhere" model is now both urgent and relevant. As demonstrated by "The Academy," American International School in Egypt's (AISE) latest venture, this is now possible, enabled by the rapid evolution of educational platforms, growing investment by leading educational institutions in creating high-quality online lessons, as well as increasingly accessible Internet connectivity across Africa and the wider EMEA region.

AISE's The Academy's American accredited program uses cutting-edge AI technology, paired with 1:1 mentorship, and a globally connected campus, to offer motivated students a new pathway to their High School Diploma, as well as the option to automatically enroll at AISE partners, Arizona State University (ASU).

Built on the pillars of independence, personal responsibility, respectful collaboration, and commitment to learning, The Academy offers students (Grade 7-12) flexible, on-demand, asynchronous lessons, facilitated by AISE teachers. Courses are aligned to meet AISE graduation requirements and The Academy students will earn credits towards graduation from AISE, as well as advanced university credit from Arizona State University (ASU) for selected courses. Course offerings range from the traditional English, Math, Science and Social Studies subjects to App & Game Development, Film & Theater Production and Business & Marketing.

Lessons are supplemented with monthly Authentic Learning Opportunities (ALOs) where students are invited to campus and coached on how to work collaboratively and use subject content to solve interdisciplinary, real world problems. ALOs are worth 10-20% of the course grade, and physical attendance is highly recommended, though synchronous, virtual attendance is also an option. This year our students are aiming to solve three UN Sustainable Development Goals, targeting "glocal" issues such as poverty, hunger, health & education. Students must combine their subject knowledge, along with design-thinking to propose holistic solutions that address all three selected goals.

Online learning isn't ideal for all students, but it is for many. According to Principal Elizabeth Johnston, "The ideal candidate is a responsible, self-motivated individual who is able to set and commit to a schedule of work for themselves, or has a parent or guardian committed to monitoring their schedule. Students must have full-time access to a device with Internet and Zoom capability." The Academy is designed for students needing a flexible schedule, such as those who are highly committed to activities outside of academic school like semi-professional Athletics or the Arts. It also benefits families with ever-changing lifestyles who may not want to (or be able to) stay in Cairo all year due to travel or work commitments in other regions. Ms. Johnston added, "The Academy can personalize pacing to a great degree, which makes it an ideal choice for students who find the classroom dynamics of school too stressful or anxiety-ridden or for whom the regular pace of academic work is either too slow or too fast."

THE ACADEMY
High Challenge, High Support

How are students responding and finding success? "So far we have a well-rested, more energized, less stressed, and more organized group of students, and in a short time they are already reaping the rewards," said Ms. Johnson, sharing the example of a Grade 11 student, who had mostly C's and D's in the year prior, and has achieved all A's and B's so far this year.

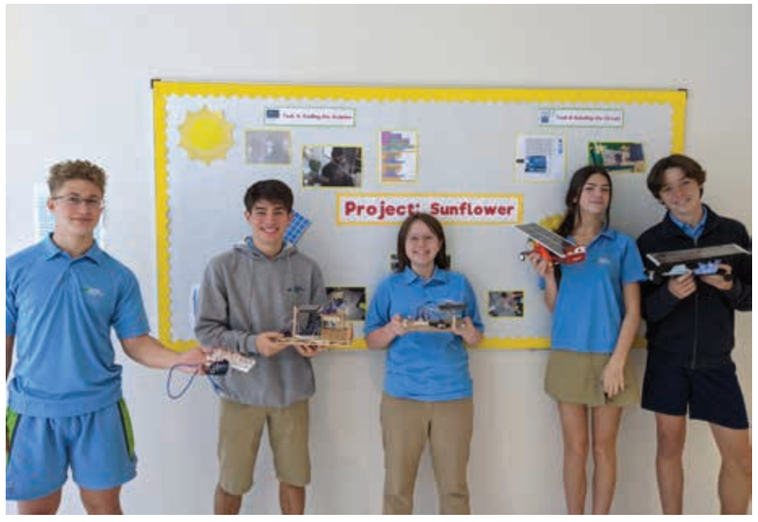
Online learning isn't ideal for all students, but it is for many. The ideal candidate is a responsible, self-motivated individual who is able to set and commit to a schedule of work for themselves.

SUSTAINABLE STEM

Take a moment to imagine a school focused on sustainability. What does it look like? What are the students doing? You might have imagined upcycled fashion, growing food and recycling plastics. You might have imagined awareness campaigns, low energy days or a meat-free cafeteria. What you might not have imagined are computer simulations, programming or electronics. Why?

By Anthony Copeland, MYP Coordinator, Fairgreen International School

A move towards sustainability is often seen as a move back to an idealised grassroots community and a move away from our reliance on technology. But the past alone can't save us, and many technological innovations are going to be required to bring about the changes we need. For example, it's both a reduction in traffic and affordable electric vehicles that will lower transport emissions. It's both the rise in consumer awareness and the availability of innovative meat alternatives that will allow us to reduce overall meat consumption. It's a move away from non-renewable energies and realistic renewable alternatives that will reduce our carbon footprint. A sustainable future is going to take both changes in behaviour and the creation of new technologies. This is why I feel that an authentic commitment to education for sustainable development is also a commitment to STEM education.



