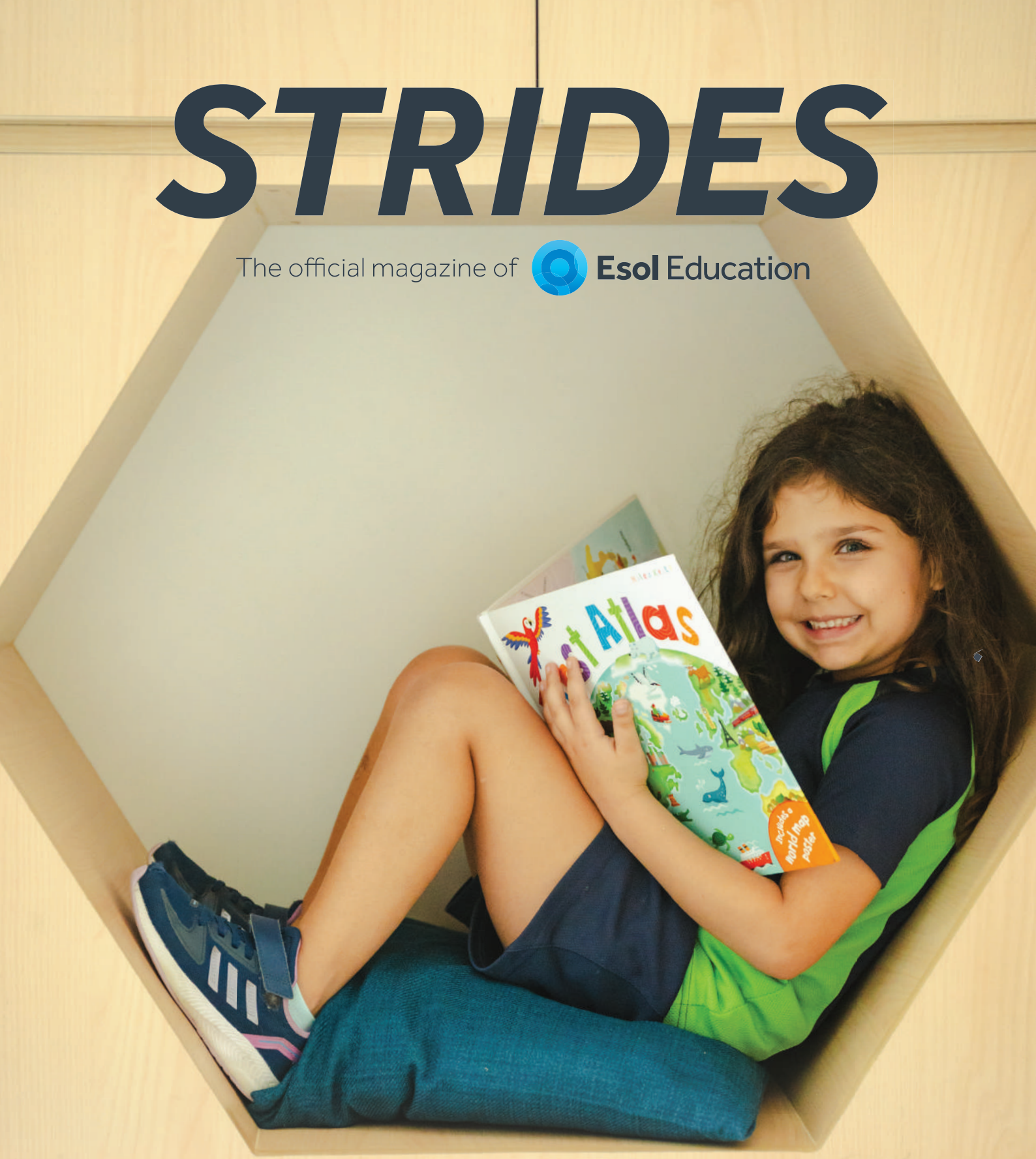
STRIDES

The official magazine of Esol Education



BEHIND THE SCENES

Step behind the curtain and discover Esol Education, the quiet force behind our schools, powering educational excellence for nearly 50 years.

ISSUE 11 • Spring 2025

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STRIDES
The official magazine of Esol Education – ISSUE 11 | Spring 2025

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.

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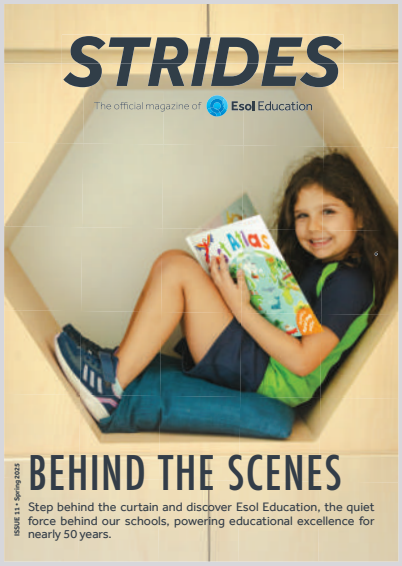


STRENGTHENING OUR FOUNDATIONS

As another academic year draws to a close, we take a moment to reflect on life at Esol Education schools - bustling campuses filled with creativity, curiosity, and the daily rhythm of discovery. Across continents and time zones, our school communities continue to flourish through innovation, collaboration, and a steadfast commitment to student success.

This issue of ***STRIDES*** invites you to explore both the visible and the unseen threads that make up the fabric of our educational ecosystem. In our cover feature, we turn the lens inward with *Behind the Scenes*. While our school communities are filled with the energy of student-teacher interaction, take a peek behind the curtain to see the Esol Education organization quietly supporting this dynamic landscape-strategically guiding our schools and ensuring they are well-resourced and future-ready.

In a world where Artificial Intelligence is rapidly reshaping how we teach and learn, our Chief Information Officer, Dr. Joseph Nettikaden, explores how schools can adopt AI thoughtfully and responsibly in *Navigating the AI Fastlane*. Our interview feature, *New Game. New Playbook*, revisits our long-standing relationship with the Middle States Association, whose President, Christian Talbot, offers compelling insights into K–12 education in an evolving world, from cutting-edge teaching practices to the transformative force of AI in education.

Step into school life in *The Brief*, where you'll find snapshots of inspiring student initiatives and campus happenings from across our global network. In *Trailblazers*, we proudly celebrate Omar Marmoush, AIS Egypt alumnus and Manchester City forward, alongside Ismahene Elouafi, an Esol parent and one of TIME's 100 most influential people of 2025.

Our *In Class* section takes you on a musical journey, highlighting the achievements of the music program at American School Hong Kong. Dunecrest American School shares how a data-informed approach is helping students thrive emotionally and socially through continuous digital surveys that measure student and staff sentiment. Environmental sustainability takes center stage at the newly inaugurated Greenhouse at AIS West, a shining example of how parent-school partnerships can bring green learning to life.

Turn to *Meeting Minds*, where we connect with John Jalsevac, whose leadership journey through three Esol schools reveals the dedication and vision that continue to shape our network. Don't miss our *Unexplored* section, where Dr. Bassem Akl, Middle School Principal at Universal College, Aley, guides us through the ancient Phoenician world, tracing the origins of maritime trade and literacy to the historic city of Byblos in Lebanon—a cultural legacy that echoes into our present. Finally, in *Last Word*, Dr. Andrew Torris reflects on a future that's more hopeful than robotic, reminding us that while AI may change the world, it's human purpose and connection that will define it.

We hope this edition of *Strides* leaves you informed, inspired, and connected to the extraordinary journey we are all on together. Thank you to our teachers, school leaders, parents, and students for your continued passion and partnership.

Wishing you all a restful, joyful summer,
Sincerely,
The Esol Education Team

ESOL EDUCATION

ESOL EDUCATION'S AMERICAN SCHOOL OF BAHRAIN ACHIEVES HISTORIC "OUTSTANDING" RATING

Esol Education proudly congratulates the team at the American School of Bahrain (ASB) for achieving an "Outstanding" rating across all categories in the recent inspection by the Education & Training Quality Authority (BQA)-a remarkable milestone for a school which has been in operation for just five years.

This top-tier rating is a significant achievement, reflecting excellence in the rated areas of Academic Achievement, Personal Development and Social Responsibility, Teaching, Learning and Assessment, and Leadership, Management and Governance. ASB's accomplishment is a testament to the strength of its educational vision, dedicated faculty, and the supportive partnership of students and families.

As part of the Esol Education family of schools, ASB shares in a legacy of nearly 50 years of delivering high-quality international education. With a network spanning the UAE, Hong Kong, Egypt, Lebanon, and Bahrain, Esol schools are committed to nurturing globally minded, passionate learners through challenging academics, inclusive environments, and internationally recognized programs.

"This recognition is a testament to our dedicated educators, motivated students, and supportive community," said Radia Ali, IB & BQA Coordinator at ASB.

Founded in 2020, ASB offers a comprehensive American curriculum enriched with local and international perspectives, and the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme. The school's rapid ascent to the highest BQA rating highlights the exceptional leadership, innovative teaching practices, and commitment to excellence that define both ASB and its sister Esol Education schools.

"Our commitment is to provide a learning environment where students are encouraged to think critically and develop a passion for lifelong learning," Ms. Ali added.

Esol Education celebrates this outstanding achievement and looks forward to ASB's continued success as a center of educational excellence in Bahrain and the region.

ASB at a Glance

AN "OUTSTANDING" SCHOOL
Education & Training Quality Authority (BQA)

Founded
2020

Curriculum
American and International, with the IB Diploma Programme

Global Family
an Esol Education school

Inspection Body
Education & Training Quality Authority (BQA)

Recognition
Among the highest-rated schools in Bahrain in under five years

NEW LEADERS, NEW VISION

Welcoming Three Dynamic Educators to the Esol Education Leadership Team

In line with Esol Education's mission to deliver high-quality, values-driven international education, we are proud to welcome three exceptional leaders to our global team. Each brings a strong track record of academic leadership, innovation, and a deep commitment to student success.

Dr. Natasha Williams, Mr. Michael Roberts, and Mr. Rory McKeague, three accomplished international educators will assume key roles across the Esol Education network in August 2025.

Dr. Natasha Williams | Education Officer

Joining Esol Education from Hong Kong, Dr. Natasha Williams will serve as Education Officer, bringing deep expertise in curriculum leadership, instructional quality, and organizational improvement. She will be based in Dubai, taking on the strategic oversight of teaching and learning across five Esol campuses: Dunecrest American School, Fairgreen International School, American International School in Abu Dhabi (AISA), American School of Bahrain (ASB), and Cairo English School (CES). She will also lead and support Esol-wide initiatives in curriculum, pedagogy, professional development, and other areas, as well as pursue new areas of focus for Esol, such as new technology-based initiatives
Dr. Williams currently serves as Head of Education, Quality Improvement and Support for the English Schools Foundation (ESF), an organization comprising 22 schools and over 18,000 students. Prior to this role, she led Renaissance College Secondary School as Principal, positioning it as a high-performing, innovative learning environment.

She will work alongside Dr. Kapono Ciotti and succeed Mr. Peter Daly, who has provided more than a decade of valued leadership in this role. Dr. Williams' arrival reinforces Esol's commitment to continued instructional innovation and the professional growth of educators across our network.

Dr. Natasha Williams

Current role: Head of Education, ESF (Hong Kong)

Previous role: Principal, Renaissance College Secondary School, Hong Kong

Expertise: Curriculum Design, Quality Assurance, Professional Development

Location: Dubai, UAE, Hong Kong

Mr. Michael Roberts | Incoming Director, Dunecrest American School

Mr. Michael Roberts will assume the role of Director at Dunecrest American School, following the expert guidance and leadership of Mr. Jeff Smith. Michael brings nearly 30 years of international education experience, including 15 years in senior leadership positions. His academic background includes a Bachelor's degree in English and European Literature, a PGCE, and a Master's in Educational Leadership and Management from the University of Bath.

Michael began his career in London and has since worked in Thailand, China, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Qatar—primarily within American curriculum schools. He is an experienced leader in both AP and IB programs and has served as an IBDP Examiner and a Council of International Schools (CIS) Evaluator. He comes to Dunecrest after serving for nine years as High School Principal at the American School of Doha, where he oversaw significant academic growth and student achievement.

Michael is passionate about inclusive, community-led leadership and believes that schools should prepare students not only for higher education but for meaningful, well-rounded lives. His leadership philosophy centers on empowerment, shared responsibility, and continuous improvement.

He will be joined in Dubai by his wife Emma, an international educator, and their four children.

Michael Roberts

Current role: High School Principal, American School of Doha

Expertise: AP/IB programs, Servant Leadership, School Growth

Education: MA in Educational Leadership, University of Bath

Location: Dubai, UAE

Interests: Reading, fitness, team building

Mr. Rory McKeague | Incoming Director, Cairo English School

Mr. Rory McKeague will take on the role of Director at Cairo English School (CES) in August 2025.

Rory brings over 20 years of leadership experience in diverse educational settings across the UK, Ireland, and Hong Kong. A graduate of Queen's University Belfast with a BSc in Mathematics, he began his teaching career in Northumberland and went on to serve as Mathematics Advisor for County Durham and Assistant Headteacher in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

He later moved to Ireland as Deputy Head at Dundalk Grammar School before joining King George V (KGV) School in Hong Kong as Vice Principal and Head of Senior School.

Rory is committed to fostering thriving learning communities that balance academic rigor with personal growth and social responsibility. He holds a Master's degree in Education with First Class Honours from University College Dublin and brings a student-centered, future-focused perspective to his work.

His deep understanding of international education and ability to build inclusive, high-performing teams will support CES as it continues to grow and evolve.

