



An Introduction

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What is NEASC'S ACE Learning PROTOCOL?

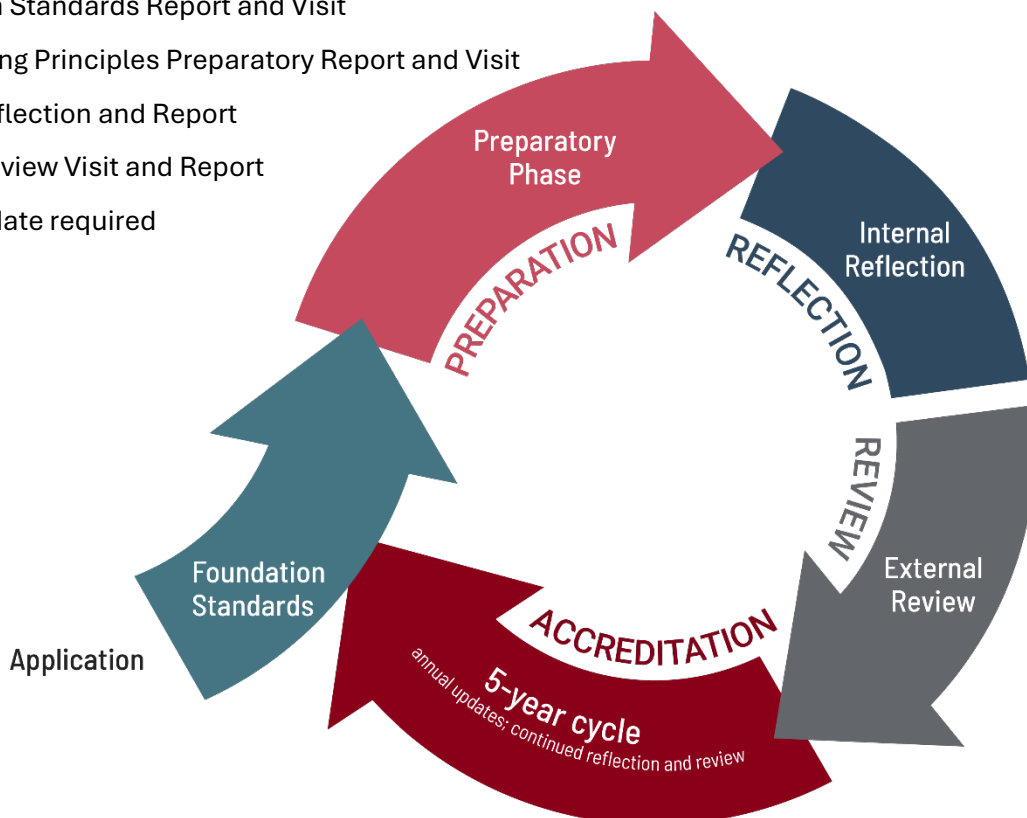
ACE Learning offers a fundamentally different approach to school accreditation compared to prior accreditation protocols. Launched in 2016, ACE Learning gives schools the opportunity to earn NEASC Accreditation while focusing heavily on effective learning and teaching in a modern world. Schools address the Foundation Standards early in the process so that the ACE Internal Reflection process can focus primarily on creating a highly effective learning-focused community based on ACE Learning Impacts. NEASC's ten ACE Learning Principles give schools a framework for deep conversations about effective learning.

ACE Learning entails several phases culminating in the External Review Visit (ERV) by a team of trained peer educators that typically leads to accreditation for candidate schools or continued accreditation for member schools. Schools undergo continued accreditation process every five years.

Schools with two or more IB programmes may inquire about using the ACE Learning Principles as a basis for the Collaborative Learning Protocol, a unified approach with the IB evaluation process.

Phases of NEASC Accreditation

- Foundation Standards Report and Visit
- ACE Learning Principles Preparatory Report and Visit
- Internal Reflection and Report
- External Review Visit and Report
- Annual update required



Foundation Standard 1 – Learning Structure

The school has guiding statements that describe the school's purpose and its desired outcomes as a learning community. They have a written curriculum for all grades and content that describes goals for learners with associated methods of assessment and expected teaching practices.

Schools are expected to have three key features to support its Learning Structure:

- Clearly expressed and well understood guiding statements that describe the school’s purpose and expected outcomes for learners. Guiding Statements may include a mission, vision, statements of values and beliefs, a “Profile of the Graduate,” etc. Please note that a Shared Understanding of High-Quality Learning, while foundational to a school, is not expected now if the school is in its first round of ACE, but rather after the NEASC expect to see this at the final External Review Visit
- A written articulated curriculum for all grades and content areas that describes goals for learners that includes key knowledge, skills, competencies with associated methods of assessment and expected teaching practices
- Learning Policies such as an assessment policy, SEN policy, a language policy and a teaching and learning policy that support the school’s mission and goals for learners

Evidence	* indicates required documentation
*Guiding Statement(s) such as Mission, Values, Shared Understanding of High-Quality Learning	
*Curriculum documentation, school-wide	
*Assessment Policy and procedures	
*Language Policy and procedures	
*Admissions Policy and procedures	
*Inclusion policies and procedures	
Social Emotional Learning Policy, Curriculum, Procedures	
* Graduation Requirements and school profile sheet given to universities and other schools	
Sample of progress reports to parents from each division of the school	

Indicators

A. The school is guided by broadly accepted and periodically reviewed Guiding Statements that express the school's overall purpose.