I'd spent four years working as a technology integrator for STEM education at a school-based makerspace before I joined Fairgreen International School in Dubai's first net-zero energy community. I arrived wondering where my experience in STEM and technology integration would support the school's ethos. There were already so many sustainable initiatives including an urban farming club, recycling drives and an annual solar energy competition hosted by the Million Solar Stars organisation. Rather than bring in something entirely new, I was curious to see how existing projects could be enhanced and the Million Solar Stars competition seemed as good a place to start as any.

Introducing Project Sunflower

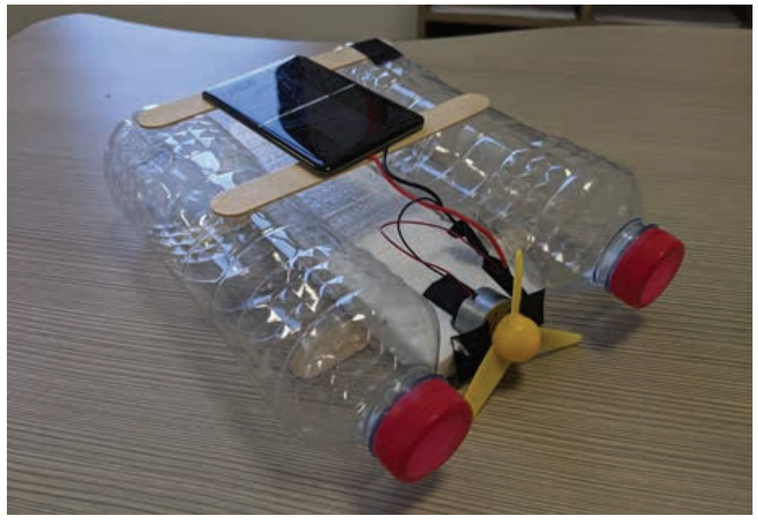
The competition already had students designing and racing solar powered boats and cars and it was great to see so much evidence of design thinking in previous competitions. I designed Project Sunflower to extend learning opportunities into electronics, programming and data analysis. The project runs alongside our Grade 8 Science unit on Electricity and starts by introducing students to the Arduino* ecosystem. Students first learn to build circuits on breadboards before they learn to write basic computer programs that run motors, switch on LED's and read temperature and light sensors. The culmination of this project is that students are challenged with creating a solar panel that tracks the sun throughout the day (If you've ever seen a time-lapse video of a field of sunflowers tracking the sun as it moves across the sky, you'll understand why I named it Project Sunflower!)

An authentic commitment to education for sustainable development is also a commitment to STEM education. A sustainable future is going to take both changes in behaviour and the creation of new technologies.



*The Arduino is a small programmable circuit board that can be used to prototype electronic machines. The major advantages to the board is that it is open source, inexpensive and has a thriving community of makers who are continuously sharing project ideas and offering support.

One of the key benefits of Project Sunflower was how low the threshold was. As soon as students knew how to write a program that says 'If you measure X, do Y', then they were ready to program an Arduino to follow the sun! That being said, STEM projects can also become as deeply technical and challenging as you like and it was great to see students motivated to push their projects to greater levels of complexity. Because there was an added sense of competition for which team could harvest the most energy and an overall sense of purpose and social responsibility, students were really motivated to improve their designs.



The challenge to find out which solar panels could capture the most energy was an opportunity for Grade 10 students to practice their data analysis skills. This involves using some extra components to record thousands of measurements taken across the day. The challenge is incorporated into a Science unit I wrote called 'Computational Science', which introduces students to using spreadsheets and Python programming to explore large volumes of scientific data.

The key takeaway for me throughout all of this is that a move towards sustainability should also be a move to supercharge your STEM projects. I've been inspired by how well the two together can build authentic and academically rigorous projects, and I'm excited to see how far we can take this.

SIX TIPS FOR STEMIFYING YOUR SUSTAINABILITY PROGRAM

1. Reassure teachers that it's okay if they aren't the experts in the room. Learning new technologies like Arduino electronics or programming can be done with students. There are countless websites and YouTube videos to support you and it gives you an invaluable opportunity to model troubleshooting to the class.

2. Utilize the growing number of STEM competitions focusing on sustainable solutions. These competitions offer a framework to get you started and a sense of competition further motivates students.

3. Technology doesn't have to be expensive. I chose Arduino because it's open source and many components can be found cheaply. Other than that our only other material was second hand cardboard and wood. For programming initiatives the entry cost can be completely free!

4. Start small. When you don't know what you don't yet know, it's amazing how quickly a project idea can become unmanageable. We chose solar trackers because we knew that we only had to incorporate motors and light sensors into our design. It wasn't until a year later that we started collecting data for the grade 10 data analysis project.

5. Don't just support the change, lead the change. Thankfully Fairgreen International School was already supporting the Million Solar Stars event so the time away from traditional lessons was already scheduled. For projects like these to get off the ground, teachers need to see that the projects will temporarily substitute their existing work and not add to it.