Rory McKeague

Current role: Vice Principal, King George V School (Hong Kong)

Education: MSc in Education, University College Dublin

Expertise: Academic excellence, team leadership, holistic development

Location: Cairo, Egypt

Dr. Williams, Mr. Roberts, and Mr. McKeague's appointments underscore Esol's continued investment in exceptional leadership and educational excellence. We look forward to the insight, innovation, and integrity that each of them will bring to our schools—and to the lasting impact their leadership will have on our students, staff, and global community.

A CELEBRATION OF SPORTSMANSHIP

Esol Education Sportsfest: 3 Days, 4 Schools, 100+ Athletes

The spirit of unity, sportsmanship, and international friendship was on full display from May 15 to 17, as students from four different Esol Education's family of international American schools gathered at American School of Bahrain (ASB) for the second annual Esol Education Sportsfest.

This year's tournament welcomed athletes from: American School of Bahrain (Eagles), Fairgreen International School, Dubai (Phoenix), American International School in Abu Dhabi (Lions) and Dunecrest American School, Dubai (Eagles)

Students competed across four major sports: Football, Badminton, Volleyball, and Basketball, celebrating athletic excellence while building lifelong bonds with their peers.

"This event is a powerful example of the shared values and vision across our Esol Education schools," said Dave McMaster, Founding Director of the American School of Bahrain. "Sportsfest is not just about competition—it's about growth, leadership, and the friendships that connect our students beyond the classroom." Mike Balo, Athletic Director at ASB, added: "We're proud to see the Esol Education Sportsfest becoming a cornerstone of our shared school culture. The energy and camaraderie was incredible—this is what school athletics is all about."

As the tournament continues to grow, it stands as a proud tradition of Esol Education's commitment to holistic student development, leadership, and global-mindedness.

AUBH LAUNCHES SOFTWARE ENGINEERING, DATA SCIENCE AND AI PROGRAMS

The American University of Bahrain (AUBH) has launched two new academic programs: a Bachelor of Science in Software Engineering and a Bachelor of Science in Data Science and Artificial Intelligence. Approved by Bahrain's Higher Education Council and WASC, both programs will begin in September 2024. These additions address the growing global demand for skilled professionals in software development, data analysis, and AI innovation. The Software Engineering program offers hands-on experience in areas like programming, databases, and project management, preparing students for careers across diverse industries. The Data Science and AI program covers machine learning, big data, and AI ethics, equipping students with tools to drive technological advancement. AUBH President Dr. Bradley J. Cook emphasized that these programs reflect the university's commitment to aligning education with global standards and labor market needs. The initiative marks a major milestone in AUBH's mission to deliver world-class, future-focused education in Bahrain.

SHAPING FINANCE & ECONOMIC POLICIES, LEADING CHANGE

Mariam Madan, a standout student at the American University of Bahrain (AUBH), is making strides in finance and economic policy across the Middle East. A scholarship recipient, she combines academic excellence with hands-on leadership and global experience. As a founding member of Youth Connect Arabia and International Project Coordinator at the FISU Games in Russia, Mariam has shown early dedication to youth engagement and global collaboration.

Her involvement in the World Investment Forum by UNCTAD, the INJAZ Company Program, and TradeQuest highlights her active role in economic dialogue and innovation. She has gained practical experience through internships at SICO and the National Bank of Bahrain, focusing on investment and financial analysis.

Mariam has earned regional recognition, winning first place in the AUE Debate Competition and the CFA Research Challenge. Now a fellow in the INJAZ Youth Change Makers Programme, she exemplifies AUBH's vision of preparing future-ready leaders in finance and policy.

3D PRINTING: TRANSFORMING CALCULUS EDUCATION

At the American University of Bahrain (AUBH), a cutting-edge teaching approach is bringing calculus to life through 3D printing. Implemented by the Centre for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE), this initiative in Math 154: Calculus II helps students understand abstract mathematical concepts through hands-on application. Students design 3D mugs using software like GeoGebra, SolidWorks, and MATLAB, optimizing volume-to-surface area ratios to reflect sustainability principles.

After creating their designs, students print physical models in AUBH's D-Lab and test them by measuring volume with water—bridging theory and real-world application. Pre- and post-assessments quantitatively measure learning gains, while formal reports evaluate technical and conceptual understanding.

This approach fosters problem-solving, creativity, and technological fluency in advanced software and 3D printing. AUBH's model of integrating experiential learning into STEM not only deepens comprehension but also equips students with critical skills for success in tech-driven industries.

AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL IN ABU DHABI (AISA)

SUSTAINABLE "SOLUTIONEERING"

Middle School Science students at the American International School in Abu Dhabi (AISA) recently participated in a dynamic Sustainability Solutioneering Fair. Students researched, investigated, and developed actionable solutions for sustainability topics aligned with their grade-level curriculum throughout the unit. The fair provided a platform for students to showcase their findings, designs, and action plans, fostering scientific inquiry, collaboration, and problem-solving skills.

What made this initiative stand out was its focus on solution-driven learning—students were not merely identifying problems but actively engineering solutions by designing eco-friendly products, developing conservation strategies, or advocating for policy changes. Integrating sustainability with STEM education, the Solutioneering Fair empowered students to think critically about their impact on the world and take meaningful steps toward a more sustainable future.

By: Savvas Largatzis, Secondary Science Teacher

A CELEBRATION OF LEARNING & FAMILY

The IB Primary Years Student Showcase at AISA provides a platform for young learners to demonstrate their skills and accomplishments while actively involving parents in their educational journey. This year's topics included the Identity Showcase in KG1, 100 Days Smarter in KG2, Biomimicry in Grade 1, and Animal Habitats in Grade 2. The showcases became more complex as third graders delved into identity and fractured fairy tales. Grade 4 created a role model museum and a showcase featuring the Earth's processes. The PYP journey culminates in fifth grade with a science fair and the PYPx exhibition. Parents were encouraged to attend the showcases, fostering a welcoming environment for families to connect, and building strong home-school partnerships.

AISA NOMINATED FOR ADEK OUTSTANDING TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AWARD

The Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge has nominated AISA for the prestigious Outstanding Teacher Professional Development Award. This recognition highlights the exceptional efforts of our Learning Office, led by Mr. Tom Harper and his team, in enhancing teacher effectiveness and capabilities. Our professional development programs have played a vital role in maintaining the high-quality education we provide our students. This nomination demonstrates that highly-prepared teachers provide outstanding student achievement.
We look forward to utilizing our exceptional professional development approaches and this significant recognition to further enhance our educational offerings and support our students' success.

DUNECREST AMERICAN SCHOOL

CODING EXCELLENCE WITH APPLE

Parshvi Bid, a Grade 10 student at Dunecrest American School, has achieved a remarkable milestone by successfully completing the Swift Accelerator UAE Program and earning the Apple Pro App certification. This prestigious program, designed for young innovators, provides advanced training in Apple's Swift programming language, equipping students with the skills to develop real-world applications.

Parshvi's dedication and passion for technology have set her on an exciting path in the digital world. The Swift Accelerator UAE nurtures future developers, empowering students to become problem-solvers and tech creators.

With her newly acquired expertise, Parshvi is already working on her own app, which will soon be available on the App Store. Her achievement is a testament to Dunecrest's commitment to fostering innovation and student success.

We look forward to seeing how Parshvi continues to make an impact in the world of technology!

CHAMPIONS RISING: DUNECREST HOSTS NESAC TOURNAMENT

This past February, Dunecrest proudly hosted its inaugural Near East Schools Activities Conference (NESAC) tournament, bringing together top American schools in the Gulf for an exciting Varsity Boys and Girls Football competition.

The tournament featured eight varsity teams, with 240 student-athletes showcasing exceptional skill, teamwork, and sportsmanship. The event saw intense matches, memorable performances, and concluded with an awards banquet celebrating outstanding players and teams. Dunecrest's state-of-the-art facilities provided the perfect backdrop for this milestone event, reinforcing the school's commitment to expanding its athletic programs and offering students opportunities to compete at the highest level.

Athletic Director Salim Laib emphasized the significance of this achievement:
"My goal was to increase participation and give our students an opportunity to compete internationally. They are beginning to see their potential, fueled by dedication and hard work."
A special thanks to our coaches, staff, and volunteers for making this event a success!

DUNECREST STUDENT SHINES IN ROBOTICS!

Mohamad Al Fahim, a Grade 12 student at Dunecrest American School, has achieved an incredible milestone! Mohamad and his team from the Emirates Science Club secured 1st place in the prestigious Science Club Award of Excellence, organized by the Rubu' Qarn Foundation at the Sharjah Research Park. Their victory has earned them a coveted spot at the VEX Robotics World Championship in Dallas, USA, taking place from

May 6-14—a monumental accomplishment for both the team and Dunecrest.

This achievement showcases Mohamad's unwavering dedication to innovation and his team's relentless pursuit of excellence in robotics. As they prepare for the World Robotics Championship, we couldn't be prouder of their hard work and success.

FAIRGREEN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Fairgreen's annual Week Without Walls , led by Ms. Shannon Johnson, MYP Coordinator, pushed students beyond their comfort zones. The Survive & Thrive challenge honed survival and sea rescue skills, while the Harvard Leadership Workshop encouraged critical thinking with mentorship from Harvard students. Grade 10 students explored Madrid, embracing Spain's culture, while others took part in environmental conservation through scuba diving in Fujairah. On campus, students mentored younger peers, innovated in Makerspace, and tackled outdoor adventures in Oman and Ras Al Khaimah. The 2025 WWW program was truly an unforgettable experience, nurturing curiosity, building character, and creating lasting memories for our students.

A JOURNEY OF FAITH AND REFLECTION

Fairgreen's secondary students and staff embarked on the school's first-ever Umrah trip this year. This transformative experience provided an opportunity for spiritual growth, self-reflection, and a deeper connection to Islamic history and heritage.

During their time in Makkah and Madinah, students completed their Umrah rituals with dedication, explored the Revelation Museum, and learned about the lives of key prophets. They also visited the historic Quba Mosque and the Uhud Battlefield, reflecting on the lessons of faith and perseverance.

Beyond the religious significance, the trip fostered personal development, resilience, and unity - aligning with the core values of the IB learner profile. As we celebrate this remarkable journey, we hope the lessons and blessings of Umrah continue to inspire our students for years to come.

THE HIVE: A YEAR OF INCLUSION, GROWTH & COMMUNITY

At Fairgreen International School, inclusion is more than a philosophy—it's a fundamental cornerstone of the school community. This academic year has been a remarkable journey for our Inclusion Department, The Hive, as they continue to foster an environment where every student feels valued, supported, and empowered. With a strong focus on neurodiversity-affirming practices, The Hive has led impactful initiatives that promote awareness, advocacy, and connection. From launching the Sip & Share parent support group to hosting our first-ever Neurodiversity Fair, this year has strengthened our inclusive culture. Engaging classroom activities and whole-school awareness days have deepened understanding, while our upcoming student-led Neurodiversity Art Exhibition will celebrate the creativity and perspectives of our diverse learners. Through these initiatives, we continue to build a school where every student is recognised for their unique strengths and has the support to thrive.

AMERICAN SCHOOL HONG KONG (ASHK)

PARENT ACCOLADES FOR ASHK

ASHK is delighted to announce that we have received three esteemed awards this year:

Best International Primary School – Champimom's Hong Kong Parents' Choice Awards 2024
Best International All-Through School – Champimom's Hong Kong Parents' Choice Awards 2024
Most Loved International School – Ophama Parent Awards 2024

Champimom and Ophama are online platforms in Hong Kong that provide resources and support for parents, helping them make informed decisions about their children's education. These awards hold special significance as they are parent-voted, reflecting the trust and appreciation of our community. The awards recognize schools that demonstrate exceptional quality in education, innovative teaching methods, and a supportive learning environment.

TOP UNIVERSITIES FOR ASHK GRADUATES

ASHK's Grade 12 Class of 2025 has been achieving remarkable success in their university applications so far, receiving prestigious offers from renowned institutions such as Berklee College of Music, The Juilliard School, Pennsylvania State University, the University of Hong Kong, the University of St Andrews, University College London, the University of New South Wales, the University of British Columbia, the University of Queensland, among others. We look forward to adding more to the list!

Significantly, an impressive 45% of offers were unconditional, with four students securing scholarship offers. These students have pursued a wide range of study courses, reflecting their varied interests and talents, from Creative Writing and Architecture to Innovation and Enterprise Engineering, as well as Public Health.

SKATING TO GLORY

Apple, a Grade 12 student at ASHK, has been passionately playing ice hockey for over seven years. Her dedication and skill in the sport have led to significant achievements on both national and international stages. In 2023, Apple was honored to represent Team Hong Kong, China, at the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) Women's World Championship, showcasing her talent and commitment to the sport.

Building on this success, Apple continued to make her mark in 2025 by representing Team Hong Kong once again, this time at the 9th Asian Winter Games held in Harbin. Competing in the Women's Ice Hockey event, she demonstrated her prowess and contributed to her team's efforts on the ice.

AMERICAN SCHOOL IN EGYPT-MAIN (AISE-M)

U14 GIRLS BACK-TO-BACK JR. NBA CHAMPIONS!

The AIS U14 Girls' Basketball team achieved a significant victory at the Jr. NBA Tournament, winning the championship for the second consecutive year. Their hard work and teamwork earned them a trip to Abu Dhabi. The U14 Boys' Basketball team also finished strong in second-place finish in the Eastern Conference. The tournament provided a valuable experience for all participants, celebrating teamwork and athletic development within the AIS community. Last year's reward trip to Germany, which included a visit to the Allianz Arena, showcased the real-world impact of dedication and sportsmanship. With its mission to cultivate a love of Basketball, the Jr. NBA teaches skills, sportsmanship and wellness in a positive and fun environment, providing our students a great sporting platform!