B. The school has a shared Understanding of High-Quality Learning that is documented, understood and observable.

First-time ACE Pathway schools:

You may skip this indicator since a shared Understanding of High-Quality Learning is expected only after the preparatory phase, as the Internal Reflection begins.

C. Teaching and learning are guided by comprehensive curriculum documentation that reflects horizontal and vertical articulation.

D. Curriculum review including appropriate innovation is completed at periodic intervals and is responsive to the needs of all learners.

E. The school ensures adequate ongoing professional growth and development opportunities for teaching and non-teaching staff

F. The school has a consistent, fair and impactful approach to assessment that is documented in policy. The school uses a variety of data to improve student learning and to inform decision making.

G. The school's admissions and academic policies and practices align with the school's Guiding Statements, programs, inclusion policy and profile of students attending the school.

H. The school ensures that all students with language support needs and learning differences, including those with exceptionally high ability or talents, are given appropriate support to thrive in the learning environment.

I. The school has a robust admissions screening and onboarding process for students and families so that students' individual learning needs are understood and supported.

Foundation Standard 2 – Organizational Structure

The school has in place a clear governance and leadership structure with defined roles and responsibilities, and a faculty and staff qualified for the roles to which they are assigned. Expectations defined in policy are carried out and observed in practice. Mechanisms for assessing the effectiveness and functionality of the school’s organizational structures have been developed.

Schools are expected to have four key features to support its Organizational Structure:

- clearly defined roles and responsibilities, including all levels of management, including those with curriculum responsibilities
- strategic leadership
- an ethical and transparent Governing Body
- structures to hire and evaluate staff and to also help them develop as professionals

Evidence	* indicates required documentation
<p>*Guiding documents such as Bylaws and Governing Body Policy Manual which include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legal compliance - Governing Body functioning (terms, elections, committees, etc.) - Protocols for preventing, intervening in, remediating and learning from incidents of misconduct. Policy or bylaw governing the removal of a Trustee “for cause.” - Financial policies and procedures - Risk management - Emergency preparedness - Safety and security - Data security - Community and external relations - Child Protection - Ethical conduct, including Conflict-of-Interest, Confidentiality and Code of Conduct for staff and Governing Body members 	
*Faculty/Instructor/Staff Handbook	
*Roster with names and roles of Governing Body members	
*Organizational chart	

*Faculty list with details that may include current position, qualifications (academic or industry), number of years in teaching, special training, English proficiency level, nationality/other demographics, etc.
*Strategic Framework/School Action Plan, 2 most recent Board Agendas, Minutes, and actions arising.
*Job descriptions (to include samples from all levels of school staff)
*Professional Growth and Evaluation process for employees
Professional Development Plan, training priorities, calendar, etc.

Indicators
A. The Governing Body is constituted, with regard to membership and organization, so as to provide the school with sound direction and effective support in the current and long-term life of the school. Governing body members should represent the diversity of the student body.
B. The Governing Body promotes strong ethical values and compliance through appropriate and effective oversight.
C. The Governing Body maintains policies and employs practices that help it execute its responsibilities across the full range of fiduciary matters, including those listed above in the Policy Manual requirements.
D. The Governing Body holds the Head of School responsible for ensuring that administrative procedures are aligned with Board policies.
E. The Governing Body avoids conflicts of interest, breach of confidentiality and other forms of misconduct.
F. The Governing Body provides appropriate orientation for new members to understand their duties, school policies and their implications.
G. The Governing Body and the Head of School enjoy a positive, open, and mutually supportive relationship.
H. The Governing Body oversees a documented, defined appraisal process for the Head of School, conducted regularly with the Head's knowledge, including written provisions for discussion and appeal.

I. The Governing Body and Leadership Team stay informed about the strategic environment and emerging trends that may affect the school.
J. The Governing Body has a succession plan to ensure continuity in the unexpected event of loss or disruption of Board members or the Head of School. When needed, the Board conducts the search for a new Head of School in accordance with proven practice and incorporating a comprehensive transition plan.
K. An ethos of transparency is promoted by the Governing Body and among all levels of leadership to ensure that stakeholders have appropriate access to information about decisions and matters that impact them.
L. The Governing Body and Leadership Team regularly engage in self-evaluation and appropriate training.
M. Funding decisions support educational priorities and are clearly communicated to all stakeholders. A multi-year financial plan is clearly tied to the school's mission and goals.
N. The school has effective governance, leadership structures in place to support sustainable school operations and leadership continuity.
O. Recruitment and screening processes are in place to ensure that employees in all categories are appropriately qualified, screened for child protection history, suited to their position, and supportive of the school's Guiding Statements.
P. The Head of School and/or Leadership Team assign workloads that allow employees to be effective in carrying out their responsibilities. (Impactful)
Q. Periodic performance reviews are conducted for all employees and supported by appropriate professional development.
R. All teachers are trained and proficient in supporting learners with mild to moderate learning differences and developing language abilities and learners learning English as an additional language.
S. All teachers have a level of language proficiency appropriate to their teaching responsibilities.

Foundation Standard 3 – Health, Safety, and Security

The learning environment is healthy, safe, and secure for all members of the school community. Effective and well-established policies and procedures exist and are acted upon to protect children, adults, and visitors alike.