6. Look at what is already there first. Schools are busy places and new projects can be difficult to get off the ground. Project Sunflower was straightforward because it built off events and competitions that were already in place

This feature was originally published in the February 2022 issue of International School Leader Magazine



POWERFUL PROVOCATIONS

Inspiring critical thinking through essential questions is a key component of the IB PYP program. The Fourth-grade team at American International School in Abu Dhabi (AISA) has perfected the art of creating provocations that ignite curiosity, challenge perceptions, stir up emotions and push learners out of their comfort zones. A recent provocation introduced students to their Sustainability unit by plunging them deep into an unthinkable but very plausible future scenario.

By AISA Grade 4 Team

Imagine this: You are a student. Your teacher tells you that you need to bring your swimming kit to school because the class will be going swimming together. You and your classmates are pumped! The entire week the anticipation builds as the special day draws near. Finally, the day arrives and you are bursting with excitement. The chatter in the changing rooms is at an all-time high as everyone dons their swim gear. When everyone is changed, your teacher leads you to the pool door - the final barricade between you and fun. Your teacher says some final words of "be safe, have fun" but you're not really listening, you're too excited! The pool door finally opens and you and your classmates push through and... everyone stops in their tracks and the smiles disappear. The pool is filled with plastic! Plastic of all shapes and sizes; some floating on top, some sunk to the bottom; plastic of all colors fills the pool. And still, your teacher expects you to get in.

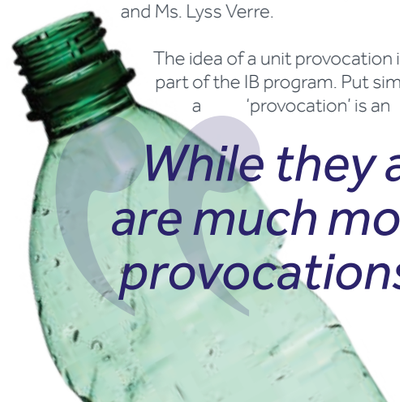
This is exactly what Grade 4 students recently experienced at AISA. This activity was actually a unit provocation that was designed to introduce students to their new unit regarding Sustainability (Sharing the Planet). It is just one example of the powerful and memorable unit provocations that Grade 4 is known for, that are designed by a group of talented and dedicated educators: Mr. Karim Abdelsalam, Ms. Donna Maika, Ms. Beth Otto, Ms. Alaviya Shaikh and Ms. Lyss Verre.

The idea of a unit provocation is part of the IB program. Put simply, a 'provocation' is an activity that is meant to provoke. However, a good provocation is a carefully designed activity that forces students out of their comfort zone which, in turn, gets them to wonder and reflect and FEEL something. The best provocations not only leave a lasting impression, but also activate prior knowledge, inspire curiosity, and spark interest in a topic. Provocations can come at the start of a new unit - as an introduction to it - or at the beginning of one of several lines of inquiry throughout the unit. Provocations can also vary in length; some being just one class period, some a full day, or some can last a whole week! The teacher's role in all of this is to record observations and student questions, so that they may be used to guide the learning later on. There are several sites online that offer tips and advice for creating a good provocation, but the key question we as a team ask ourselves is, "What impact will it have on the students?"

By pushing students into uncomfortable scenarios, they more naturally come to ask questions and express their feelings. From this one plastic pool provocation, students began to explore other local and global issues revolving around sustainability. This was followed by a mini inquiry into Earth's natural resources, which will lead to a larger inquiry into various sources of energy. Throughout the unit, students are asked to reflect on their own practices and what actions they can take in order to make a change for the better. In Arab Social Studies students learn about the UAE's commitment to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals while simultaneously learning about the country's dependence on oil. In Design and Innovation class, the students are tasked with noticing issues around the school (and their own homes) that don't align with the idea of sustainability, and create solutions to improve the situation. In the end, the Grade 4 team hopes that students will find it within themselves to act positively to make this world a healthier place to live in, because nobody wants to swim in an ocean full of plastic!



Powerful provocations such as these can have a lasting impact on the minds of students. While they are educational, they are much more than that. Powerful provocations are never forgotten. The long-standing members of the Fourth-Grade team have High School seniors approach them simply to mention the provocations they had experienced when they were fourth grade so many years ago!



While they are educational, they are much more than that. Powerful provocations are never forgotten.



METAVERSE

Just like previous centuries were marked by the industrial revolution and the advent of the Internet, the twenty-first century may be remembered for the inception of a new world, or "metaverse" offering an immersive virtual experience unlike any other to date. Dr. Joseph Nettikaden, Esol Education's Chief Information Officer, takes a deep dive to bring us up to speed with this emerging new world.

By: Dr. Joseph Nettikaden, Chief Information Officer, Esol Education

WHAT IS THE METAVERSE?

"Snow Crash," a 1992 science fiction novel by Neal Stephenson, first introduced the idea of the "metaverse." In this post-apocalyptic novel, humans are able to interact in a virtual online 3D world via individual personal devices and VR goggles, or public devices. Real estate can be bought and developed, individual users can appear in avatars of their choosing, and even move about using the virtual monorail programmed into the virtual environment.

Today Stephenson is hailed as a futurist in tech circles, and many of his concepts, including the metaverse, have gained traction in the form of apps and new technological developments.

The metaverse that is now making waves among digital enthusiasts is a shared digital environment that allows users to "live" virtually using their 3D avatars, without ever having to leave the comfort of their homes. Proponents are imagining a sophisticated virtual reality that will allow people to move seamlessly between the physical and digital world, a major future technology trend for business and human interaction.