NYU GLOBAL BUSINESS STRATEGY PROGRAM VISIT

AIS Egypt recently hosted students and faculty from New York University Abu Dhabi (NYU Abu Dhabi). Under the leadership of Professor Sunder Narayanan, the visit focused on the course "Global Business Strategy," facilitating a valuable cross-cultural academic exchange.
The program featured in-depth discussions on Egypt's educational landscape, offering insights into regional practices. A student-to-student interaction session fostered meaningful dialogue, while presentations on university admissions provided practical information. The visiting group from NYU Abu Dhabi expressed great appreciation for the AIS Egypt community and their cultural experience in Egypt.
This successful program marks the beginning of a collaborative partnership between AIS Egypt and NYU Abu Dhabi, establishing a foundation for future academic engagements.

EMPOWERING WOMEN'S VOICES AT UN'S GIRLUP SUMMIT

Lmar Elnajjar, an AIS Egypt Grade 11 student, recently made a powerful impact at Egypt's inaugural UN GirlUp Summit, speaking passionately about women in leadership. Lmar's topic was deeply personal, reflecting her unwavering belief in women's capability to drive change across all fields. She challenged the persistent gender biases that limit women's access to leadership roles. Citing evidence of women's exceptional performance in global leadership, she highlighted the unjustified doubt and speculation that women often face.

Her articulate presentation was aimed at overcoming self-doubt, emphasizing that gender should never be a barrier to leadership. Lmar's participation in the GirlUp Summit provided a vital platform to voice her convictions and inspire others, showcasing the potential for young leaders to create meaningful change.

AMERICAN SCHOOL IN EGYPT-WEST (AISE-W)

AIS SENIOR REPRESENTS EGYPT AT UN SUMMIT

AIS West Grade 12 student Karima Mostafa was chosen to represent Egypt at the prestigious UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) Summit in Vienna in March 2025.

This honor followed a rigorous selection process initiated in August by the Egyptian Foreign Ministry and UNODC Cairo. AIS West nominated several exceptional Model United Nations (MUN) delegates, who competed among candidates from over 17 international schools in Egypt. After an intense evaluation, Karima stood out as the top choice.

Karima joined Dr. Ghada Waly, Head of UNODC, at the summit, marking a significant achievement in her academic and leadership journey. Her dedication, intellect, and passion for global diplomacy earned her this prestigious opportunity.

A PATH TO PASSION

A question echoed in their minds: "How do the underprivileged find their passion?" Yasmine and Yassin, two remarkable grade 11 students, answered with "Path to Passion," a program supporting the girls of Banaty orphanage in Egypt.

The program offers education, English lessons, sports activities, and arts and crafts, aiming to provide more than just basic needs. This initiative is not just a school project but a commitment. During Christmas, the students raised 100,000 EGP to give personalized gifts to every girl.

They continue to monitor progress and dedicate three hours every Friday, along with 15 friends, to support the girls. They're not just teaching; they're showing these girls that they are seen, valued, and capable of pursuing their own passions, creating a lasting impact on their lives.

SQUASH SENSATION

Amina Orfi, a senior at AIS West, has made a remarkable leap in the world of professional squash. This year, she broke into the top 5 women's world rankings, becoming the second youngest player ever to reach this elite status.

Amina's achievements include representing Egypt on the senior team at the World Team Championships in Hong Kong, where she helped secure a gold medal alongside her teammates. Recently, she claimed victory at the New Zealand Open and earned second place at the Australian Open, reinforcing her position among the sport's rising stars.

Looking ahead, Amina plans to pursue a college degree while continuing to advance her squash career. With the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics set to feature squash for the first time, she aims to qualify for Team Egypt and hopes to make history by capturing the inaugural Olympic gold medal in the sport.

Currently, Amina remains focused on climbing to the number 1 spot in the world rankings and winning the world championships, as she continues her journey toward becoming one of squash's all-time greats.

CAIRO ENGLISH SCHOOL (CES)

DIPLOMACY IN ACTION

The theme at this year's CES MUN conference was International Cooperation in a Divided World. Delegates from across Cairo came together to address pressing global issues with an emphasis on cooperative problem-solving and international solidarity. Nine committees, from the Security Council to the International Court of Justice, saw delegates debating world-wide challenges and producing resolutions. CESMUN 2025 highlighted students' intellectual rigor, leadership and dedication. CESMUN also had the honour of welcoming Amr Aljowaily, Assistant Foreign Minister for Multilateral Affairs and International Security, as a guest speaker, inspiring students to embrace diplomacy. Beyond the walls of committee rooms, the conference heightened students' global awareness and drove them towards shared dedication for the pursuit of unity.

PAINTING A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Two Cairo English School students achieved remarkable success in the prestigious Hayah Art competition, which attracted over two thousand high-quality entries from across Cairo. Year 5 student Candy Amgad Gadelrab won third place with her vibrant acrylic painting of a sea turtle, showcasing her creative vision of a more beautiful world. Year 11 student Jana Mohamed Haridi earned recognition for her powerful painting depicting the contrast between a blazing forest fire and a crashing ocean, symbolizing the balance of nature and environmental awareness. Both artworks conveyed strong messages about protecting the planet's beauty and the urgent need for action. At the award ceremony, the students represented CES with pride, demonstrating how art can inspire, express unique perspectives, and raise awareness on critical issues. Their achievements highlight the school's passion for nurturing creativity and celebrating artistic progress among its diverse student community.

MASTERY MATHS

In Early Years Education, developing strong mathematical foundations is key to ensuring long-term success. This term, in FS1, we have focused on Mastery Maths, with particular emphasis on the CPA (Concrete, Pictorial, Abstract) approach, which provides a structured pathway for young learners to develop strong mathematical foundations. Children begin with hands-on activities using real objects (Concrete), progress to drawing and visual representations (Pictorial), and eventually move towards understanding numbers and concepts without physical aids (Abstract). This progression is supported by engaging activities such as sorting, counting, using ten frames, and mark-making. To deepen understanding, teachers encourage problem-solving and reasoning through open-ended questions and tasks, ensuring children not only learn mathematical concepts but also develop critical thinking skills. By embedding CPA principles and meaningful challenges, FS1 students build confidence, number fluency, and a lasting love for maths.

AMERICAN SCHOOL BAHRAIN (ASB)

GCC 26 CHAMPIONS VISIT

The American School of Bahrain radiated with excitement and Bahraini pride as the Bahrain National Football Team, champions of Gulf Cup 26, visited the campus.

The atmosphere was electric as students met their sporting idols, capturing unforgettable moments through photos and autographs.

It was a day filled with joy, inspiration, and national pride, uniting the school community in celebration of this historic achievement.

As a proud school in Bahrain, ASB embraces the nation's successes and values, fostering a spirit of unity, dedication, and excellence amongst its students.

CULTURAL MOSAIC

The ASB Parent Association organized its annual International Day, a vibrant celebration of the school's diverse community. Students, parents, and staff wore traditional attire, proudly representing their cultures. Booths offered authentic cuisine from around the world, and a lively parade showcased the many nationalities within ASB. This event reflects ASB's commitment to embracing diversity, fostering respect, and celebrating cultural heritage. International Day is a special moment where the community comes together to appreciate and learn from one another, reinforcing the school's values of inclusivity and global awareness.

COFFEE TO COMPOST

High School students at ASB are participating in INJAZ Bahrain, Company Program, for the second consecutive year. Established in 2005 as part of Junior Achievement Worldwide, INJAZ Bahrain empowers young people with hands-on learning in entrepreneurship, financial literacy, STEM, and more, preparing them for real-world challenges. Last year, the ASB team made it to the finals in Qatar with an innovative business concept that aims to reduce food waste. This year, team ASB is competing with their business idea, "Turba," which transforms coffee waste into high-quality organic fertilizer. Through INJAZ, ASB students gain valuable skills, industry exposure, and the opportunity to turn their ideas into impactful solutions.

AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL IN CYPRUS (AISC)

TO BAN OR NOT TO BAN... MOBILE PHONES IN SCHOOLS?

The AISC School Debate Team took the floor at a recent High School assembly to consider the proposition: Schools should ban cell phones in their entirety.

The Affirmative side pitched the diminished focus, distraction argument. They talked about cyber bullying and the dark side of social media which creates anxiety and where questionable content, bad actors, and few guardrails are pervasive. They

also mentioned cheating. They were persuasive and sincere.

The Negative side felt that dealing with excessive or improper phone use in a more even-keeled, educational manner was the way to go – not bans. They argued that students need to develop appropriate ownership and responsibility regarding phone use to internalize solutions that can be sustained once in an environment not constrained by bans. They were equally persuasive and sincere.

The audience was engaged. They listened and considered the various points made by the talented risk-takers on stage. At the end of it all, the school principal spoke of the ban in practical terms. Students were informed, heard, and respected. The new policy was successfully implemented!

WEEK WITHOUT WALLS

Week Without Walls is a travel program during which AISC students gain valuable insight and rewarding hands-on experience in a variety of international settings. As an international school, we have an expectation that students are integrally involved in community service work and other creative, historical, and cultural activities that serve to further their growth and development. This can be achieved through aspects of our various curricula. It can also be achieved through participation in trips of an appropriate nature.

At AISC, we value variety and choice with respect to trip destinations and have therefore provided our students with a broad range of programs that cater to individual interests. The trips offered this year to Vienna, Bordeaux, Amsterdam, Berlin, and within Cyprus were designed to challenge students to push their boundaries in positive ways, to plan and initiate activities, to work collaboratively with others, and to engage with issues of global importance.

GARDEN OF EXPRESSION: A CELEBRATION OF CREATIVITY

The recent Garden of Expression Fine Arts event was a spectacular celebration of student creativity across all school divisions, from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

The school was transformed into a vibrant hub of artistic expression, featuring everything from Samba drumming and choirs to student-led rock bands, original raps, music technology installations, and minimal orchestras. Art, ceramic and sculptural exhibitions, cross-curricular projects, and live theatre performances offered a holistic view of student talent.

Our strong connection to community was demonstrated through traditional Greek song and Sounds of the City compositions. The audience, which filled every room and overflowed the theatre, moved through spaces alive with sound, color, and energy. A student DJ closed the evening with a show-stopping set that had everyone on their feet. Garden of Expression wasn't just an event—it was a living, breathing testament to the power of the arts in education.

UNIVERSAL COLLEGE - ALEY (UCA)

FROM DEDICATION TO DISTINCTION

UCA proudly recognizes Rayan Nasr for his outstanding academic achievements and unwavering dedication to excellence. As a testament to his hard work, he achieved an impressive 1560 on the SAT, a reflection of the critical thinking and problem-solving skills nurtured at UCA.

His excellence was further acknowledged when he was selected as one of the top 20 students among 900 Early Merit recipients at AUB, where he was honored in a special event with President Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri. This recognition places him among Lebanon's brightest minds, and his nomination for the President's Merit Scholarship further highlights his commitment to academic and personal growth.

Throughout his journey, he has embodied the UCA spirit of perseverance and self-improvement, always striving to work not just harder, but smarter. We celebrate his success and commend his advice to fellow students: "The world belongs to optimists. Pessimists are only spectators." — Francois Guizot.

INNOVATING WITH LEGO & ARDUINO

At UCA, STEM learning takes a hands-on approach —it comes to life through hands-on experiences that spark curiosity, creativity, and problem-solving. Our classrooms have embraced LEGO Kits and Arduino, transforming traditional lessons into dynamic, interactive challenges where students explore engineering, coding, and innovation.

Through these engaging activities, students build and program functional models, deepening their understanding of key STEM concepts while developing essential skills like critical thinking, collaboration, and adaptability. By integrating LEGO Kits, students design and construct robots and mechanical systems, learning the fundamentals of engineering in a playful yet educational way. Meanwhile, Arduino microcontrollers introduce them to coding and electronics, allowing them to create real-world applications that enhance their problem-solving abilities.

These innovative learning experiences not only make STEM subjects more accessible and exciting but also prepare students for future careers in science, technology, and engineering. At UCA, we are striding confidently into the future of STEM education.

YOUNG MINDS, GLOBAL IMPACT

This year at UCA, we launched the Youth Leadership Club (YLC), a student-led initiative designed to equip learners with essential leadership skills for life. Through this club, students also prepare for programs like Model United Nations (MUN) and Model Arab League (MAL), gaining valuable experience in diplomacy, public speaking, and global affairs.

Guided by their advisors, students gather after school and during breaks to engage in structured debates, conduct critical research, and participate in collaborative discussions. They refine their public speaking, analytical thinking, and diplomatic negotiation skills while learning to draft compelling position papers, develop persuasive arguments, and confidently articulate their viewpoints on global issues.

Beyond honing communication skills, YLC fosters leadership, teamwork, and civic engagement, preparing students to thrive in diverse international settings. With mentorship from advisors and experienced participants, members gain hands-on experience in problem-solving and decision-making, empowering them to become proactive global citizens. More than just an academic exercise, the journey is a transformative experience—one that leaves a lasting impact and prepares students for leadership roles beyond the classroom.

BEHIND THE SCENES

For our families, the daily experience of school life revolves around its classrooms, culture, and community. Behind the scenes, however, the Esol Education organization plays a vital role in making that experience consistent, high-quality, and future-ready. Our role is both strategic and supportive. We guide, resource, and empower our schools so they can focus on what matters most: educating children.

Over the past two decades, the landscape of international education has undergone a significant transformation. For many years, the world of international schools consisted mainly of smaller independent schools serving expatriate families. Today the typical international school is part of an interconnected, global network serving a broader and more diverse student population.

Esol Education has embraced this evolution by fostering a connected and collaborative framework—one that empowers each school to thrive while benefiting from the strength and shared wisdom of the wider network.

"Our collective organizational strength and reach benefits our school communities through our education officers' support and oversight, efficient and cost-saving Esol-wide processes and resources, and initiatives that support future-readiness. This level of support enables our school leaders to guide the academic functions of the school with autonomy and effectiveness," shared Dr. Ahmed Mitwalli, Chief Strategy Officer at Esol Education.