Schools are expected to have policies and procedures relating to health, safety and security:

- to ensure that the physical and emotional safety of students, teachers, and others is supported
- to ensure that there are appropriate resources and training to that end
- to verify ongoing implementation of risk assessment, health, safety, and security measures with appropriate auditing and recordkeeping

Evidence	* indicates required documentation
*Child Protection/Safeguarding Policy	
Single record of background checks for all staff and written references from the most recent HOS and 1-2 other references (no more than 5 years old) (Will be required starting 2026)	
*Policies for online safety	
*Risk assessment and emergency response and crisis management procedures	
*Health/medical provision and facilities	
*Local codes compliance documents (available for viewing onsite)	
*Code of Ethics/Behavior for students and staff	
*Record keeping/Data protection policy	
Records of evacuation and other safety drills	
*Description of wellbeing efforts not limited to Social Emotional Curriculum, counseling provision with documented policies and procedures	

Indicators
A. The school meets all eight NEASC requirements for Child Protection as listed above (see FS template).
B. The school is in full compliance with all applicable local, regional, and national safety and health codes and regulations.
C. The school has appropriate storage and handling procedures for hazardous materials such as laboratory and industrial chemicals. If students are working remotely, the school has appropriate procedures and policies for safety of science experiments and other student self-directed activities.
D. Sufficient resources (human, financial, and structural) are allocated to the essential work of maintaining the health and safety of students.
E. An internal health and safety committee (or its equivalent) provides a regular, systematic review of safety procedures and practices.
F. Crisis management team (or subcommittee of the Internal Health and Safety Committee) is trained and prepared to convene in response to potential or actual crisis or emergency situations but also meets on a regular basis to plan and discuss overall safety, security and emergency preparedness policies and strategy
G. The school premises have an effective system to control access to the school by visitors and other non-school personnel.
H. Access to the school's Learning Management System is tightly controlled and clear parameters are outlined.
I. The school has comprehensive health policies and procedures that are regularly updated and communicated.
J. The school's physical and mental health care services for students and employees are administered and carried out by appropriately trained and experienced personnel and/or school personnel provide appropriate referrals as needed.
K. The school conducts and maintains records of periodic evacuation and other context-appropriate safety drills.
L. All off-site trips and fieldwork by students have appropriate supervision and support and are subject to a pre-departure risk assessment by competent staff and post-trip reflection to promote ongoing improvements.
M. The school promotes practices and attitudes that support personal wellness (physical and emotional) and a healthy lifestyle.
N. Facilities for preparing, serving, and consuming food and beverages meet appropriate standards of safety, comfort, hygiene, and good dietary practice.
O. The school enhances student safety through appropriate student supervision

Foundation Standard 4 – Finance, Facilities, and Resources

The school has in place policies, practices, and procedures that ensure financial health and economic sustainability. The principles governing financial management are designed to provide the resources (in personnel, equipment, and facilities) required to support the school’s learning program and objectives. The school facilities are fit for purpose.

Schools are expected to ensure that finance, facilities, and resources support a healthy, sustainable learning environment by having:

- clearly documented policies and procedures, aligned with the school’s Guiding Statements and compliant with prevailing laws, that describe financial management systems
- clearly documented policies and procedures for facilities management and resource allocation, taking into account local regulations and aspirations of providing internationally appropriate standards of school facilities
- the provision of appropriate human, physical, and financial resources to support a safe, sustainable learning community
- identification of operational and financial risks, liabilities, and obligations with sufficient resources to address these
- a multi-year strategy that is tied to financial planning and Master Facility planning

Evidence	* indicates required documentation
*Most recent audited financial statements	
*Operating budgets for current and past two years	
*Master Facilities plan approved by the Governing Body	
*Financial Summary - Annual Operations (using the NEASC form)	
*Salary scale/compensation guidelines	
*Financial policies	
Cash flow statements	
Financial forecasting documents	
Sample billing statement to families	
Insurance policies (risk, property, liability for child protection cases, etc.)	
Facilities plans (maps, building projects)	
Multi-year technology infrastructure and plans with costing	
Auxiliary and subcontracted services guidelines (contracts available if requested)	

Indicators
A. The physical facilities and Learning Management System are fit for purpose, meet local regulations and are appropriate to promote a healthy school environment and support the school's learning goals.
B. The teacher/student ratio allows for personalized and meaningful learning experiences for students.
C. The short- and longer-term finances of the school are sufficient to fulfill the Mission, address facilities needs and manage unforeseen financial emergencies.
D. Compensation packages are at a level that enables the school to recruit and retain qualified and appropriately experienced staff.
E. The school has a documented, multi-year financial strategy, master facility plan and technology plan.
F. Accounting processes are orderly, understood by all parties involved, and carried out in accordance with sound and ethical business practices.
G. The Governing Body and Leadership Team conducts an annual risk assessment to ensure preparedness for financial, physical and enrollment risks.
H. Insurance provides for effective risk and liability coverage for the school and its facilities, as well as for students, employees, visitors, and members of the Governing Body.
I. An annual external audit of the school's finances is performed by an independent accounting firm, results are discussed at appropriate levels within the school, and any necessary action is taken.
J. Information and Communication Technology provisions (hardware, software, networks, training, and maintenance) effectively support the educational, management, and operational functions of the school. A multi-year technology plan is utilized for planning.
K. Employees and contractors are properly qualified and experienced, as well as appropriately assigned and supervised.
L. The school takes all reasonable steps to operate its facilities and related services using environmentally responsible practices, hence acting as a positive model for students and the wider community.