Implications for our World

Open-source blockchain technology, freely available to anyone around the world, is emerging as a foundational component of the metaverse, allowing it to be owned by everyone rather than a specific private or public entity. The decentralized nature of blockchain technology is a key driver behind this trend. Blockchain-based networks create permanent records of business transactions by storing multiple copies of them on different devices on the network, and recording them in a decentralized public database known as a "ledger." This recording system offers easy verification of transactions, automatically securing them against manipulation or falsification of data. It also enables secure peer-to-peer transactions without the need for a central authorizing body, fueling the rise of cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin, as well as NFTs (non-fungible tokens), smart contracts and more.

Once fully developed the metaverse will have a profound impact on not just traditional vocations and activities, but also on how humans interact with one another. Some of the factors that will underpin the metaverse's success are free access, easy operability and the ease of transacting online, which in-turn hinges on cryptocurrencies, which are already being used to finance both real-world as well as digital transactions.

Future Possibilities with the Metaverse

When the COVID-19 epidemic swept the globe, crippling economies, the Internet and the resulting Work from Home (WFH) technology aides were instrumental in keeping businesses afloat, and in some cases, rapidly expanding. Various sectors, including K-12 and higher education, have seen significant transformations because of the epidemic and have grown more technologically demanding. By incorporating augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR)-based wearables, the metaverse has the potential to further transform these industries. Using wearables, students will be able to travel to different virtual worlds in the metaverse from the comfort of their homes and classrooms. Just like the popularity of virtual parent meetings and online conferences, people will no longer have to worry about traveling long distances, or even dressing up for events! Children will be able to study a variety of subjects and courses at their own pace, broadening their horizons beyond what standard syllabi allow. After-work and school activities such as watching movies or socializing with friends will be available in the virtual world without the limitations of the physical world. As organizations accelerate their digital transformation, the metaverse can help people meet up in a digital environment, making meetings more comfortable with the use of avatars, and facilitate creative collaboration from all around the world. In a nutshell, the metaverse presents infinite potential!

Beyond opportunities for retail and service industries, or balancing work and life, the metaverse can also be used for a range of social and business applications. From quickly rolling out training in different fields such as medicine, technology, manufacturing or retail, to arts and music lessons to live concerts, shows and book clubs, the possibilities are endless.

The immersive environment of the metaverse isn't just an opportunity for consumer-facing companies, or balancing work and life - there are plenty of business applications. Jensen Huang, CEO of the world's largest maker of graphics and artificial intelligence chips, Nvidia, believes simulations in the metaverse can translate to billions of dollars of savings in the real world. In a recent interview, he told CNBC: "We waste a whole bunch of things to overcompensate for the fact that we don't simulate. We want to simulate all factories in metaverses, in this omniverse. We want to simulate plants in omniverse. We want to simulate the world's power grids in the omniverse. By doing that, we could decrease the amount of waste, and that's the reason why the economics are so good for companies," he continued. "They're willing to invest a small amount of money to buy into this artificial intelligence capability but what they save is hopefully hundreds of billions of dollars."



"Using wearables, students will be able to travel to different virtual worlds in the metaverse from the comfort of their homes and classrooms."



Meanwhile, Microsoft is gearing up its cloud services to create a foundation for the metaverse, using its Mesh platform to enable avatars and immersive spaces to thread into its collaboration environments, such as Teams. With post-Covid hybrid or remote working environments, many of these more creative virtual business experiences are likely to become even more relevant to how companies connect to their people and to their customers. Large-scale artificial intelligence models are now becoming platforms, creating ambient intelli – digital environments that are responsive and aware of a user's needs. These AI breakthroughs can be used by organizations in a variety of ways, from deploying intelligent agents to aid in customer service to extracting information from volumes of unstructured data.

Armed with the ease of converting conventional currency into cryptocurrencies, people will be able to seamlessly switch between the physical world and the metaverse. From digital avatar enhancement and buying virtual property to throwing a baby shower, consumers can buy a range of goods, services and experiences using cryptocurrencies in the metaverse.

Artists will perform in the metaverse, get paid in cryptocurrencies, and exchange those earnings for goods in the physical world. The expansion of the metaverse will be powered by different groups or companies. These groups or companies may build their own versions of the metaverse, but the real expansion and growth of the metaverse will be realized when these different versions become interoperable, allowing participants to carry their cryptocurrencies and goods from one to another, thus leading to a rapid expansion of the metaverse.

Fashion retail could be transformed with virtual showrooms and digital fashion shows being accessible to a mass audience. And people aren't just selling physical goods! In fact, the auction house, Sotheby's recently announced its own metaverse gallery for curated virtual art, housed in Decentraland (a 3D virtual world open to public where users perform commercial transactions using the Mana cryptocurrency, which is based on Ethereum blockchain). New business models for influencers, virtual goods including NFTs, and commerce on physical goods purchased in virtual worlds will all emerge in importance as capabilities scale.

With major technology companies such as Meta (Facebook) and Amazon (Web Services) working on solutions to build the metaverse and offer blockchain network support, other companies are sure to follow, leading to exponential growth of the metaverse, providing value to both consumers and investors.