A Strategic Model That Prioritizes Learning

Esol Education's operating structure is designed to deliver academic excellence while managing core operations, allowing experienced school leaders to focus singularly on their academic mission. In parallel, Esol provides centralized support across essential areas such as finance, HR, IT, marketing, compliance, procurement, and facilities management—functions that benefit from scale and shared expertise.

This approach allows school leaders to concentrate on what matters most: students, learning, and community building. Operational efficiency, enabled by Esol's network infrastructure, ensures that quality remains high and resources are allocated effectively.

"At Esol our focus is on recruiting the most qualified academic leaders and empowering them with the support and resources to provide the ideal learning environment, curriculum, and pedagogical approaches for their respective school communities, tailored to the families and host countries they serve," said Mr. Tammam Abushakra, Advisor to Chairman.

The Power of Leadership Collaboration

A cornerstone of Esol's support strategy is the annual Leadership Meeting, a tradition now in its 15th year. These gatherings bring together school directors from across the network to analyze school performance data, examine trends in K–12 education, and collaborate on new initiatives.

Esol's educational leaders review student achievement through internal and external assessment data, university admissions outcomes, and other indicators of student success. Discussions also focus on pedagogy, curricular alignment, and teacher professional development. Collectively, the leadership of the Esol Education schools develops plans and strategies to ensure the continual improvement of the Esol schools and to enhance the learning of their student bodies.

In 2025, Esol's School Directors reaffirmed the value of the annual meetings as a forum for peer learning and strategic planning. Key focus areas included:

- Using data to drive decision-making and improve outcomes
- Enhancing teacher development and appraisal systems
- Curriculum alignment and refinement
- Integration of AI into teaching and learning

"Esol leadership meetings are where genuine collaboration leads to real school improvement. By coming together to share insights, reflect, and challenge one another, we create the conditions for meaningful change that benefits both our students and our communities," remarked Dr. Kapono Ciotti, Education Officer at Esol Education.

Investing in Innovation and EdTech

As part of its commitment to future-readiness, Esol Education actively guides schools through the fast-evolving digital landscape. The leadership meetings regularly include in-depth discussions about educational technology - from the evolution of learning platforms to device management, cybersecurity, and immersive learning environments.

This year, AI emerged as a major topic of focus. A follow-up virtual session allowed Directors to share successes and concerns about integrating AI in classrooms. Topics ranged from academic integrity to support for neurodiverse learners, and how AI can enhance rather than threaten authentic learning.

As a result of these conversations, Esol formed the Esol Education AI Steering Committee, inviting each school to nominate a representative to help shape network-wide AI policies, governance protocols, and shared resources.

"Following our recent Esol Education leadership meeting, Fairgreen is proud to be part of a group-wide initiative focused on shaping the thoughtful integration of AI across all our sister schools," said Mr. Ed Pearce, Director of Esol Education's Fairgreen International School. "Even though our curricula may differ across our sister schools, from IB to British and American, there is strong alignment in our shared values, collaborative spirit, and collective commitment to exchanging best practices and co-developing policies that guide the responsible use of AI in education," he added. At Fairgreen, this collaboration will enhance the school's ability to explore how AI can personalise learning, support diverse student needs, and reinforce its core pillars of sustainability, wellbeing, and innovation.

A Culture of Continuous Professional Development

Esol's commitment to professional learning extends well beyond leadership. Across its schools, over 1,200 educators benefit from a dynamic mix of conferences, job-alike sessions, collaborative planning, and curriculum development projects. Examples include multi-school teams working together to align curriculum in Computer

Through Esol's work behind the scenes, parents can count on well-run schools, highly trained teachers, thoughtful leadership, and a steady focus on excellence.

Science and Sustainability Education, and network-wide PD opportunities in teaching practice and leadership development. These programs elevate educators and ensure consistency in quality across the group. These initiatives foster not only skill development but also a sense of shared purpose and professional community.

Mr. Nathan DeSouza, High School Counsellor at Esol's American School of Bahrain, is making a remarkable impact in the field of university counselling in Bahrain, inspired by his collaboration with Ms. Marium Boulus, his counterpart at American International School in Egypt, a sister school. He was instrumental in establishing the National Network of University Counsellors, a collaborative platform that brings together counsellors from all of the country's outstanding international schools. Through this network, he has successfully facilitated the first-ever visits to Bahrain by prestigious institutions such as Imperial College London, the University of Cambridge, and University of Pennsylvania. His efforts have not only broadened opportunities for students across the nation but have also positioned Bahrain as a meaningful destination on the global higher education map.

Esol Education Sportsfest: Play Together, Win Together!

The Esol Education Sportsfest, now completing its second year, was initiated through the organization's annual Leadership Meetings, with a view to fostering cross-network collaboration. The tournament brings together student-athletes from across the Esol schools to compete in basketball, volleyball, football, and badminton. With the tagline "Play Together, Win Together," the event promotes sportsmanship, teamwork, and inter-cultural connection.

The inaugural Sportsfest took place in 2024 at Dunecrest American School in Dubai, followed by the 2025 edition hosted by the American School of Bahrain. More than 100 students participated, forming lasting friendships and inter-school camaraderie.

The event has become a showcase of what Esol's network model can deliver—opportunities that go beyond what a single school might achieve alone. The third edition is already being planned at a new destination.

Translating Strategy into Family Impact

While much of Esol's work takes place out of sight, its impact is fully visible in the student experience. Through Esol's work behind the scenes, parents can count on well-run schools, highly trained teachers, thoughtful leadership, and a steady focus on excellence. Operational consistency, well-supported teachers, strategic innovation, and steady leadership, all translate into better learning environments.

Esol's role in its school communities also enables students to benefit from expanded opportunities they may not have access to in a single, standalone school—from global enrichment programs such as MIT App Inventor, the Stanford Pre-collegiate Summer Program, The Green Bronx Machine sustainability initiatives and AI innovation, to cross-campus collaborations and network-wide recognition for their achievements. Families, in turn, can be confident in the knowledge that their children are part of a wider family of schools, built on excellence, integrity, and care.

NEW GAME. NEW PLAYBOOK.

For over 40 years the Middle States Association Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools (MSA-CESS) has been a valuable partner in the growth and development of Esol Education schools. As a leading accreditation body, MSA accredits all 8 of Esol's American international schools, and supports their continuous school improvement efforts. *STRIDES* catches up with MSA President Christian Talbot for a deep dive into the modern K-12 education landscape, and gains his insights on the challenges and exciting opportunities that lie ahead for education leaders.

As a leading accrediting agency for American schools, what would you say are the key areas of focus at MSA for the coming years?

To answer that question, I need to provide context. Everything we do at Middle States starts with our purpose: "to inspire wise change in schools." I have been a head of school twice, and many of my colleagues have also been school leaders and teachers. So we approach the work from that perspective.

Middle States has always helped school leaders create wise change through the mechanism of accreditation, but in the last three years we have significantly expanded our support for school leaders.

For example, we are the only accreditor in the world to provide endorsements for schools in AI, and this summer we will launch the world's first endorsement for K12 governing boards. Last year we launched The Journey, the world's only education summit entirely devoted to leading change in schools. Earlier this year we launched the Evolution Academy, our professional learning platform. We are about to launch Evolution Stories, a podcast focused on how change happens in schools. We are currently piloting a Next Generation Accreditation protocol designed to support innovative school models. And we now offer custom consulting engagements.

I hope this shows that Middle States is not just an accreditor. We are here to inspire wise change with every kind tool that a school leader might need. And it all comes from the heart, because we have been in the shoes of school leaders. At our staff meetings, we talk about school leaders all the time!

MSA accredits over 3,200 schools, a community of over 2 million students. What are some of the most cutting-edge teaching and learning practices you are seeing at the forefront of K-12 education today?

We have a strong point of view on this, and it is different from what others talk about. Cutting-edge teaching and learning practices have to be guided by a North Star. We believe that the leading edge of teaching and learning is grounded in what we call the "Declaration of Powerful Learning." We created this new asset for schools pursuing the endorsement in "Essential Learning Experience with AI," the schools participating in our AI Fellows program, and the schools piloting the Next Generation Accreditation protocol.

We define it this way: "In a powerful learning experience, learners experience purpose and agency as they develop knowledge, skills, and dispositions." We distilled this definition from Mehta and Fine's groundbreaking study In Search of Deeper Learning (2019).
Some schools design for powerful learning through project-based learning. I'm thinking of Middle States member schools like Beyond 8 in Chennai, or The Innovation Fellowship in Tokyo. Other schools design for powerful learning through IB programme capstone work. And other schools are now using AI to help students learn through social entrepreneurship

American international schools are fantastic melting pots. By weaving American educational approaches with local cultures, they enable kids to become comfortable and skilled at navigating relationships with diverse communities. In our connected world, that is priceless.

(we did a fantastic social entrepreneurship design sprint with a school in the United States—each team of students also included an AI teammate).

There are many other cutting-edge teaching and learning practices that I could talk about, but they all have in common deliberate moves—selected by teachers and supported by school leadership—that bring to life a school's definition of powerful learning.

What do you think are the top challenges faced by school leaders today?

We have members in 117 countries, and all around the world school leaders tell me that governance is their biggest challenge. Governance challenges probably explain why the average tenure for school heads has been declining for several years. This summer Middle States is piloting an endorsement for boards in excellent governance so that boards can protect their school's present and future.

School leaders also tell me about other challenges: the pace of change is breathless (especially given the rapid evolution of AI); students are struggling with social emotional well being and development; and faculty and staff are often exhausted by the midpoint of the year.

American schools in an international context provide a powerful, globalized education model. In your opinion, what are some of the key areas where American international schools excel?

For starters, American international schools excel at blending strong academics with student agency. At Middle States, we love when we see "powerful learning experiences" in which students apply their knowledge to problems or new situations with purpose. American schools often make learning meaningful in this way.

American schools also tend to be the first to adopt new technologies in service of that powerful learning. Other school models sometimes seem afraid to take risks with innovations before they have been proven repeatedly.

I've noticed that American international schools are fantastic melting pots. By weaving American educational approaches with local cultures, they enable kids to become comfortable and skilled at navigating relationships with diverse communities. In our connected world, that is priceless.

MSA and Esol Education have enjoyed a relationship that goes back over 40 years. How would you describe the evolution of Esol Education and its schools from your perspective as President and CEO of MSA?

Let me tell you about my first conversation with Tammam Abushakra. He and I met at an AAIE conference in early 2023. As soon as I told him that we were planning an endorsement for AI literacy, safety, and ethics, his eyes lit up. He leaned forward and started asking thoughtful, probing questions. What could AI enable students to do that wasn't yet possible? How could schools protect young people from the biases and potential harms of AI? How could schools use AI to become more relationship oriented in their teaching and learning? It was clear that Tammam shared our vision for education that is "human-driven and AI-informed," as we say at Middle States.

That conversation confirmed what my predecessor Dr. Hank Cram had told me when I first arrived at Middle States in 2022: "Meet the people at Esol as soon as you can. They are a great community doing wonderful work. And the Abushakras truly care about their schools."

In accreditation, it's really clear whether a school simply wants to check a box or earnestly undergo an improvement

process. By choosing to seek the gold standard in accreditation, the Abushakra family has consistently demonstrated their commitment to providing—and then improving—quality educational opportunities for all of their students.

Esol has also partnered with Middle States to advocate for rigorous quality accreditation for all schools around the world. The way I see it, Esol is contributing to the common good at a time when others prefer to merely check a box.

AI is an exciting space in every industry. Do you feel it will be a game changer in K-12 education? How?

The moment I used ChatGPT for the first time in early December 2022, I thought, This will be the most transformational technology since the public internet. Maybe the most concrete way to think about that comes from Tom Vander Ark, a member of the Middle States AI advisory team, who recently said on his podcast, "The information age was about access to data and information. With the introduction of ChatGPT, we've moved into access to intelligence." Schools have never dealt with access to a "co-intelligence," as Wharton professor Ethan Mollick calls it. To be honest, this is both an opportunity and a threat.

On the opportunity side, kids can now do more, and they can do it faster and better. In a project-based learning environment, a student might have had to wait days or weeks or months to get expert feedback on their work. AI can now simulate that expertise and provide guidance so that students can prototype more rapidly and get to real world impact sooner. If you believe in powerful learning that allows students to apply their knowledge to problems and new situations, AI is a total game changer. At the same time, there are enormous potential risks. Cambridge University professor Philippa Hardman has written, "Every week more AI-powered education technologies come to market, but the vast majority accelerate, automate and scale traditional, broken methods of instruction." Translation? The world isn't going to reward kids who have done more worksheets just because the teacher used AI to create infinite versions. But if teachers use AI to automate and scale broken methods of instruction, they will activate another risk: students will begin to outsource their thinking to AI.

But kids can't develop cognitively without doing the hard work of learning to think for themselves. So the pressure is on for schools to get serious about designing those "powerful learning experiences," because those are the experiences that make kids want to do their own thinking! The third major risk is children are already experiencing the simulated intimacy of chatbots. And AI is only going to sound more and more human—yet AI is not, and cannot be, human. If social media was the world's largest uncontrolled social experiment of the last twenty years, then simulated intimacy with AI might be the largest uncontrolled experiment of the next twenty years.

Can you share more about MSA's RAIL initiative, the impetus behind its launch and its key goals?

RAIL stands for Responsible AI in Learning and its the name of our series of endorsements for schools in AI. The first is "AI Literacy, Safety, and Ethics," and the second is "Essential Learning Experience with AI." We have more planned. By the way, the American School of Bahrain, an Esol school, was in the first cohort to earn the endorsement in "AI Literacy, Safety, and Ethics."