Foundation Standard 5 – Ethical Practice

The school has well established, transparent policies and practices in place to ensure that employees, learners, and parents are treated fairly, equitably, and ethically.

Schools are expected to have several key features to support its Ethical Practice:

- policies that support fair, ethical and inclusive practices reflective of community values — which are reviewed regularly
- open, transparent information and communication platforms where policies and procedures are readily available
- conflict resolution structures

Evidence	* indicates required documentation
	*Faculty/Staff Handbook or Guide including Hiring/Retention/Dismissal Policies & procedures, employee appeals procedures
	*Student/Parent Handbook or Guide including student behavior and discipline Policy and procedures
	*Sample employment contract
	*Employee appeals procedures
	*Discipline Policy and procedures
	*Non-discrimination Policy which addresses all forms of bullying, harassment and abuse. (Staff and student handbooks)
	*Climate survey results/analysis
	School newsletter/magazine
	Web page, social media
	Sample parent communications or example of online parent community space

Indicators

- A. All employees and contractors have a written contract or employment agreement, supported by documented job descriptions, which provides for compensation and other benefits appropriate to the position and to the school's location, and that respects local and international standards of good practice.
- B. The school's employee compensation structure is equitable and appropriately communicated to relevant stakeholders.
- C. Employees have appropriate guarantees of job security for the term of employment, including procedures for appeals.
- D. Employees and contractors respect and comply with all applicable statutes, government laws, and regulations, and with school expectations for appropriate behavior.
- E. Written personnel policies and guidelines establish expectations for the performance of employees and are consistently and effectively applied.
- F. Members of the faculty foster respectful interactions among and with students, parents and with their peers, both inside and outside classrooms.
- G. There is a documented, understood policy for the timely non-renewal and termination of employment. Staff reductions are handled ethically and in accordance with the school's written policies.
- H. There is a documented, understood employee grievance policy.
- I. Policies and practices foster effective performance and positive morale among all employees.
- J. Policies and practices foster a sense of partnership between the school and parents/guardians.
- K. Opportunities are provided for parents/guardians to learn about the school's educational aims, programs, and pedagogical approaches as well as their child's progress as a learner.
- L. Staff onboarding processes result in staff feeling comfortable and confident with their transition to the learning community.
- M. The school's policies, procedures and actions create a sense of belonging for all community members.
- N. The school's well-being policies and curriculum, along with its support for teacher and staff well-being promote a healthy community.

Foundation Standard 6 – Boarding/Residential (if any)

The boarding/residential program, if offered, effectively supports the well-being and enhances the learning experiences of all boarding students and staff.

Schools are expected to promote boarding/residential excellence in the following areas:

- boarding program: alignment with the overall school program and desired Learning Impacts, with a sense of home shared by students and staff
- boarding facilities: suitable in terms of health, safety, comfort, and auxiliary services for students and adults
- boarding staff: sound character (including required and updated background checks), specific training, sufficient numbers, broad availability, and pastoral commitment to ensure welfare for all
- sufficient funding allocation for boarding facilities, staff, and programming
- effective communication between boarding staff, teaching staff and parents/guardians

Evidence	* indicates required documentation
*Boarding Guidelines for staff and students, including Code of Conduct	
*Emergency response and crisis procedures	
*Records of evacuation and other safety drills with improvement plans as appropriate	
Boarding staff roster with qualifications	
Schedule of evening/weekend events; staff duty schedule	
Example of recent communication to parents/guardians of boarders	

Indicators
A. A clear boarding educational philosophy is in place which creates a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week living environment.

B. Sound, clear, and effectively implemented operating procedures and systems are in place which support boarding life and provide guidelines for addressing fire, medical, and other emergencies.
C. The boarding program is supported by written policies and effective record keeping which enhance the well-being of students.
D. Boarding staff have appropriate training and orientation for the role they play and have been effectively screened prior to appointment to ensure that they have the necessary skills and sound character to provide a supportive, safe, caring, and nurturing environment.
E. Boarding staff members are adequately deployed to provide boarding students with a safe environment and open, positive, inclusive and nurturing teacher/student relationships.
F. The boarding facilities effectively reflect the school's Guiding Statements and support the well-being of students and staff in the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the number and needs of the boarding students - the number and needs of the boarding staff - The promotion of social-emotional learning
G. The boarding facilities and practices meet local authorities' safety standards and any reasonable stipulations which may be required by NEASC.
H. The culture within the boarding program demonstrates sensitivity to and respect for the diversity of the student body as well as a sense of home and family.
I. Effective channels of communication are in place between the school, boarding staff, and the home to ensure that parent/guardians, teachers, and residential staff work in partnership to support boarding students.
J. Schools that board students privately or have legal responsibility for them support their well-being through clear written expectations and active monitoring.

ACE Learning Principles 2.0

1 ▶ Learning Purposes

Learning builds understandings, competencies, knowledge, and dispositions that can be applied across different situations. Learners become responsible and successful global citizens by actively engaging with complex real-world issues.