As the global companies work expediently towards establishing a foothold in this nascent digital space, some psychologists and mental health experts convey caution on the impact on the development of children in K-12 age group. Recent research has shown the negative psychological effects of social media on children and adolescents, with increased self-esteem and body image issues, as well as more commonplace online bullying and harassment. The concern expressed from social-emotional wellbeing experts is that these issues could be exacerbated in the metaverse. If the companies building these new virtual worlds can address these concerns in a purposeful manner, then perhaps they can find technology-based solutions to remedy the related mental health issues.

History provides several examples of positive and negative use cases emerging from new technologies. Educating oneself is the best approach when considering the use and adoption of new technologies. At this early stage of the metaverse, it is hard to predict what the future holds, but looking ahead you can be an active participant in this new virtual landscape.



Dr. Nettikaden is responsible for setting the technology vision and strategy for Esol Education, and overseeing the integration of technology into Esol schools' curricula, with a strong focus on the administration, operations and implementation of technology programs. Dr. Nettikaden also explores new, innovative technologies to enhance teaching and learning at all Esol Education schools. He manages the technology departments at all Esol schools, which strive to provide an exceptional user experience to students and teachers, by taking advantage of organizational synergies and the standardization of operational processes. Dr. Nettikaden earned a Doctorate in Education from Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California, MBA from Northern Illinois University and MS in Information Technology from Northwestern University. Apart from spending time with his family, he is passionate about new technologies and understanding the impact of these technologies on the daily lives of people.

HOMECOMING

Returning to the Esol Education family, Mr. Jeff Smith took over the reins as Director at Dunecrest American School at the beginning of the 2021-2022 academic year. *STRIDES* caught up with this dynamic leader to learn more about his fascinating background and his plans for Dunecrest for the coming years.

Tell us a little about yourself.
I grew up in Manchester, UK (originally in foster care) in the North of England. I attended Smithills Moor Grammar School, Bolton, and went on to study Physics at Coventry University. I spent nine years in the British Army in a specialist airborne unit. I've always had an interest in outdoor pursuits such as mountaineering and fell-running, and am happiest when in a tent on a mountain! I started my educational career teaching Physics and Mathematics, and moved abroad with my first international school position as Head of Secondary at an international school in Jakarta, Indonesia. In 2017, I earned my Master's Degree in Leadership and Management in International Education. I am married to Heather who is from Keswick in the Lake District. We have been married for 32 years 4 months, 3 days and 8 hours , but who's counting! All three of our children, Helen, Joe and Elliot are in the medical profession, we are also blessed with two grandchildren, Sebastian, 7 and Lani, 3.

How long have you worked with the Esol organization and what brought you back to leading another Esol Education school?
I spent seven years as Director at Deira International School (DIS), Festival City Dubai 2011 – 2018, and I re-joined Esol Education in August 2021. I had a great experience working with Esol previously at DIS and enjoyed the family orientated approach (non-corporate) as well as the freedom offered to School Directors to innovate with a high degree of independence in a mutually trusting relationship.

What does effective school leadership look like in your view?
School leadership starts with a clear realistic vision understood by all and a high degree of respect and trust across the school community. Teachers need to know they are valued and respected and that they are regarded as the biggest asset the school has. Parents and students need to know that their opinions and voice will be heard and that all decisions are based on what is best for students.

What has been your most unforgettable experience as an educator?
The most unforgettable experience you can have as an educator is when you know you have had an impact on a student's life. As a Deputy Headteacher in the UK, I was responsible for pastoral care. One student called David, had many problems and most teachers, including the Headteacher, wanted him expelled from school because of his behavior. David's mother had died from drug abuse, his father was in prison, and he lived in an awful children's care home. Having been in care myself, and having left home at age 15, which was David's age at that time, we connected, and I understood his frustration with the world. I put a plan in place that would keep David in school. In short, he completed the basic qualifications required to join the Royal Navy and went on to have a very successful naval career. I explained to him that joining the military would provide a wage, a bed and three meals a day, and he could re-set his life, just as I had been able to do with my own. I received a Christmas card from David every year and in one he quoted verbatim what I said to him while at school; "you can make your difficult childhood your excuse for failure or your reason to succeed – you choose". I am proud to say, he chose to succeed. Teachers should never forget the power they have to change lives.

Name three things you feel are key to student success.
- Being happy and feeling safe at school
- High-quality, exciting and engaging teaching



- A wide array of opportunities to help students develop personally and academically

What aspirations do you have for Dunecrest for the coming years?
I would like Dunecrest to be known as the best American school in Dubai, then the UAE, then the region, celebrated for its happiness, wellbeing and student experience, as well as the school of choice for educators in the region to teach, innovate and develop further professionally.

"Teachers should never forget the power they have to change lives."

RAPID FIRE

1. What book would be at the top of your must-read list for educators?
Jonathan Livingston Seagull by Richard Bach

2. The best advice you ever received?
Focus on helping those around you succeed which will be the best measure of your own success.

3. Tech you would like to master?
Google Classroom

4. Your favorite movie of all time?
Local Hero

5. Most inspirational travel destination
The Lake District in the UK for its stunning beauty

Photo credit: ©Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi

A crescent of towns, forts, traditional Bedouin villages and date farms, Liwa is a gateway to the infinite Rub Al Khali, or the Empty Quarter, of Arabia.