The goal of RAIL is to enable schools to "stay safe and stay ahead" with AI. In the early phase of any new technology, nobody knows what to do. Someone has to explore the unknown frontier, learn what is there, and then bring back lessons to make it safe for others to follow. At Middle States, many of us are former school leaders, so we knew that we had to make that unknown territory safe for schools. The result was the world's first endorsement for schools in AI, whose goal is to ensure that schools are systematically literate, safe, and ethical in their use of AI. The endorsement addresses how AI affects every part of a school's operation. In that sense, it's sort of like an accreditation process.

But safety isn't enough-in this moment, we need schools to leverage AI to create transformational learning experiences. That is why we built the second endorsement to help teachers design powerful learning.

Pre- and post-RAIL surveys show that every school working with us-over 70 schools from 30 countries on 6 continents-experience huge improvements in their ability to be literate, safe, and ethical in their use of AI. We are even more excited about the impact of the second endorsement in "Essential Learning Experience," whose first cohort just started their work.

> *[Esol Education] are a great community doing wonderful work...the Abushakras truly care about their schools.*

Christian Talbot has served as the President of The Middle States Association Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools (MSA-CESS) since July 2022. A seasoned educator and leader, Talbot previously served as interim president at Regis High School in New York. He also served as Head of School of Malvern Preparatory School.

He is a lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania, founder of Basecamp Consulting and JUNO Strategy & Design. He holds degrees from Georgetown University and the Boston Graduate School of Psychoanalysis and has served on several educational boards.

GOAL-GETTER: FROM CLASSROOM TO CHAMPION

Not so very long ago, Manchester City Forward, Omar Marmoush, was walking the same corridors as some of our students at Esol Education's American International School in Egypt, juggling classes, projects, soccer practice, and all the rest that came with life at AIS. Today, he's living the dream of millions of soccer-obsessed children in Egypt and worldwide - playing before packed stadiums as a professional footballer in the English Premier League. It's a story so good it's unbelievable, but to those of us who knew Omar in his AIS days, it was clear from the start that he was special.

Omar was not only a wonderful player—he was a fine student, a quiet presence in class who let his performance on the field do his talking for him. His teachers remember his focus, his drive, and the way he always seemed to exert himself just a little bit more than anyone else.

"He wasn't flashy or loud, but when you saw him play, you just knew he had it," said Mr. Ahmed Elagroudy, PE Teacher. "He had that kind of determination that you can't really teach."

That choice saw Omar thrive at AIS's infrastructure. With the school's emphasis on individual growth and its robust support system, he was able to find a place where he could grow—both on the pitch as a footballer and off it as a teenager. Even then, balancing school life and training would have been no easy feat!

The Move to Europe

Having carved out a niche for himself in Egypt's junior league, Omar was given his big break in 2017 when he joined VfL Wolfsburg in Germany. It was a giant leap—not just in terms of competition, but also culturally. New language, new climate, new everything.

> *I owe where I am today to AIS, the school gave me confidence, kept me on track, and always challenged me to work harder.*

He started out with Wolfsburg's reserve team and progressed through sheer determination and effort. Loan spells to FC St. Pauli and VfB Stuttgart gave him invaluable experience, and soon he got a key position at Eintracht Frankfurt, one of Germany's top clubs. But that was a small preview to what was in store for him
.

Manchester City Calls

In January of this year, Omar made a gigantic leap into the big leagues as Premier League giants Manchester City came calling. The move, worth an estimated €70 million, was one of the biggest Egyptian player transfers in years. For Omar, it was not an upgrade—it was a dream fulfilled.

The Cairo boy who used to play lunchtime games on the AIS field was now training with Pep Guardiola, alongside some of the sport's biggest stars.

He quickly impressed, winning over supporters with his pace, tactical awareness, and boundless energy. In his post-match interviews, Omar is humble, usually attributing his background and early mentors for his outlook

Flag Bearer

With his club career taking off, Omar has become a similarly key player for Egypt's national team. Since debuting in 2021, he's brought passion and consistency to the team—and become an immediate fan favorite.

Competing for Egypt is close to Omar's heart. It's a reminder of his roots, and a way of giving back to a country that nurtured him.

"Whenever I put on that jersey, I feel like I am back home," he told a reporter in one interview. "I recall my school, my family, my friends—they're all with me on the pitch."

Back to His Roots

All the more striking, though, is the way in which Omar has managed to stay so connected to his roots. During his visits to Egypt, he drops by the AIS Egypt campus, sees old teachers, and sets an example to all the young students who look up to him. He spoke last year at a gathering of AIS students, answered their questions and offered advice. His message was concise but powerful: work hard, believe in yourself, and never be afraid to dream big.

"I owe where I am today to AIS," he told the students. "The school gave me confidence, kept me on track, and always challenged me to work harder."

FAIRGREEN PARENT ISMAHANE ELOUAFI IS TIME100 WORLD'S MOST INFLUENTIAL

Esol Education proudly celebrates Ms. Ismahene Elouafi, part of the parent community at Esol's Fairgreen International School, Dubai, being named on the 2025 TIME100 list of the world's 100 most influential people.

Executive Managing Director at CGIAR, a global research partnership for a food-secure future dedicated to transforming food, land, and water systems in a climate crisis, Ms. Elouafi is widely recognized for driving efforts to strengthen global food security and nutrition by systemically transforming how we produce food while protecting the environment for sustainable agriculture. Dr Elouafi also stands out as a champion for the diversification of agriculture via forgotten crops such as legumes and pulses, her strong voice on the use of non-fresh water in agriculture, and her global leadership in the empowerment of women in science.

Each year TIME100 celebrates activists, leaders, science experts, and artists shaping the future of our world and transforming lives. This prestigious distinction celebrates how Elouafi's visionary leadership in shaping agricultural innovation strengthens the livelihoods of millions of global smallholder farmers.

The recognition arrives at a crucial time when agriculture faces challenges like climate change, population growth, declining biodiversity, conflict, poor agricultural practices, and reduced research funding, highlighting the need for transformation.

"It is an incredible honor to receive this recognition. It belongs to the dedicated scientists at CGIAR, our partners and funders who support us, and the millions of smallholder farmers guiding our work towards global food security," said Elouafi, "Yet I worry about the capacity of our research to fulfill our goals within an uncertain funding environment. Global food security concerns us all."

The TIME100 honor joins a long list of accolades bestowed upon Elouafi including the National Reward Medal by King Mohamed VI of Morocco, the Excellence in Science Award from the Global Thinkers Forum, and the Jean Mayer Prize for Excellence in Nutrition Science and Policy

She has held several senior scientific and leadership positions including the Chief Scientist at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations and the Director General at the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA).

As well as her leadership for CGIAR, Elouafi is a distinguished scientist whose work on halophytes like quinoa and Salicornia had a major impact on food security and sustainability in countries facing salinity issues. Her research into wheat genetics significantly contributed to enhancing the resilience and productivity of crops in wheat cultivation regions.

"I see firsthand the impact of today's challenges on global farming communities." Elouafi said, "So I am delighted with this recognition as a powerful signal to the world that agricultural innovation can and must be part of the solution. I hope this honor inspires others, and especially women and young people, to be bold about the agricultural change they want to lead, working alongside the farmers at the forefront of the crises who hold the deepest knowledge of the challenges they face."

"The Gates Foundation is proud to partner in CGIAR's work, and the world is lucky to have Ismahane leading the way toward a future where no child goes hungry," said Bill Gates, Chair of the Gates Foundation.

Elouafi received the award at the annual TIME100 Gala in New York City this April, alongside 300 guests including many current and former TIME100 members, bringing together the world's leading figures in politics, technology, science, philanthropy, media, business, and entertainment, and attracting worldwide media coverage.

> *The Gates Foundation is proud to partner in CGIAR's work, and the world is lucky to have Ismahane leading the way toward a future where no child goes hungry.*
> *~ Bill Gates*

RHYTHM RISING

From International trips to Dusseldorf and Seoul, a variety of local performances opportunities for students, to exceptional university placements, the music department at American School Hong Kong celebrates a fantastic year of student growth and achievement.

Setting the tone for an exciting year, ten secondary school musicians from ASHK traveled to Düsseldorf, Germany, to take part in the Association for Music in International Schools (AMIS) Honours Jazz Festival. Out of this group, five students were selected for the elite Festival Band, a notable accomplishment given that selection was made from over 150 international schools worldwide. The remaining five, who are younger developing musicians, attended workshops and masterclasses, where they learned directly from experienced professionals and deepened their understanding of jazz techniques. This experience placed ASHK's students among top young musicians globally, offering them valuable performance experience and international exposure. Shortly after their return from Germany, the ASHK Lab Jazz ensemble was invited to perform at the West Kowloon Jazz Festival, a major annual music event in Hong Kong that celebrates jazz music and culture. This opportunity allowed the students to perform on the same afternoon as jazz legend Herbie Hancock, who was headlining the festival. The students were excited to showcase their work before a live audience and enjoyed the chance to watch Herbie Hancock and other professional acts perform.

Three students received offers from the Berklee College of Music, while others were accepted to institutions such as the Boston Conservatory, New England Conservatory, and the Juilliard School.

In December, ASHK's Winter Concerts featured performances from students across all grade levels, from Kindergarten through Grade 12. These concerts provided a platform to demonstrate the progress of the students and to highlight the breadth of the school's music program. The event concluded with a community play-along and sing-along of "Wonderful Christmastime," uniting the audience and performers in a shared celebration of the season.

The Spring Concert was another highlight for ASHK musicians, featuring performances at the HK Fringe Festival, held at the Fringe Club, and at Disneyland Hong Kong by the ASHK Concert Band ECA. Additionally, four ASHK students were selected to participate in the AMIS Asian Honour Bands in Seoul, further expanding their musical experiences and connections within the local and international music communities.

ASHK also hosted its first Jazz Night, focusing on middle and high school students. The event featured large ensemble jazz pieces as well as student-led combos, giving students opportunities to collaborate and to take the lead in performances. Family and friends attended to support the performers, contributing to a positive and encouraging atmosphere.

Spring also brought news of major music university acceptances for ASHK seniors. Three students received offers from the Berklee College of Music, while others were accepted to institutions such as the Boston Conservatory, New England Conservatory, and the Juilliard School. All acceptances were unconditional, and several were accompanied by scholarship offers, marking a significant achievement for the graduating class.

Looking ahead, ASHK's Head of Music, Mr. Liam Callan, was elected to the AMIS Board of Trustees, a group of nine teachers who oversee the organization. This appointment reflects Mr. Callan's leadership and raises ASHK's profile in the international music education community. In the next academic year, ASHK will host the AMIS Global Honour Jazz Festival in October 2025. Selected by audition from over 150 member schools, student musicians from around the world will gather in Hong Kong for the first Honors Jazz Festival to be held outside Europe in nearly a decade. Hosting this event is a significant honor for ASHK and will bring together talented young musicians to share their passion for jazz.

SMART WELLBEING

From social media pressure and academic expectations to maintaining peer relationships and a balanced lifestyle, adolescents today are navigating an unprecedented, continually shifting landscape of stressors. Parents now ranking mental health as their top concern for their children. Student wellbeing is a key pillar at Dunecrest American School, and a robust counselling program is in place spanning Early Childhood, Elementary and Middle & High School. This year, the program has been further fortified using a proactive, data-informed approach by implementing the Komodo Wellbeing Student Surveys.

Recognizing that openly expressing mental health concerns may be challenging for students, and supported by research that self-reported data can better represent adolescents' internal world and lived experience, Komodo's surveys offer students a non-confrontational, non-judgemental way to report if anything is troubling them. From academic pressure to sleep issues, bullying, social relationships, connectedness to the community and other factors, data is collected by way of regular check-ins, giving school leaders powerful insights into student wellbeing and the difficulties they face, and providing opportunities for early prevention

Students receive a personalized wellbeing score, can request staff check-ins, or even share compliment badges with teachers-creating a positive feedback loop within the school community.

The check-ins, developed by educational psychologists, are conducted via the Komodo app and assess multiple aspects of wellbeing: emotional, social, physical, and digital. Students receive a personalized wellbeing score, can request staff check-ins, or even share compliment badges with teachers—creating a positive feedback loop within the school community.

A Strategic, Data-Driven Wellbeing Program

The data collected from Komodo helps Dunecrest stay responsive to the evolving needs of its students. It provides valuable insights into key developmental areas, including social, emotional, digital, and physical wellbeing. The surveys provide visibility on trends across key wellbeing domains, enabling the school to design timely interventions. Whether it's through personalized check-ins, classroom-based strategies, or wider school initiatives, this data empowers educators to tailor their approach and uplift every student.

Enhancing Emotional and Mental Wellbeing

With each Komodo survey, students are encouraged to reflect on their emotional state and mental health. The system provides them with a clear wellbeing percentage, helping them track how they feel over time. When students need additional support, they can instantly request a private check-in with a teacher or counselor—allowing for quick, personalized responses that make a real difference.

Encouraging Student Self-Awareness and Engagement

Students are not only participants but active agents in their own wellbeing. Through visual graphs and trend tracking, they begin to understand what influences their emotional health. This promotes ownership and awareness, two key pillars of resilience and long-term mental wellness.
Compliment features also reinforce a culture of gratitude and recognition among students and staff.

Tackling Emerging Wellbeing Challenges

Digital wellbeing and exam-related stress are just two of the challenges that Komodo data has helped Dunecrest address. Insights from the surveys have prompted school-wide initiatives to promote healthier screen habits and reduce academic pressure during assessments. With this feedback loop in place, Dunecrest is well-equipped to respond to student needs before they escalate.

Empowering Students to Lead Wellbeing Initiatives

Dunecrest believes in cultivating leaders who care. Student Wellbeing Champions from both Elementary and Secondary School meet regularly to analyze survey results and brainstorm ideas to enhance peer wellbeing. In Secondary, select students also participate in Teen-to-Teen Mental Health Training, giving them the skills to be approachable, supportive figures among their classmates.

