SINGAPORE AMERICAN SCHOOL

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Why are you even thinking about this?

While we started this process with the objective of keeping the elementary school (ES) as a single division, we heard time and again from teachers and parents during the process about the challenge of the size of the ES. The ES is the largest of any international school ES, and it is more than double that of any other IASAS elementary school. It is roughly the size of our MS and HS put together.

Many of you urged that we consider going back to a two division model, which we had for many years at SAS before consolidating a decade ago into a single ES. Your emphasis was that two divisions of approximately 1000 students and 150-200 educators each would allow for more personal interactions and closer personal relationships that could help the new leaders build trust and understanding more quickly.

For us, this was less a question about "What is the current problem that you are trying to solve?" and more a question of "How do we best set up David's successor(s) and the entire ES for success going forward?"

We heard your feedback and accepted the importance of having discussions with you on this question of one vs two divisions before we made a principal hiring decision. We engaged in several dozen conversations with educators, parents and school leaders and heard a wide variety of views.

What feedback did you hear?

Here are some of the benefits we heard of two divisions as we met with educators and parents:

- "One of the benefits would be the ability to focus on the developmental differences and create more targeted structures and professional learning for educators"
- "Do it now—the benefits outweigh the cons. Hire now and get two strong people who can work out the kinks."
- "When it was two divisions, it felt smaller, like a family"
- "Having two principals would help make it more streamlined"
- "A smaller team, smaller faculty, and smaller student body could streamline things and allow for decisions to be made more quickly"

And, here are some of the questions and concerns raised:

- "The goal is to create a community but this might make people feel further apart"
- "Having two would be disjointed from a school culture perspective"
- "We would need to make sure the leaders were calibrated so one divisions doesn't appear better than another"
- "Need to think about how to streamline communications between two divisions"
- "The building and staffing wasn't designed to be split so you can't just split places like the library and gyms"

In fact, of the over 100 educators and parents who expressed their opinion in meetings and in surveys, there was nearly an even split between keeping one ES division or having two.

Why are two divisions better than one?

We feel on balance that a two division model will offer a more successful, more personal, and more agile structure. It will allow each principal to develop closer relationships with a smaller set of educators, students and parents. Those relationships are key to building trust and understanding all that is going on in a division. The smaller scale will help the leaders get direct feedback from educators and make and communicate targeted decisions in a timely fashion. It will also help them target more developmentally appropriate professional development and strategies to the students at that level.

The analogy with our middle and high schools is relevant here. Our middle and high schools combined have about the same number of students as the ES and the same number of grade levels (eight in ES starting with preschool and seven in the MS and HS). Few would advocate for combining the MS and HS into a single 6-12 secondary school. The reasons for not doing so are all the same reasons that we favor having two divisions in the ES rather than one.

We do acknowledge the concerns many of you have expressed around alignment. Having two divisions in the ES (much as having separate MS and HS divisions) creates the need for us to focus clearly on issues of alignment to serve kids and families well as they go through their formative years. Much of this need for alignment across ages and grade levels exists regardless of whether there is one ES division or two, but having two divisions may make the alignment work more complex. We recognize this as a downside of having two divisions and are committed to the time and focus to address the issues that will arise.

How will the model work?

We want to give our leaders, and you, the time and space to help shape how this new structure should work. Other than the very basic decision that the lower ES will be P-2 and the upper ES will be grades 3-5, no final decisions have been made about the details of alignment, naming, or division of responsibilities. This is intentional. We want our leaders to have the chance to listen, collaborate, and co-create this with deputy

principals, educators, and parents. Your questions and insights will be essential in this process, and we believe that by starting now, we give our community the best chance to get this right.

One of the central issues is to think about how to align and support the key vertical programs that need to be thoughtfully led and aligned P-5, including Chinese immersion, learning support, specials (art, music, PE), counseling/deans/school psychologists, and EAL. How would each of these vital P-5 vertical efforts work in a two division model? Where should responsibilities lie separated within each division and where should there be a single P-5 structure led by one of the two principals? This is something that we feel we should not decide now but only after deep consultation with educators in each of these areas, deputy principals, and the new principals.

Why do this now?

In our conversations, some of you supported the idea of two divisions but cautioned on its timing, wondering whether we could wait a year or two before we made a decision. As we thought about it, we felt that it would be better to make a decision now. Delaying the decision by one to two years could result in a period of uncertainty, hesitation, and confusion for the new leader and ES educators. Making a decision now, by contrast, would allow the new principal(s) to begin with clear goals and expectations and greater certainty about what lies ahead.

We have been fortunate, moreover, to have such a deep pool of highly qualified finalists this year, which presents an excellent opportunity to welcome two outstanding leaders. By appointing both principals now, we give them the chance to transition together, learn alongside each other, and build a cohesive leadership model from the outset.

Summary

We are grateful for the feedback shared. It pushed our thinking and led us to reconsider our assumptions.

Our objective is to place our leaders in the best position to succeed and we believe that moving to a two-principal model places both of our leaders and their teams in the best position to effectively lead and serve our community.

If you have any additional questions or ideas, please feel free to reach out to us directly.

Best,

Tom Boasberg, Superintendent
Dr. Jennifer Sparrow, Deputy Superintendent