THE TERRIFYING MOUNTAIN

Whether you live in the UAE or are just visiting, an endless panorama of sand and sky awaits a within a few hours drive to the edge of the world's largest continuous desert, whose unearthly landscape served as the backdrop to movies such as Dune and Star Wars VII, as well as the upcoming Tom Cruise-starrer, Mission Impossible 7

A two-and-a-half-hour drive away from Abu Dhabi, through majestic sand dunes, lies Liwa Oasis. This ancient province is the ancestral home of the Bani Yas, one of the most influential tribes of Southern Arabia, the forebears of the ruling Al Nahyan and Al Maktoum families of the Emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. According to legend, in 1761 clansmen followed a gazelle from Liwa to the shores of what was to become the gleaming city of Abu Dhabi, growing from a collection of barasti (palm-frond) huts, to a modern, technologically advanced city.

Nothing compares to the quietness you feel at sunrise in the desert.



However, until 1795, and for more than 400 years prior, Liwa served as headquarters of the Bani Yas, and remains a charming settlement today. A crescent of towns, forts, traditional Bedouin villages and date farms located deep in the desert, on the edge of the UAE-Saudi border, Liwa is a gateway to the infinite Rub Al Khali, or the Empty Quarter, of Arabia. The driest region in the world, lying virtually uninhabited, Rub Al Khali has tantalized kings and explorers with its otherworldly beauty, while standing unconquerable with its daunting, uninterrupted expanse of sand, the largest in the world.

Guarding its entrance is Tel Moreeb or "Terrifying Mountain," one of the tallest sand dunes in the world. Accessing the dune is via a paved road, just a short 15-minute drive from Liwa, and doesn't require a four-wheel-drive vehicle. The base of the dune is the permanent site of the annual Liwa Tal Moreeb Festival, the highlight of which is a race to the top of the dune. The festival brings together desert enthusiasts for a week of camping, 4WD and bike races, as well as fringe events including a drag race, motocross track challenge, camel race, horse race, classic cars competition, freestyle drifting and heritage events. On a regular day, dune buggies and sandboards abound, as do people attempting to drive up the dune in their 4WDs.

The drive out to Tel Moreeb certainly provides a preview of the majestic desert scenery of Rub Al Khali. However, persistence pays, and should you manage to surmount its 300 meter height, climbing shifting sands at an intimidating 50 degree incline, this imposing dune offers spectacular views of the extraordinary desert it defends.

DESERT DIARY

"Nothing compares to the quietness you feel at sunrise in the desert," shares Ms. Crystal Hanna, Early Childhood Principal at Dunecrest American School, who embarked on a short yet transformative desert trek into the Liwa Dunes this school year. The trip was organized by a local trekking company that organizes fun hikes, treks and camping trips for trekkers of all different abilities and fitness levels.

A three hour and fifteen minute drive from Dubai, the group arrived at the Residence at the Liwa Art Hub, farm-style lodgings located at the edge of the desert. Upon arrival, trekkers could settle in, have a quick swim and refresh themselves before setting off behind the lodgings for a trek up a dune, to finish the day with spectacular sunset views of the desert. Upon their return, they were greeted by a BBQ dinner around a campfire. When it was time to turn in, Ms. Hanna and a few other campers, opted to spend the night in the desert, under a blanket of stars. The next day started off with an early morning trek to catch the sunrise, followed by a light breakfast, and then desert trekking, to complete a 10k trail.

"You are surprised by exactly how much you're capable of," remarks Ms. Hanna. "Making friends with people you don't know, looking out for each other, and developing a respect for the desert" were all part of the uniqueness of this unforgettable experience for her.

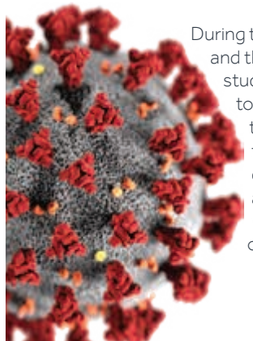
To discover more treks, for the 2022 season starting this fall, visit **www.uaetrekkers.com**

THE PANDEMIC: LESSONS LEARNED OR GOODBYE TO ALL THAT

As I write this it will be 675 days since the start of the spread of Covid. If what the scientists are telling us is true that the threat from this pandemic is receding, is this the opportunity to reflect on what positive lessons in education we have learned from this painful and incredibly disruptive experience? What is the legacy for schools?