Strengthening Relationships Between Students and Teachers

One of Komodo's most powerful outcomes is the enhancement of teacher-student connections. With access to student wellbeing data, homeroom, advisory, inclusion, and counseling staff are better equipped to hold meaningful conversations and adjust learning experiences accordingly. Students feel seen, supported, and heard—core ingredients of a thriving learning environment.

"We are committed to the holistic success of our students, and that includes prioritizing their wellbeing. With Komodo, emotional and social support is not only

personalized but also data-driven—empowering every student to reach their full potential," said Jeff Smith, Director, Dunecrest American School

Looking Ahead: Supporting Educators, Too

Dunecrest's wellbeing journey is evolving. Building on the success of its student surveys, the school has started piloting the Komodo Teacher Wellbeing Survey. This tool allows teachers to reflect on their own wellbeing, share concerns, and help shape a more supportive workplace culture. Because a healthy school starts with healthy educators.

EDUCATIONAL ECOSYSTEMS

The Greenhouse at American International School in Egypt West Campus (AIS West), inaugurated this spring, is the result of six years of dedicated work by the AIS West PTO Go Green project, led by Ms. Hiba Dandan and in partnership with Urban Greens, a Cairo-based company that promotes urban agriculture. A working example of how sustainable agriculture can be integrated into a school environment, the greenhouse fosters environmental stewardship through experiential learning.

What began as a simple after-school activity has grown into an integral part of the curriculum at AIS West, offering hands-on educational experiences that resonate with students from the youngest learners in KG1 all the way through to the graduating seniors in G12.

Through a Train-the-Trainer model, students receive specialized training that equips them to establish and support similar sustainable agriculture projects in minimally resourced schools within the wider community.

Employing state-of-the-art hydroponic systems, the AIS West Greenhouse is resource efficient, cultivates a diverse array of crops, grown without traditional soil, minimizing overall environmental impact. This innovative approach showcases how locally grown, fresh produce, lessens reliance on long-distance transportation and associated carbon emissions.

The greenhouse functions as a crucial and engaging educational hub, seamlessly integrating practical learning with the school's academic curriculum. Ms. Dandan personally conducts comprehensive tours for classes spanning from KG1 to Grade 5, meticulously sharing the wealth of knowledge and information embedded within the greenhouse operations. These tours are aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) that the students are currently exploring in their classrooms, making abstract concepts tangible and fostering a deeper understanding of plant science, ecosystems, and sustainable practices.

For the youngest learners in KG1 and KG2, the greenhouse offers a unique opportunity to engage their senses and learn about healthy eating. They recently tried fresh lettuce, many for the first time, and discovered its crisp texture and mild flavor. This direct interaction helps to build positive associations with healthy foods and introduces them to the concept of where their food comes from at a very early age.

Building upon this foundation, the Grade 3 students recently undertook a remarkable project that combined agricultural learning with entrepreneurial skills. They successfully harvested lettuce grown within the greenhouse and then took on the responsibility of selling their produce to parents, teachers, and fellow students. Students were excited and proud as they presented their harvest and handled transactions. "It was a beautiful, natural place to visit, I felt like I was on a field trip!" exclaimed one student. This sentiment perfectly encapsulates the engaging and immersive nature of the learning environment within the greenhouse.

Grade 11 and Grade 12 students participate in an empowering Train-the-Trainer (TOT) program. Through this initiative, they receive specialized training that helps them establish and support similar sustainable agriculture projects in minimally resourced schools within the wider community. This peer-to-peer model not only reinforces their own understanding of sustainable practices but also significantly expands the reach of the Go Green project, fostering environmental stewardship, creating a ripple effect of positive change.

In addition, the Junior Urban Gardening program, teaches students about planting seeds, nurturing growth, understanding the importance of soil and water conservation, and the interconnectedness of living organisms. This early exposure cultivates a sense of environmental responsibility.

The AIS West Greenhouse at AIS West is far more than just a structure; it is a dynamic ecosystem of learning, sustainability, and community engagement. The project showcases how education and sustainable practices can powerfully converge to cultivate not only fresh produce but also a greener, more resilient future for the students and the wider community. It stands as an inspiring example of how a simple school initiative can blossom into a comprehensive educational tool that impacts students across all grade levels, fostering environmental awareness, practical skills, and a commitment to a more sustainable world.

NAVIGATING THE AI FAST LANE

As Artificial Intelligence (AI) continues to monopolize the conversation around the future of learning and work as we know it, the dizzying speed of AI evolution needs to be balanced by a measured approach, says Dr. Joseph Nettikaden. Here he outlines pathways for schools to roll out AI initiatives that can supercharge teaching & learning, while ensuring student and staff safety and wellbeing.

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

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming K-12 education, offering new opportunities for personalized learning, administrative efficiency, and creative teaching methods. However, the swift proliferation of AI tools in classrooms, unchecked, poses significant risks for both students and teachers, including privacy breaches, ethical dilemmas, and the erosion of academic integrity. As with any technology integration, a whole-school approach, following a strategic framework, with age-appropriate guidelines, will ensure sustained best practices and safeguard the well-being of all educational stakeholders.

Today, educators are experimenting with a wide array of AI tools-from adaptive learning platforms to AI-powered essay graders-often without centralized oversight or a unified framework from school administrators. This decentralized approach raises critical concerns, particularly around the handling of sensitive student data and Personally Identifiable Information (PII). Many AI tools are built on large language models (LLMs) and trained on extensive datasets, making it vital for educators to understand the specific capabilities and limitations of each tool before integrating them into the classroom. The multicultural setting of international schools, in particular, has further concerns arising from racially-biased and gender-biased data and lack of intercultural understanding, stemming from skewed data sources.

The rapid and often uncoordinated adoption of AI tools can lead to fragmented strategies within schools. Different departments or teachers may use disparate tools, resulting in inconsistencies that complicate efforts to scale AI initiatives school-wide. Without clear objectives and careful evaluation of outcomes, schools risk encountering conflicts, increased complexity, and diminished effectiveness in their AI adoption strategies. Moreover, the lack of oversight can expose students to inappropriate content, algorithmic bias, and privacy violations.

While fostering innovation is a priority, schools must equally prioritize student safety and well-being. Introducing AI into classrooms without adequate safeguards can compromise privacy, academic integrity, and mental health. Social and emotional growth can be further undermined by the additional risk of children "humanizing AI," by attributing human-like thoughts and feelings to AI-powered devices, blurring the lines between reality and technology. Monitoring the use of AI tools is paramount, and parents must be informed about how these technologies are being used and what data is being collected. Implementing robust security measures-such as data encryption, anonymization, and regular audits can help mitigate risks and build trust among students, parents, and educators.

To navigate these challenges, schools need a comprehensive adoption framework that aligns with ethical guidelines and privacy standards. Key components of such a framework include:

- **Ethical and Safety Guidelines**: Develop clear policies covering data privacy, bias mitigation, and the responsible use of AI tools. Regular training for educators and administrators is essential to ensure these guidelines are understood and implemented effectively.
- **Stakeholder Engagement**: Involve students, parents, teachers, and community members in AI policy development to ensure diverse perspectives and foster transparency.

> *The multicultural setting of international schools has further concerns arising from biased data and lack of intercultural understanding.*

- **Phased Rollout and Evaluation**: Pilot AI initiatives in select classrooms, gather feedback, and assess impact before scaling up. This approach allows for adjustments based on real-world outcomes and evolving technologies.
- **Continuous Monitoring and Auditing**: Establish systems for ongoing evaluation of AI tools to identify risks, ensure compliance, and maintain accountability.
- **Teacher and Student Training**: Invest in professional development to build AI literacy among educators and students, empowering them to use AI tools safely, ethically, and effectively.

Esol Education's American School of Bahrain's recent Responsible AI in Learning (RAIL) endorsement from the Middle States Association offers a possible path forward. ASB's whole-school approach integrates AI literacy, safety, and ethics across all grade levels, ensuring students and staff are learning how to use AI responsibly. The school developed comprehensive policies, updated procedures, and a change plan to embed AI in age-appropriate and ethically sound ways-from creative

> *Responsible AI integration should enhance, not replace, the vital human elements of education.*

SMART & SAFE:

The Ultimate AI Classroom Readiness Checklist for Educators

This checklist is designed to help ensure safe, effective, and equitable use of AI in educational settings, in line with leading child protection policies and digital best practices.

1 PURPOSE AND ALIGNMENT

- Does the AI tool support explicit educational goals and curriculum objectives?
- Is the tool addressing a clearly identified instructional need?
- Does the tool align with your curriculum and learning objectives?
- Are AI features used to support, not replace, meaningful learning and teacher-student interaction?

2 STUDENT AGENCY AND DIGITAL LITERACY

- Does the tool support student understanding and responsible use of AI?
- Are digital literacy and AI literacy integrated into the curriculum?

3 PRIVACY & DATA PROTECTION

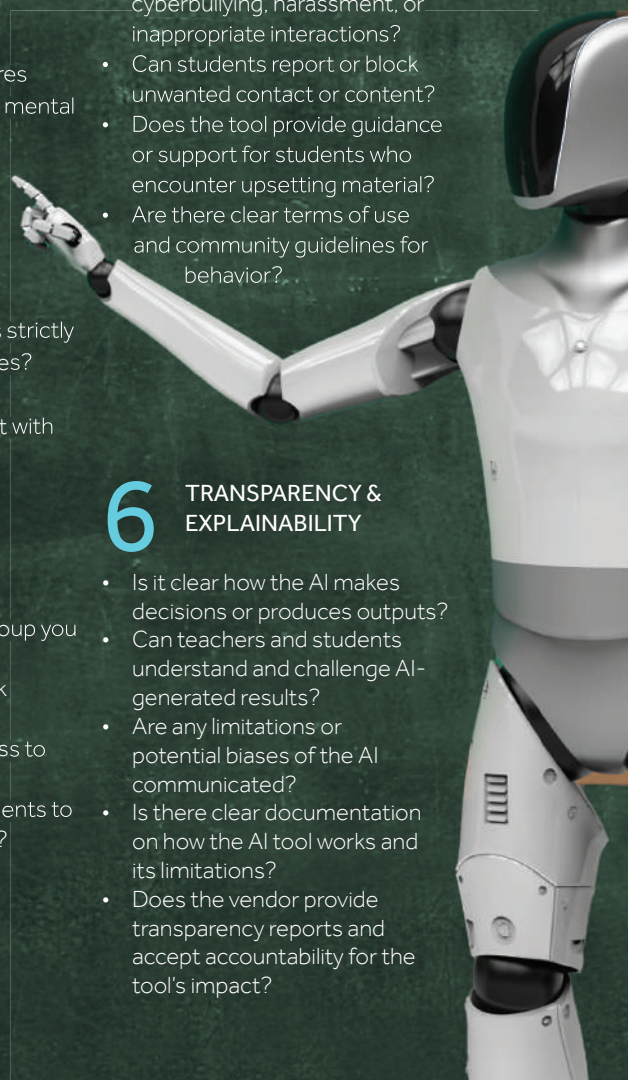
- Does the tool comply with relevant data protection laws (e.g., GDPR, COPPA, FERPA)?
- Are student data (names, email addresses, work) encrypted, securely stored, and protected from unauthorized access?
- Is there a clear privacy policy explaining what data is collected, how it's used, and who can access it?
- Can students use the tool without providing personally identifiable information?
- Has the tool been reviewed for harmful design features (e.g., addictive elements, negative mental health impacts)?
- Has the tool undergone third-party safety, privacy, and efficacy audits?
- Are there options to delete student data upon request?
- Is data collection limited to what is strictly necessary for educational purposes?
- Are data ownership and sharing policies transparent and compliant with regulations?

4 AGE-APPROPRIATENESS & CONTENT FILTERING

- Is the tool designed for the age group you teach?
- Does it automatically filter or block inappropriate or harmful content?
- Are there settings to restrict access to certain features or content?
- Does the tool avoid exposing students to advertising or third-party content?

5 USER SAFETY & WELLBEING

- Are there safeguards to prevent cyberbullying, harassment, or inappropriate interactions?
- Can students report or block unwanted contact or content?
- Does the tool provide guidance or support for students who encounter upsetting material?
- Are there clear terms of use and community guidelines for behavior?



6 TRANSPARENCY & EXPLAINABILITY

- Is it clear how the AI makes decisions or produces outputs?
- Can teachers and students understand and challenge AI-generated results?
- Are any limitations or potential biases of the AI communicated?
- Is there clear documentation on how the AI tool works and its limitations?
- Does the vendor provide transparency reports and accept accountability for the tool's impact?

podcast projects in elementary classes to AI-assisted assessments in high school. Teachers receive ongoing training, and parents are kept informed, fostering a culture of transparency and continuous improvement. This recognition highlights ASB's commitment to not just using AI for routine tasks, but leveraging it as a transformative force for creativity, deeper understanding, and future readiness.

ASB's experience demonstrates the value of rigorous standards, stakeholder engagement, and sustained professional development in achieving responsible AI integration.

Collaboration between educators, policymakers, technology developers, and parents is key to successful AI implementation in a K-12 school community. By prioritizing ethical use, data security, and inclusive access, schools can harness AI's potential while minimizing risks. Ultimately, responsible AI integration should enhance, not replace, the vital human elements of education, preparing students for a future where technological fluency and ethical awareness go hand in hand.

Schools that embrace this balanced, proactive approach will not only protect their communities but also set the standard for best practices in the evolving landscape of educational technology.

7 ACCESSIBILITY & INCLUSION

- Is the tool accessible to students with disabilities (e.g., screen reader compatibility, alternative text)?
- Does it support multiple languages or diverse learning needs?
- Has the tool been evaluated for algorithmic bias and fairness?