2 ▶ Dimensions of Learning

Learners grow through regular engagement in creative, ethical, interpersonal, technological, environmental, physical, and entrepreneurial experiences. Learners explore ideas and develop solutions that may have impact beyond themselves.

3 ▶ Evidence of Learning

Learners engage with feedback that promotes self-awareness, improvement, and mastery. Learners demonstrate growth and development in a variety of forms.

4 ▶ Learning Perspectives

Learners face complex problems, challenges, and issues that promote deep learning. Learners consider multiple perspectives and take informed risks in the pursuit of knowledge.

5 ▶ Learner Autonomy and Engagement

Learners have age-appropriate, goal-oriented autonomy over their learning and make informed choices supported by guidance within and beyond the classroom.

6 ▶ Research, Reflection, and Action

The learning community applies current research, connects with other learning communities, and uses future-oriented thinking to improve learning for all. The learning

community evaluates the results of its actions and pursues questions about future innovations, including Artificial Intelligence tools, that prepare learners to shape their present and future. Likewise, learners analyze the results of their efforts and collaborate with peers to improve and extend their learning.

7 ▶ Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Belonging

The learning community exhibits a culture of inclusiveness that enables the diverse needs, identities, and interests of all learners and community members to be acknowledged, actively celebrated, and proactively addressed. Differing viewpoints and opinions are invited in pursuit of an informed and welcoming community.

8 ▶ Governance and Leadership for Learning

The roles of leadership and governance are aligned with the school's learning goals, unified through a common mission, and organized through well-aligned structures that allow informed analysis, communication, and decision-making in support of learners.

9 ▶ Learning Space and Time

The learning community optimizes physical environments, virtual opportunities, and time to support learning and wellbeing for all.

10 ▶ Learning Community Wellbeing

The learning community is a healthy environment where all members thrive. Respectful, healthy, ethical, and honest relationships create a true sense of community. Community values are clearly stated, actively lived, and define a distinct, sustained identity.

Learning Principle 1: Learning Purposes

Learning builds understandings, competencies, knowledge, and dispositions that can be applied across different situations. Learners become responsible and successful global citizens by actively engaging with complex real-world issues.

Rationale

Learners will be faced with a future in which memorization of content will be less important than the ability to analyze and assess complex information, find novel solutions, work across disciplines, apply tools of artificial intelligence and learn how to learn new things, communicate well, collaborate, and to live with an understanding of the impact of their behaviors and decisions on the world.

Experiences that emphasize interdisciplinary learning (connecting the disciplines in challenging tasks) and transdisciplinary learning (such as collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking) are more representative of the real world now and in their future.

The school's chosen goals for student growth in understandings, competencies, knowledge, and dispositions are designed to engage students in the complex problems they are likely to face in their lives. The school's chosen student goals are long-term in nature, written in language that is clear to teachers and learners, and directly influences learning tasks.

Learning Principle 1 asks schools to reflect on how the school's curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices as well as written and unwritten priorities promote learners' ability to use their knowledge and skills to engage in authentic work in various real-world contexts.

Impacts

- 1.1 Learners use critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, technological, and research skills, and transfer their learning across disciplines to solve local and global problems within real-world contexts. They do so with increasing autonomy over time.
- 1.2 Learners develop an ethical mindset and a global perspective when they engage with real-world problems and issues.
- 1.3 The learning community has clearly defined goals for student growth in understandings, competencies, knowledge, and dispositions, which contribute to each learner's ability to become responsible global citizens.
- 1.4 The learning community has clearly defined expectations for the appropriate use of artificial intelligence tools to support the development of its most critical goals for learning.

Learning Principle 2: Dimensions of Learning

Learners grow through regular engagement in creative, ethical, interpersonal, technological, environmental, physical, and entrepreneurial experiences. Learners explore ideas and develop solutions that may have impact beyond themselves.

Rationale

Learners thrive when they are given challenging opportunities to develop the many dimensions of who they are as human beings. As adults, learners will have to navigate work and personal lives that combine many dimensions sometimes simultaneously. Successful learners and adults will be those who can solve important, real-world problems creatively, find new ways to do things, and work in an interconnected, highly technological world with diverse partners.

Students need to understand the impact their choices will have on others and themselves. They need to learn to be ethical, respectful citizens of a multiracial, multicultural world and to understand inequality and bias as it exists in societal norms, laws, structures, practices, and beliefs.

Students thrive when they are given opportunities to impact their world by tapping into these dimensions of learning to become changemakers for a better world.

Learners leverage digital tools for learning, including artificial intelligence to develop their work across these dimensions and they use technology to share their work with others.

Impacts

- 2.1 Learners develop and use higher-order thinking skills in the creative, ethical, interpersonal, physical, technological, environmental, and entrepreneurial dimensions of learning.
- 2.2 Learners actively inquire into and document their development based on a profile and definition of success in creative, ethical, interpersonal, physical, technological, environmental, and entrepreneurial dimensions of learning.
- 2.3 Learners engage with mentors inside the school and in the local and global community to support their efforts to engage with the dimensions of learning in a way that creates local or global impact.

Learning Principle 3: Evidence of Learning

Learners engage with digital and interpersonal feedback that promotes self-awareness, improvement, and mastery. Learners demonstrate growth and development in a variety of forms.