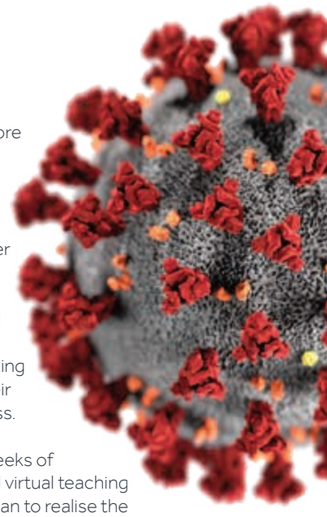
By: Peter Daly, Chief Education Consultant, Esol Education

During this period school leaders, teachers, students and parents have been forced to adapt, transform and respond rapidly to a changing situation. It has placed the education sector into a position it has never been situated in before. It has brought into focus just how, when and in what format or style does a school communicate with their parents. Schools had to establish a shared sense of purpose, a sense of calm and authority. They had to show that they were on top of this situation and parents would have trust and confidence in them to get things right. The message had to be clear that even though we suspected the opposite, virtual learning would not impinge too heavily on the learning experience and progress of students. As schools moved to full on distance learning followed by periods of blended, hybrid and face to face opportunities, it was made clear that schools would not compromise safety and that school leaders were aware of the challenges parents were facing with a disrupted situation that was often impacting on their livelihoods and putting them in very unfamiliar situations with their child's education. At the same time leaders and medical staff communicated more regularly with parents, often daily related to ever changing health and safety protocols, explaining and decodifying conflicting guidelines from the variety of regulatory bodies that evolved overnight and at the same time reassure parents that their children would continue to receive a quality education in an ever-changing situation.



During the latter half of 2020 and throughout 2021 students and teachers had to come to terms with teaching and learning that moved from full on distance virtual learning at home interspersed with blended and hybrid options with the gradual return of face-to-face learning in school. Communications became more frequent and varied with schools continuing to use the traditional forms of communication through newsletters and email announcements to newer forms of contact through videos, open virtual sessions, blogs, social media and the ubiquitous WhatsApp parent groups. For many parents this was an opportunity to have an unparalleled and exceptional access to school and their child's education and a similar level of access to the leadership team of the school.

Through the creation of the virtual classroom parents, many for the first time, had direct access into their child's classroom and firsthand involvement in their child's learning. Almost overnight the appreciation by parents for teachers grew as a greater understanding of their role and the challenge of their occupation was recognised. For many parents they had to relearn how to read with their younger children and assist with complex mathematics problems that suddenly seemed so much more difficult than when they were at school. They became partners in their child's education. There was no longer the mystery of what happens in a classroom. Parents had a direct lens into the educational life of their child and the work of a teacher and a direct contact with the teacher, particularly in secondary schools, that they had previously not experienced.



They were more aware of the progress of their child and virtual parent teacher meets was celebrated as a streamlined and effective means of finding out about their childs progress.

After a few weeks of lockdown and virtual teaching everyone began to realise the importance of why children must attend school not just for their academic growth. The impact all over the world on students with their faces glued to screens for long periods of the day was impacting negatively on their social, emotional and personal development exacerbated by the lack of daily interactions with peers. Wellbeing and mental health came under the spotlight. The absence of collaborative learning and the challenge of learning virtually more active subjects such as art, music, physical education and science compounded by the absence of extra-curricular activities were skewing a child's learning experience. The reaction was a range of initiatives were developed that involved counsellors, other support staff including external agencies,

This is a time to reflect and consider what did work in schools and what could be taken forward for the future.



after school classes, buddy systems, break out groups and peer teaching by older to younger students who could provide one to one tutorials and much needed support to the hard pressed and isolated teacher. The teacher realised they now had an even greater role in providing emotional support for their students and the need for more one to one conversations and support. Some students became more confident in their learning; some students such as the recluse, the loner, the introvert, those who are less outgoing seemed to cope and enjoy the new situation. Maybe they at last had a voice. For the majority this was a dull and uninspiring way to learn. The fun had gone out of school.

The quick and easy to complete survey began to proliferate as schools required immediate feedback on success of communications with parents, the wellbeing of students and views and opinions of the success and preference for of virtual, distance, hybrid or face to face learning. This became a vital source of information for schools to act upon with immediacy.