8 HUMAN OVERSIGHT & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Can teachers monitor student activity and interactions on the platform?
- Are there controls for teachers to manage student accounts and settings?
- Will teachers maintain oversight and control over AI-assisted instruction?
- Is professional development available for educators on using and assessing the tool?
- Can teachers easily remove or restrict access for students if needed?

9 IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING

- Is there a clear implementation plan (rollout, onboarding, support, integration)?
- Have all stakeholders (students, parents, administrators) been consulted?

10 VENDOR TRUSTWORTHINESS & SUPPORT

- Is the vendor compliant with school, district, and national data privacy standards?
- Is the provider reputable, with positive reviews from other educators or institutions?
- Are there clear channels for technical support and reporting issues?
- Is the tool regularly updated for security and safety?

11 PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT & CONSENT

- Is parental consent required and collected where necessary?
- Are parents informed about how the tool works and what data it collects?
- Can parents access or review their child's data and activity?

12 CONTINUOS MONITORING AND EVALUATION

- Are mechanisms in place for regular review of the tool's effectiveness and safety?
- Is there a process for collecting feedback and making necessary adjustments or discontinuing use?

TIP:
Before adoption, pilot the tool with a small group, review its privacy and safety documentation, and consult with your school's safeguarding lead or IT department.
References:

- UNICEF Policy Guidance on AI for Children
- UK Safer Internet Centre: Educator Resources
- ISTE AI in Education Guidelines
- Common Sense Education: Privacy Evaluations
- COPPA, FERPA (U.S. child privacy laws)
- NIST AI Risk Management Framework (NIST, 2023)
- EU AI Act (European Commission, 2024)
- OSPI AI Guidance (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2023)
- World Economic Forum AI Toolkit (WEF, 2023)
- TeachAI Guidance (TeachAI, 2023)

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.

GLOBAL STEWARDSHIP

From the pre-opening year at American School Hong Kong (ASHK) in 2015, expertly navigating the challenges of establishing a new Esol Education school, complete with a total campus retrofit, to bringing fresh energy and new direction at American International School in Egypt (AIS Egypt) in 2022 to his expert steerage of American International School in Cyprus (AISC) starting 2024, John Jalsevac has been a stalwart presence on the Esol leadership team for over a decade. *STRIDES* connected with this inspiring leader to delve into his remarkable journey and hear about his vision for AISC in the years ahead.

Where did you grow up?

I'm proud to say that I was born in Toronto, Canada. Many may not know this, but Toronto is the 4th largest city in North America after Mexico City, New York and Los Angeles. Toronto is a very cosmopolitan city with fantastic neighbourhoods, shops, restaurants, galleries and people. And, as is typical for most Canadian cities, Toronto enjoys 4 distinct seasons. I met my lovely wife Joanne in Toronto when we were in Grade 9 together. Prior to beginning my international education journey 20 years ago I was fortunate to work as a teacher, principal and superintendent in Toronto.

What or who inspired you to become a school director?

I have always graciously accepted the gift of leadership bestowed upon me from the days of my youth when I became class and student council president, lead in school plays, and captain of most athletic teams I played on, to the point where, after working as a high school PE teacher for only 7 years, I was successful with an application to work as a High School Vice Principal. That was many years ago and since then I have been fortunate to serve at some very prestigious schools. Along the way, I have worked with many outstanding teachers and students, and it is these people who continue to inspire me to serve as a school leader.

You are the first person to have served as Director of three different Esol Education schools. What has motivated you to work with Esol Education for ten years on three different continents?

As a Director of a school, depending on the governance model of that school, I recognize that I will report to either an ownership group or a Board of Governors. I've worked in a variety of settings over the years.

With Esol Education, I have always found that my supervisors were down-to-earth, accessible, not stuck in policy, collaborative, personable, and friendly. I know what to expect from school to school and am comforted knowing that I can get on with running the school in the manner that my experience and qualifications have trained me to do and in the manner that the ownership group recognized when they hired me for the 3 different schools.

With your wide-ranging experience in international education across the Americas, East Asia and the Middle East, what do you feel is the need of the hour when it comes to educating our students?

Building positive rapport! It's fundamental for success and usually connected to respect. Respect from students must now, more than ever, be earned – not demanded. We have all had favorite or inspirational teachers from our own school days and when we reflect on the qualities of those wonderful educators who were instrumental in our development, we recognize that they were genuine, positive, heart-in-the-right-kind-of-place teachers and mentors, who enjoyed being with us and respected us as students and as individuals.

> *Beyond the academic rigor, holistic nature, liberal arts tradition, and university preparatory excellence, our students, through engagement in IB programs, will have a better opportunity to become self-actualized, critical thinking, problem solvers who are equipped to reach their full potential.*

How do you feel the IB program meets the needs of students?

I have worked in five schools with IB programs. Some were new to the program and very much in an infancy stage in terms of program development, while others were well-established, high performing schools. Yet a common thread ran through all these experiences which produced for me a unifying narrative. Quite simply, beyond the academic rigor, holistic nature, liberal arts tradition, and university preparatory excellence, our students, through engagement in IB programs, will have a better opportunity to become self-actualized, critical thinking, problem solvers who are equipped to reach their full potential.

With the advent of AI and other technologies, how does teaching practice need to adapt for 21st century learning?

We're going through an inevitable but necessary transition or paradigm shift at my school in Cyprus where AI is currently thought of in a pejorative sort of way. I suspect that this situation exists in many schools. It is this way because more than a few students have used AI in a manner that puts them at odds with their school's academic integrity policy. Yet educators and parents also recognize the enormous untapped potential that exists with AI. The trick for all of us is to stay the course and remain open-minded, informed, and better equipped to tap into this amazing and transformative tool with endless possibilities for infusion in schools.

What aspirations do you have for AISC for the coming years?

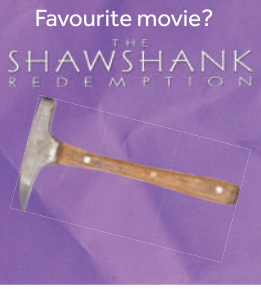
I am fortunate to work at a school that enjoys an excellent reputation as a warm, welcoming, and invitational community. I'm confident that our students would say to their parents that they enjoy their experience at AISC and feel supported and inspired daily. However, the former hotel and hospital buildings we occupy, which many describe as charming or interesting, need some upgrades. One of my major goals over the next few years is to build further capacity in our students by providing them with the resources and facilities they need to reach their full potential.

What is the best way for parents to be involved in their children's education?

The trick is to know when to pull in the rope and when to let it out a bit. Children need to develop a sense of independence and must eventually assume ownership and responsibility for their education. Most parents get it right and know how to support and supervise their children. However, some limit a child's growing independence by becoming too involved and overbearing. Balance is the key – and a lot of patience and love along the way.

RAPID FIRE

Favourite movie?



Favourite live theatre production?
Les Miserables

Favourite sports team?
Toronto Maple Leafs

Most inspirational travel destination?
The pyramids in Giza Egypt

What's in your lunchbox?
I go back and forth between a hot lunch (pasta or chicken or beef are 3 favourites) and a sandwich or two. Today, I've got a cheddar cheese sandwich on sourdough bread and some sliced raw vegetables

Originally from Toronto, John began his career as a physical education/geography teacher. For many years, John served his district as a principal and later as a curriculum coordinator and superintendent of education. John began the international chapter of his career in 2004 and for the next 20 years he has worked in a senior leadership capacity in schools in Hong Kong, China, Egypt and now Cyprus.

John obtained his BA from York University, BEd from the University of Toronto, MSc from Niagara University in New York, and Supervisory Officer's and Principal's Certification from the Ministry of Education in Ontario.

John is married to Joanne and they have two children who reside in Hong Kong and New York respectively. They are also blessed with 3 lovely grandchildren!

A PHOENICIAN LEGACY

Before the ascent of the Greek and Roman empires, an ancient Semitic civilization ruled the shores and islands of the eastern Mediterranean extending from Levantine lands to the islands of Cyprus, Malta, Rhodes and Crete, across the coast of Northern Africa, spanning Carthage, Algeria and Morocco, all the way to their colonies in Malaga in southern Spain. From 1200 to 332 BC, these skilled seafaring adventurers journeyed from their homeland in present day Lebanon, and founded a flourishing network of city states by establishing colonies along the various shores they visited. Dr. Bassem Akl from Esol Education's Universal College - Aley, takes us on a journey to the ancient city state of Byblos, which, along with Tyre and Beirut in Lebanon, was the homeland of the Phoenicians.

Contributing Writer: Dr. Bassem Akl, Middle School Principal & High School Social Studies Coordinator, Universal College Aley

From its origins as a fishing settlement approximately 10,000 years ago, Byblos is one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, located 40 km north of Beirut, Byblos has been a part of numerous cultures including Greek, Phoenician, Egyptian, Assyrian, Persian, Hellenistic, Roman, Genoese, Mamluk and Ottoman. From Neolithic settlements and Bronze Age temples to Persian forts and the Crusader citadel, the city of Byblos showcases an unprecedented depth of history, taking visitors on a remarkable journey through time.

"I've visited Byblos many times, but deepening my historical understanding has profoundly transformed the way I see and feel about this ancient city," shared Dr. Akl. "What once seemed like a beautiful coastal town now strikes me as one of the great cradles of civilization. Byblos isn't just old—it's foundational. This is the city that gave the world the alphabet, and stood as a beacon of manufacturing, industry and culture while much of the world remained in darkness. It witnessed the birth of written language, the flourishing of crafts, pottery, shipbuilding, and the early stirrings of literature and theater. To walk the streets of Byblos today is to walk through layers of human achievement that shaped the course of history."

The months of March, April and May are the ideal time to plan a trip, when the weather is mild and landscape lush, making this a perfect Spring Break destination. "Most of my visits to Byblos have taken place in the spring, a season when the fragrance of blossoming flowers mingles with the lingering scent of antiquity—a perfect harmony of renewal and memory," says Dr. Akl. "The Phoenicians, who once thrived here, believed that spring marked the renewal of life, signaling a fresh beginning for humankind." The city's religious significance is underscored by the ancient temple of Baalat Gebal, the city's chief goddess, which was also venerated in Egypt.

To walk the streets of Byblos today is to walk through layers of human achievement that shaped the course of history.

Once you visit Byblos, it leaves a lasting impression. The city's history and ruins invite you to keep learning more each time you return. Visiting becomes less about sightseeing and more about understanding the past and how it shaped the present. The city is dotted with archaeological sites that reveal its long history. The old market, castle, and ruins show evidence of daily life, trade, and royal burials. Among the ruins are two stone chairs, which some believe are linked to ancient local gods.

Climbing to the top of Byblos Castle gives you a clear view of the city's surroundings. On one side, you see the seafront, which shows Byblos' importance as a historical trading center. Byblos was revered in antiquity for its export of cedar wood, papyrus, glass, and purple dye. The Phoenicians were renowned for their skills in ship-building, and their luxury goods such as pottery, gold and silver jewelry, were highly prized by cultures around the region, with artifacts found as far away as Britain, marking a rich maritime trade across the Mediterranean. On the other side, the Lebanese mountains remind you of the city's long history of resilience. Inside the castle, you can see evidence of the many civilizations that have left their mark on Byblos.

The Lebanese National Museum in Beirut is a must-visit for archaeology buffs, with its stunning display of artifacts from Byblos: coins, pottery, and above all, the Ahiram inscription. Since ancient times, people have looked for ways to record their ideas and preserve their history. The Phoenician alphabet, developed along the Levantine coast, was the first writing system to use only letters, making writing simpler and more flexible. This system was later adapted by the Greeks and became the basis for many modern alphabets. One of the earliest examples is the inscription of King Ahiram of Byblos from the second millennium BCE. This text, found on his sarcophagus, is written entirely with letters and has no pictures, showing a shift from using images to representing language with symbols for sounds. Byblos is recognized as the birthplace of the alphabet, the basis for most western languages written today.

Byblos is far more than a picturesque coastal town; the city's legacy extends beyond the past—today, it plays an important role in Lebanon's cultural tourism and educational outreach. Institutions such as the Byblos Fossil Museum and ongoing archaeological efforts continue to shed new light on ancient life, offering fresh insights for historians and travelers alike. As new discoveries are unearthed and conservation efforts expand, Byblos continues to connect modern generations with the achievements of one of history's most remarkable civilizations—reminding us that the stories of the past are never truly finished, only waiting to be rediscovered.

TRAVEL TIPS

BEST TIME TO VISIT

March through May offers mild weather and lush landscapes, making it ideal for exploring both the ruins and the modern town. Spring also coincides with local festivals and flower blooms.

LOCAL CUISINE

Enjoy fresh seafood at the harbor's restaurants, and sample traditional Lebanese dishes in the old town's cafes.

GETTING THERE

Byblos is about 40 km north of Beirut and easily accessible by car, taxi, or public bus. The drive along the coastal highway offers scenic Mediterranean views.

CULTURAL ETIQUETTE

Dress modestly when visiting religious sites. Engage with local artisans in the souk for authentic crafts and souvenirs.

MUST-SEE SITES

Don't miss the Crusader Castle, the ancient port, the old souk, and the temple of Baalat Gebal. The royal necropolis and the site's well-preserved city walls provide insight into the city's ancient grandeur.

MUSEUM VISIT

Crusader Castle Museum, The Lebanese National Museum in Beirut.