Rationale

Growth in understandings, competencies, knowledge, and dispositions are tracked over time by the learner, his/her parents, and the school. The community understands that learners' strengths vary according to the subject, the task, and the circumstances surrounding assessment activities.

Assessment of learning is modified as needed to meet individual learner needs. Assessment is viewed as an opportunity to provide feedback so that appropriate support and challenge can be provided. Learning Principle 3 focuses on assessment practices that support a learner's growth across multiple domains. It supports the notion of a growth mindset through which students learn to persist with difficult tasks knowing that learning and growth are not a product of fixed ability but rather of focused effort. Schooling has traditionally been characterized by high-stakes external testing that may not match the curriculum or culture as the school begins to transform toward a deeper focus on growth versus achievement. Learners, teachers, and parents use evidence to support learners' growth in both disciplinary and transdisciplinary knowledge and skills.

For assessment to be growth-producing, learners need ongoing formative feedback that is aligned to their personal goals. They need clarity on what is going to be assessed, and they need to know what "quality" looks like in a work product. Reflection on learning helps students and adults become confident about their personal strengths and potential for growth.

In schools that are aligned to this Learning Principle, learners talk confidently about what they are learning, how they are demonstrating their learning, and what they need to learn next. Learners have choices about how to demonstrate their learning, and often assessment tasks are shared with authentic audiences. Assessment is never used to compare or rank students or teachers. All stakeholders, including parents, talk about the importance of growth and learning over test scores.

Impacts

- 3.1 Learners reflect on and document their learning relative to academic, creative, ethical, interpersonal, physical, and entrepreneurial goals. The school has systems in place for ongoing student reflection, goal setting, and acknowledgment of growth in all areas.
- 3.2 Learners play a central role in determining areas of strength, areas for growth, identifying appropriate evidence of learning, and ways in which they will share their learning journey.
- 3.3 Learners understand and can articulate the current state and progress of their learning.
- 3.4 Formative and summative assessment activities are routinely used by students and teachers to synthesize learning and gain deeper insights into a student's learning process.

Learning Principle 4: Learning Perspectives

Learners face complex problems, challenges, and issues that promote deep learning. Learners consider multiple perspectives and take informed risks in the pursuit of knowledge. Learners think more deeply about complex challenges when they use a wide variety of tools to extend their thinking, including, where appropriate, AI tools.

Rationale

Learners must demonstrate appropriate risk-taking in the pursuit of learning as they explore a range of approaches and consider multiple perspectives when tackling a problem or challenge. This includes considering the perspectives of others as they continue to reflect and refine their work.

Learning communities have a unique opportunity and responsibility to cultivate a learning environment where all learners develop intercultural competence, as well as the ability and desire to consider different viewpoints. Adults in the learning community must both model this mindset and purposefully create opportunities for learners to see the world through the eyes of others. Communities where trust and empathy are pervasive typically exhibit a greater capacity for appropriate risk-taking in learning.

Impacts

- 4.1 Learners demonstrate insights gained through mistakes.
- 4.2 Learners adjust learning strategies and processes as they integrate new information and multiple perspectives.
- 4.3 Learners develop an understanding of cultures and life experiences different from their own through ongoing exploration, reflection, action, and feedback.

Learning Principle 5: Learner Engagement and Autonomy

Learners have age-appropriate, goal-oriented autonomy over their learning and make informed choices supported by guidance within and beyond the classroom. They approach challenging situations with resiliency and self-efficacy using a wide variety of tools and resources to support their learning journey.

Rationale

Learning Principle 5 asks learning communities to build experiences that allow learners to become more active, independent, and autonomous in their learning journey. As the world of work is changing, careers are becoming much more self-regulated, self-directed, and often entrepreneurial. Individuals need to know how to decide what, where, and how to learn and how to pursue their own passions and interests. Independent and autonomous learners are confident when dealing with uncertainty and crisis. They approach challenging situations with resiliency and self-efficacy. They understand how learning proceeds through a cycle such as an inquiry cycle.

Learners are also more motivated and engaged in learning when they can follow their intellectual curiosity and make choices about what to learn, how to learn it, and how to demonstrate their learning. To cultivate autonomy and engagement, learning communities must become adept at moving among teacher-directed, co-created, and student-directed learning experiences. Over time, learners should demonstrate an increased capacity to direct their own learning. In learning communities that promote learner autonomy, adults can shift from the provider of content to that of coach and mentor, and they are skilled at co-creating learning experiences with students. In such learning communities, even the youngest learners are trusted to pursue their own interests.

Impacts

- 5.1 Learners demonstrate the skills and dispositions of self-directed learners, such as the ability to ask thoughtful questions, to design a plan to pursue an area of interest, to assess the state of their progress, and the ability to seek help when it is needed.
- 5.2 Learners pursue their personal strengths, challenges, interests, and passions in a variety of ways.
- 5.3 Learners exercise voice and choice in what they learn, how they learn it, and how they demonstrate what they have learned.
- 5.4 Learners develop through self-initiated exploration, research, and discovery.

Learning Principle 6: Research, Reflection, and Action

The learning community applies current research, connects with other learning communities, and uses future-oriented thinking to improve learning for all. The learning community evaluates the results of its actions and pursues questions about future innovations, including Artificial Intelligence tools that prepare learners to shape their present and future. Likewise, learners analyze the results of their efforts and collaborate with peers to improve and extend their learning.