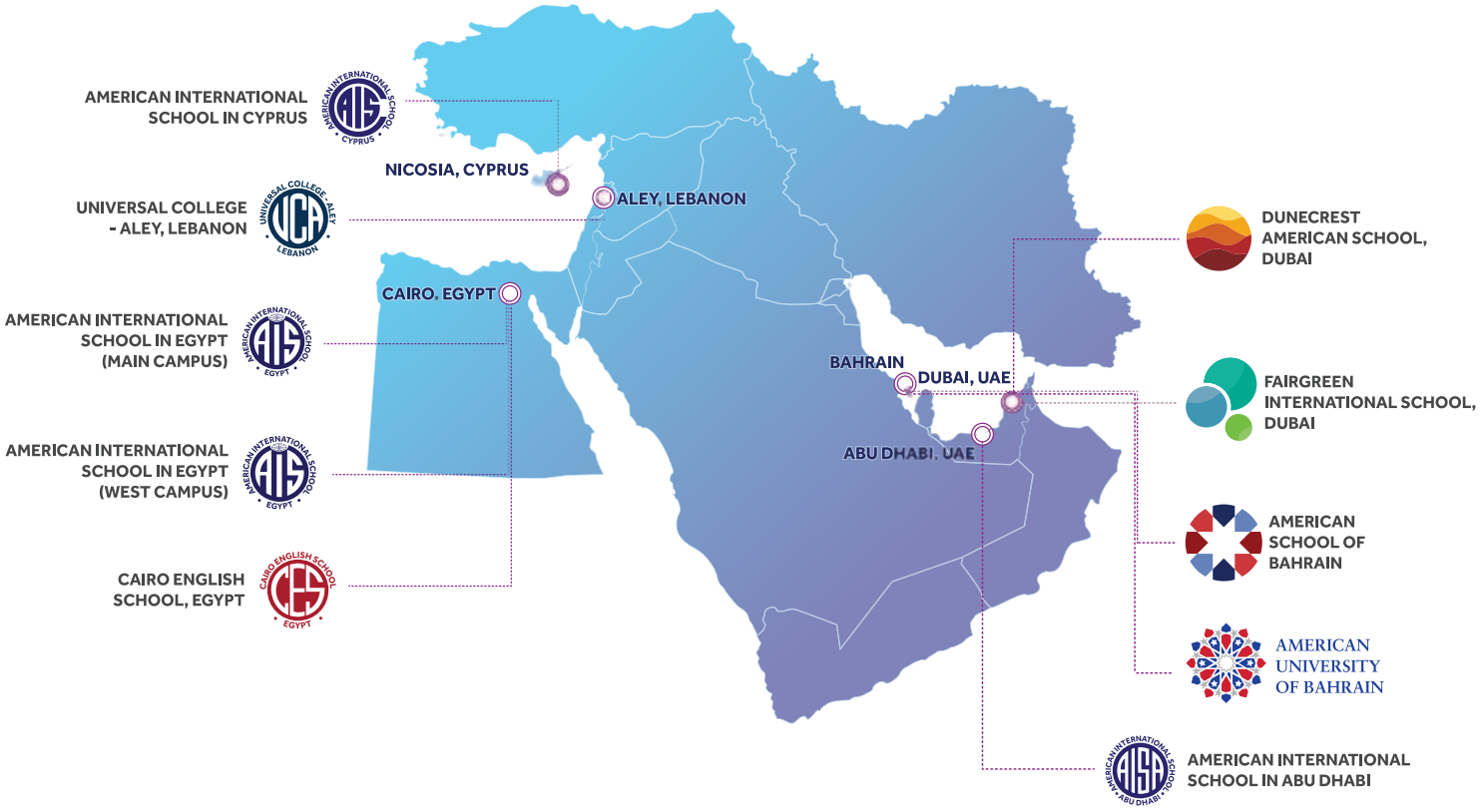
What are the positives to take away from this time that we can look to retain? The option of the virtual parent teacher meet has been retained by many schools and welcomed by parents who have the found the process much improved. Gone was the drudge of the traffic challenged journey to school, the queuing, the rising anger at parent who would skip the line or the one who exceeded their time limit. An evening of frustration and annoyance suddenly transformed into a more serene and positive experience.

It has forced schools to view modifications to the curriculum in a more positive way given that the priority was what content would and would not work in a virtual environment. Digital platforms have proliferated as well as personalised on-line learning with built in assessments. Students are improved researchers with many taking a much greater responsibility for their own learning. Technological innovation has been accelerated and all teachers have become comfortable and expert in use of systems to enhance teaching and learning that otherwise would have taken years to develop. 'Necessity was the mother of invention' as schools had to ramp up their technical infrastructures and improve their networks to accommodate the new teaching, learning and assessment requirements. For many schools there was a need to support the isolated, and sometimes frustrated and overworked teacher. Wellness groups were formed with the use of mentors and coaches with a focus on the mental health and wellbeing of staff. Distributed leadership was practiced more than ever before

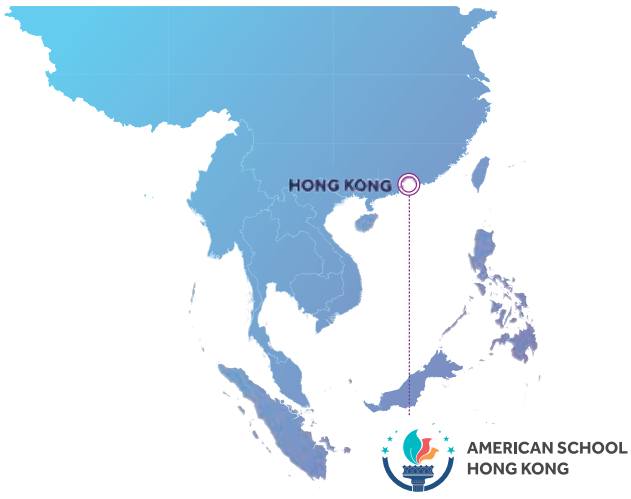
However, the disruption has been enormous and the impact on many children not so positive particularly in the public/ state school sector. Many students are experiencing curriculum deficit. There are now studies emerging indicating students in some countries have fallen up to three years behind their reading age. The pandemic led to a slower pace of learning and these deficits must be recovered. The impact on the mental health and wellbeing of students has been well documented. This is a time to reflect and consider what did work in schools and what could be taken forward for the future. We cannot ignore the progress and the success of what did work over the last two years and schools should look to reflect, identify and then embed those changes and adaptations that have resulted in positive outcomes for students, parents, school leaders and teachers.

The Esol Education schools

MIDDLE EAST & MEDITERRANEAN



EAST ASIA



Esol Education FZ LLC

P.O. Box 500720
Block 2A, First Floor, Suite 45
Dubai Knowledge Park, UAE

www.esoleducation.com

T: +971 4 364 4802
F: +971 4 367 8424

E: info@esoleducation.com