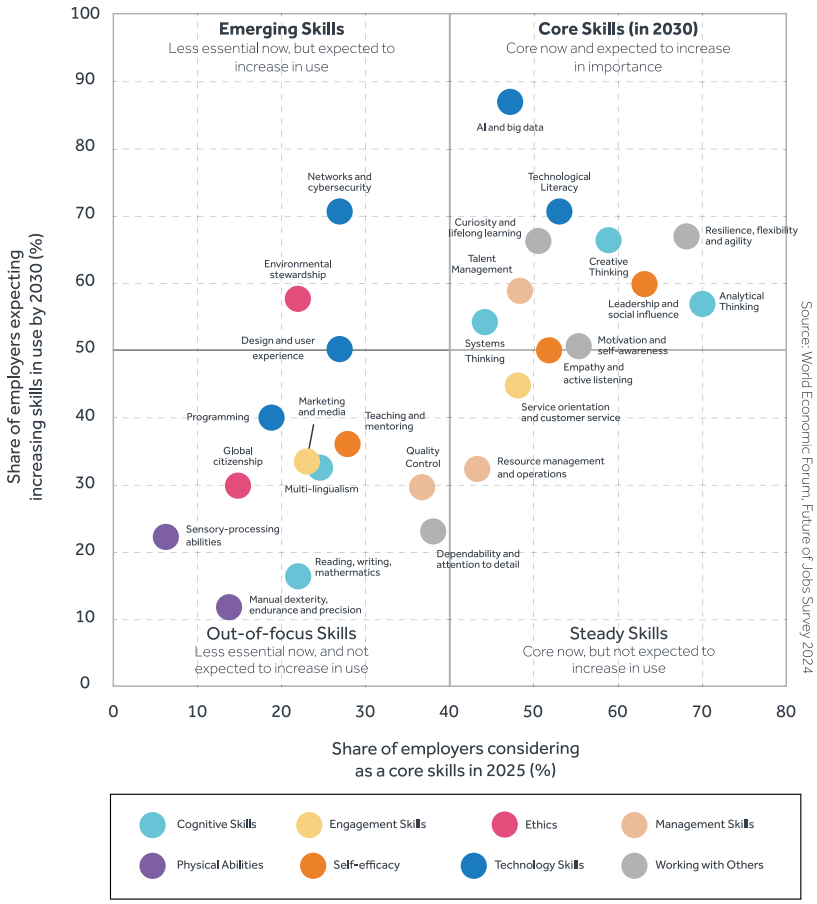
THE ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR A BRIGHT FUTURE: EMBRACING A HUMAN-CENTERED APPROACH

As we look ahead to 2030, it's easy to picture a world dominated by machines-where AI takes care of everything and coding is at the forefront. But the reality is much richer and, honestly, more hopeful.

By: Dr. Andrew Torris, Ed.D., Director, American International School in Abu Dhabi

What will really count in future workplaces? It won't be just about technical skills or digital know-how; it's also about our uniquely human qualities: the ability to think strategically, lead with empathy, embrace change, and dedicate ourselves to lifelong learning.

The World Economic Forum's "Future of Jobs Report" makes this shift clear. The most critical skills employers are prioritizing for the next decade are not technical in nature; they are relational, reflective, and deeply tied to how we understand ourselves and others. As an educator and school leader, I find that incredibly encouraging-and also a call to action. Let's take a closer look at the skills that stand out and why they should influence what occurs in our classrooms, school policies, and leadership practices.



Systems Thinking: Context is Everything

In our interconnected world filled with challenges like climate change, global pandemics, and social inequity, it's clear that linear problem-solving just isn't enough anymore. My belief is that we need systems thinkers who can see the big picture-the 30,000 foot view-not just the next step. We must nurture within ourselves and our students the skills to ask insightful questions, forge deeper connections, and grasp the effects of our actions. It's not merely about technical manuals; this is the realm of strategists and educators who know that context matters.

Creative Thinking: Not Just a "Nice to Have" Anymore

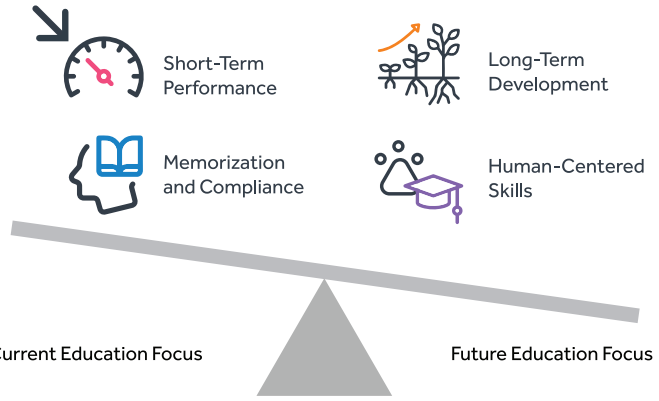
AI can replicate what's been done before. It can't imagine what's never been tried. That's why creativity, once seen as a "nice to have," is now a "must have." In our school, we see this every day. The most compelling student projects aren't the ones that follow the rubric to the letter; they're the ones that push boundaries, remix ideas, and spark dialogue. That's the energy we need in the workforce of 2030-and we need to cultivate it intentionally.

> *[AI] can't imagine what's never been tried. That's why creativity, once seen as a "nice to have," is now a 'must have.'*

Analytical Thinking: Depth Over Data

We often find ourselves overwhelmed with information while genuinely seeking meaningful insights. A day does not go by when I hear someone say, "I am buried in information!" Now more than ever, navigating through complexities is crucial-

filtering out all that noise and focusing on what truly matters. Analytical thinking isn't just about mastering spreadsheets; it's about discernment. It's about saying, "Here's what's important," and "Here's what we still have yet to uncover." In a world filled with AI-generated options, the human touch in making wise choices remains essential.



Self-Awareness and Motivation: The Inner Game

The most overlooked skill set may be the most powerful: self-awareness, intrinsic motivation, and emotional regulation. We call this executive function in educational psychology-and it's foundational. Students who can manage their emotions, set goals, and reflect on their behavior tend to thrive. Adults who can do the same lead more effectively and build healthier cultures. As workplaces become more fluid and less hierarchical, this inner game matters more than ever.

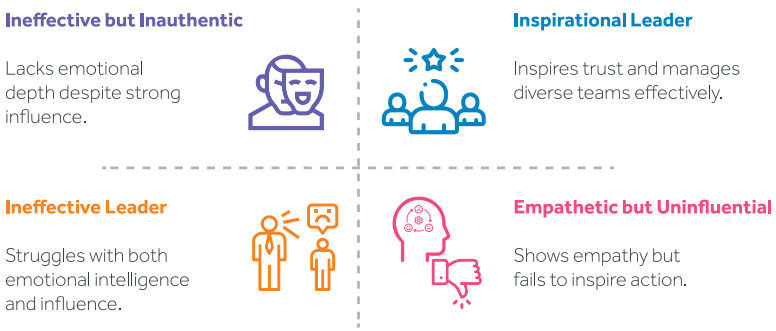
Leadership and Social Influence: Building Skills

Leadership in 2030 will look different. It won't just be about titles. It'll be about influence, authenticity, and the ability to bring people together. Emotional intelligence—empathy, listening, conflict resolution—will be the differentiator. Can you inspire trust? Can you manage a diverse team? Can you lead with both clarity and compassion? It is those among us who have these skills refined that will lead change and make the world a better place.

Our Mission: Building Resilience, Agility, and Adaptability

At the American International School in Abu Dhabi, our newly adopted mission is to "Develop resilient learners, compassionate leaders for a dynamic world." Adaptable and resilient learners will find themselves making significant gains and be ahead in amazing ways. Resilience isn't just about bouncing back; it's about growing and flourishing through challenges. The wonderful news? It's something that can be taught! In fact, it's essential! Schools that weave this into their curriculum do so much more than prepare kids for tests—they're equipping them for a fulfilling life ahead!

Leadership Skills for 2030



Curiosity and Lifelong Learning: Keep Learning and Stay Relevant

If you've stopped learning, you've started falling behind. That's not a threat—it's a truth. Curiosity is the engine of lifelong growth. The best professionals I know—whether they're teachers, designers, or tech entrepreneurs—are voracious learners. They ask, they read, they experiment. And they stay humble enough to know they don't know it all. That's the mindset we need to model and nurture.

So What Does This Mean for Education - and All of Us?

This is where things get real. If we know that the most essential skills for the future are human-centered, creative, critical, emotional, and adaptive, then why are so many schools still built around memorization and compliance? We have to do better! That means shifting our focus from short-term academic performance to long-term human development. It means integrating social-emotional learning, interdisciplinary thinking, and student agency into the core of what we do.

Technology will continue to shape the landscape. AI will be a powerful tool. But it will not replace the need for reflection, connection, and ethical decision-making. Those are our jobs—and they always will be.

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Dr. Andrew Torris began his education career 38 years ago in the beautiful state of Oregon. Since 2001, he has enjoyed leading international schools in inspiring places like Saudi Arabia, China, Dubai, India, and now Abu Dhabi. He also had the pleasure of serving as an Assistant Professor of Education at Warner Pacific University in Portland.

Dr. Torris proudly holds a doctorate in Educational and Organizational Leadership from Nova Southeastern University, a master's degree from Pacific University, and a leadership certificate from Lewis & Clark College. As a lifelong learner and community builder, Andy is a father of four and a soon-to-be grandfather! He and his wonderful wife, Amanda DeCardy, love to recharge by traveling and creating unforgettable memories with their family.

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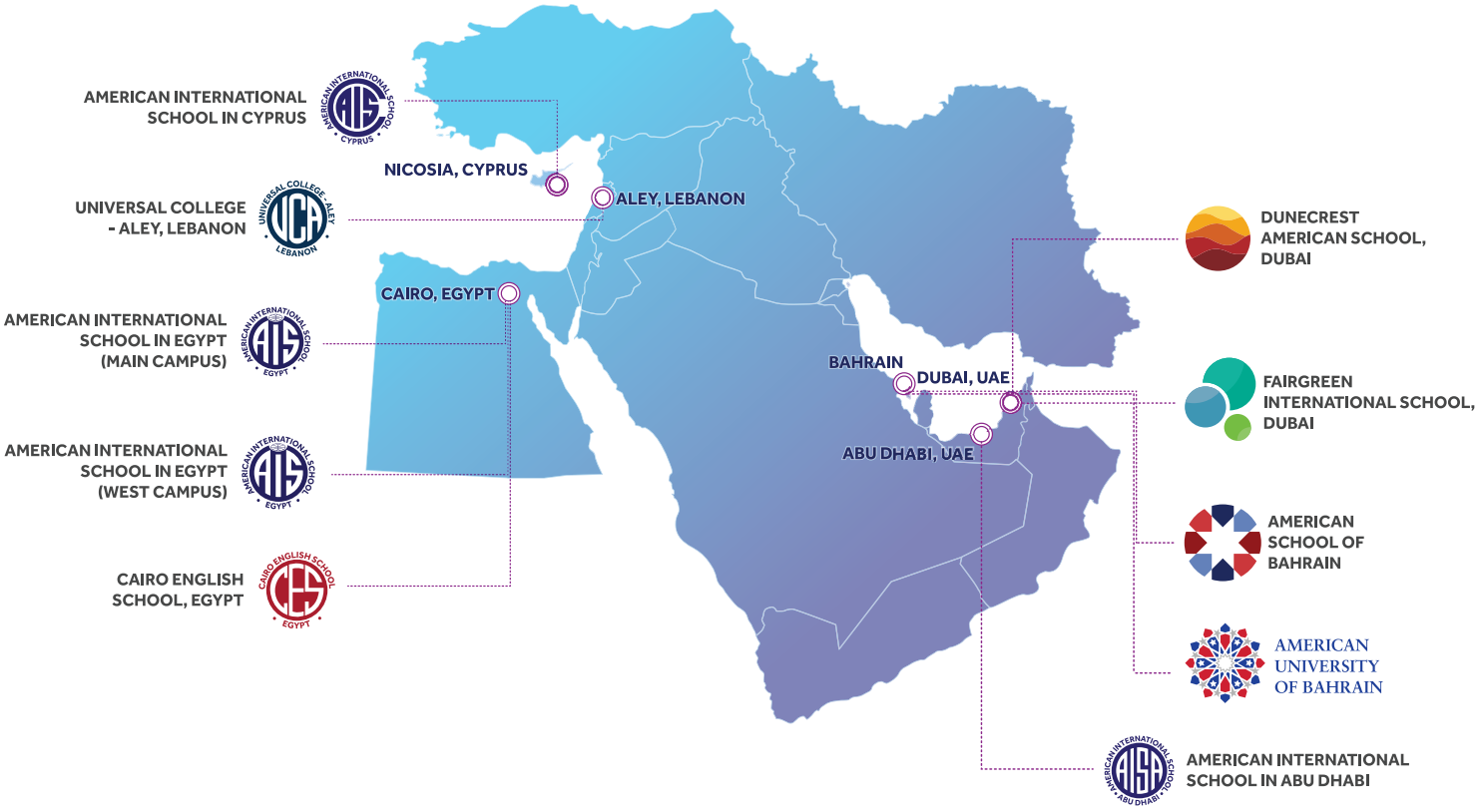

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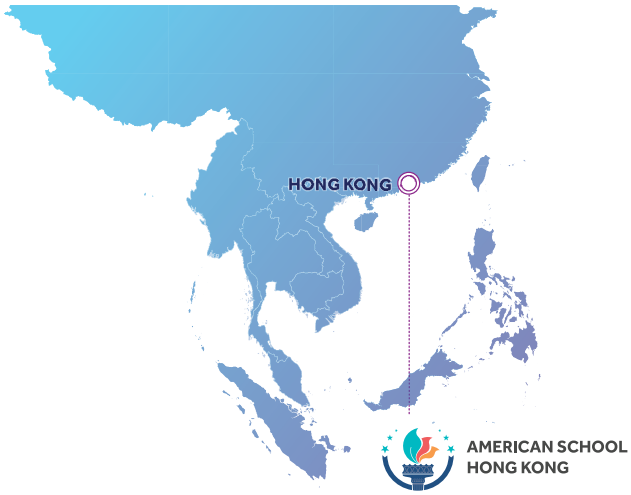

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