Rationale

In schools that are strongly aligned to Learning Principle 6, there is an evident curiosity in understanding what improves learning, what can be learned and adapted from research, and how members of the community can work together to further refine approaches to learning.

The learning community's collaborative reflection, review, and revision processes ensure that its pedagogy, programs, structures, curriculum, and assessment practices remain relevant and serve the current and future needs of learners. Teachers routinely engage in action research to promote their own development as well as that of the learning community. There are structures and processes in place to frequently seek and act upon feedback from all stakeholders. This includes stakeholder surveys, focus group interviews, considering relevant educational research, and seeking inspiration from other forward-thinking learning communities. The learning community strives to connect with other learning communities around the globe to gain insights, share findings, and work together to transform learning. Distributive leadership permits innovative ideas to surface and be acted upon by the learning community.

Just as the community is encouraged to use action research or design thinking in its continuous improvement, so too are learners taught to use a design cycle in their projects. Learners need ongoing opportunities to engage in a design cycle such as study, design, act, reflect to become increasingly able to direct their own learning. Learners, peers, and the adults who support their learning play a key role in learning through collaboration and analysis. While much can be learned from studying the learning community itself, the members also understand the need to build understanding about current research and look to experts and other learning communities to deepen and challenge the school community's thinking.

Impacts

- 6.1 The learning community has an approach to design thinking and inquiry which is understood by all members of the community
- 6.2 Learners make connections with experts beyond the school environment to aid in their pursuit of solutions to problems that have meaning to them.
- 6.3 The learning community engages with complex issues and future trends by developing its own inquiry, trying out novel ideas, and applying design-oriented approaches to addressing complex questions and opportunities.
- 6.4 The learning community develops and communicates relevant ideas and conclusions supported by insights gained from observation, current research, and collaboration both within and outside the learning community.
- 6.5 The learning community regularly tests ideas and solutions in order to assess their suitability and usefulness and refines them based on understandings developed through the process.
- 6.6 The learning community collaborates with external partners leading to opportunities for learners to connect to real-world experiences.

Learning Principle 7: Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Belonging

The learning community exhibits a culture of inclusiveness that enables the diverse needs, identities, and interests of all learners and community members to be acknowledged, actively celebrated, and proactively addressed. Differing viewpoints and opinions are invited in pursuit of an informed and welcoming community.

Rationale

Inclusive schools prioritize a culture where students and adults feel physically and emotionally safe, supported, and respected in their development, regardless of their race, background, disability, or status. Inclusive schools consider challenges and issues through multiple lenses, and practice “cultural humility”. School communities hold themselves accountable for examining and reforming policies, practices, and school climate factors so that all learners feel included and can thrive.

The Learning Community has adaptable and effective processes and purposeful programs that promote inclusion and belonging. School communities that embrace inclusion, equity, diversity, and belonging not only say the right things but act proactively to root out racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of abuse among all stakeholders. Transparent communication and respectful interactions contribute to an inclusive community where all members feel they belong and that it is safe to challenge practices that do not fit the community’s values. When seen or heard, racism and divisive actions are addressed.

Impacts

- 7.1 Access to learning is equitable.
- 7.2 The learning community actively supports the value and integrity of each of its members.
- 7.3 Individual and community success is supported through a variety of structures and processes.
- 7.4 The intended and taught curriculum is rich with opportunities for learners to engage with issues of inequity, disability, racism, poverty, and injustice.
- 7.5 All members of the community act ethically with respect for all others in the learning community.
- 7.6 All community members feel like they belong in this learning community.

Learning Principle 8: Governance and Leadership for Learning

The roles of leadership and governance are aligned with the school's learning goals, unified through a common mission, and organized through well-aligned structures that allow informed analysis, communication, and decision-making in support of learners.

Rationale

A learning community that is unambiguous in its goals, unified through a common mission, and organized through well-aligned structures of communication and decision-making can have a lasting impact on learners. Clarity, transparency, and follow-through are hallmarks of a well-led and well-governed learning community. Organizations that are living this principle have a common understanding of the learning Impacts sought by the school and a common language to describe how to reach those Impacts. Leadership for learning is often shared by stakeholders who serve in various roles that extend beyond management into learning-focused leadership.

Good ideas can emerge from all areas of the school and be acted upon. Leadership traits and skills are cultivated and supported at all levels including among the students themselves. Leadership is distributed and there are multiple opportunities for teachers to lead from their classroom positions. Learners themselves are also developing leadership skills through authentic opportunities to influence and lead within the school itself and in the local community. Leaders and the governing body seek feedback from stakeholders on a regular basis and use appropriate measures to determine the school's success at achieving the desired learning Impacts. The learning community has systems and structures that guide the community toward its common values and mission and protect members of the community when its values are not adhered to. Learning Principle 8 asks schools to look at how well their leadership and governance structures serve their mission and their stakeholders and what could be improved further.

Impacts

- 8.1 Decision-making is grounded in the learning community's core values, agreements, and desired goals.
- 8.2 Governance, leadership, and management structures are aligned with, or guided by desired Impacts.
- 8.3 The learning community systematically utilizes evidence of Impact to direct future plans and actions.
- 8.4 Progress towards achieving learning Impacts is regularly monitored, communicated to all stakeholders, and used in ongoing planning and implementation.
- 8.5 Governance, leadership, and management demonstrate a generative mindset, a focus on the future, and a strategic outlook when envisioning how best to support learners.
- 8.6 Governance, leadership, and management regularly collaborate to explore the future, articulate desired Impacts, and design appropriate approaches and innovations to achieve a common vision.

Learning Principle 9: Learning Space and Time

The learning community optimizes physical environments, virtual opportunities, and time to support learning and wellbeing for all.

Rationale

Learning is organized and happens in a variety of ways, spaces, and times. Being flexible with space and time allows for greater learner autonomy and self-navigation. Learning Principle 9 asks learning communities to consider how time and space can be organized to contribute to the school's overarching goals and priorities.

Learning communities who embrace Learning Principle 9 see space and time as factors that can be manipulated to serve learner-centered approaches rather than barriers to such. How does the virtual learning environment, coupled with the learners' home environment, work together to create optimal learning time and space? This principle also asks the learning community to consider the broader environment, community, and global context as aspects of the child's learning environment.

Impacts

- 9.1 Learning space (physical and virtual) and the structure of learning time contribute to the achievement of learning goals for learners.
- 9.2 Learners and teachers have the autonomy to manipulate learning space and time to maximize learning. Learners are given time to pursue interests and passions within the framework of the core curriculum.

Learning Principle 10: Learning Community Wellbeing

The learning community is a healthy environment where all members thrive. Respectful, healthy, ethical, and honest relationships create a true sense of community. Community values are clearly stated, actively lived, and define a distinct, sustained identity.

Rationale

Learning communities that are aligned with Learning Principle 10 are characterized by respectful interactions and broadly accepted values that contribute to a sense of community. The community members can articulate what makes the learning community unique and what the community is striving to achieve through its Guiding Statements.

In these communities, members' voices are encouraged and their opinions are heard and acted upon. The well-being of all members is highly valued and expressed through opportunities for members to attend to their physical, emotional, spiritual, and social needs. The understanding of wellbeing includes an understanding of specific experiences of members of historically marginalized groups.

Members feel appropriately challenged by work or study, but also express that they are able to maintain a work/life balance. Members of the learning community are constantly learning new skills to improve their social-emotional wellbeing. Channels of communication are considered to be effective, timely, and facilitate the community's sense of togetherness. Parents and staff express that they know what is happening in the community, what the major initiatives and goals are, and that they generally feel well informed.

Impacts

- 10.1 Members of the learning community express satisfaction with the ways in which they are treated and included as members of that community.
- 10.2 The community demonstrates an understanding that voice, choice, and self-directed learning are fundamental underpinnings of an individual's sense of engagement and wellbeing. The community is acting upon that understanding by increasing opportunities for voice, choice, and self-directed learning.
- 10.3 The learning community members are engaged, informed, and supportive of the community's goals.
- 10.4 Community members experience high levels of personal and professional wellbeing and a sense of belonging.
- 10.5 Learners use appropriate skills to enhance their own social-emotional wellbeing.
- 10.6 Learners transition successfully from grade to grade, between divisions, and into and out of the school community.

Key Terms

NB: The definitions provided are not intended to be comprehensive or ‘final’; they are offered to stimulate further discussion and conversations about the nature of learning.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Applications that mimic behaviors and processes exhibited by humans, including but not limited to generative AI and large language models.

BLENDED LEARNING

A style of education in which students learn via electronic and online media as well as traditional face-to-face teaching.

DESIGN THINKING

Learners utilize the design cycle such as study, design, act, reflect to become increasingly able to direct their own learning. There are many different versions of the design cycle.

ENTREPRENEURIAL LEARNING

Yong Zhao defines entrepreneurial learning as “an individual’s ability to turn ideas into action”. Entrepreneurial learning promotes creativity, innovative thinking, and problem solving. The Aspen Youth Entrepreneurship Strategic Group defines an entrepreneurial mindset as “a critical mix of success-oriented attitudes of initiative, intelligent risk-taking, collaboration, and opportunity recognition.” In other words, entrepreneurial learning should not be confused with “business studies.”

FUTURE DESIGN VS. STRATEGIC PLANNING

Traditional strategic planning often begins with an analysis of the learning community’s current situation, proposes goals intended to improve upon the present, and leads to the development of a set of actions over a period of three to five years. On the other hand, Future Design begins by examining the drivers of change, then imagines a preferred future and articulates goals aligned with the learning community’s *raison d’être* – learning. Future Design eschews long-range action planning in favor of more agile, nimbler strategies that are refined and adapted regularly based on evidence of success, stakeholder feedback, and desired modifications of the organization’s preferred future.

GENERATIVE AI

Systems that continue to learn from examples to generate content.

GOVERNANCE VS. LEADERSHIP

Across NEASC membership, there are various governance and leadership models, including not-for-profit, proprietary, government-affiliated, and for-profit (including family-owned or part of a school

group.) The governance of the school may look different across the various types of schools from a traditional non-profit Board to a management structure that is affiliated with a corporate entity. The key is to have a governance and leadership structure that prioritizes educational impact, in which roles and responsibilities are clearly delineated so there is appropriate separation between school operations and oversight, allowing those who are accountable to have appropriate authority, autonomy, and support to ensure success.

GROWTH MINDSET

A growth mindset, proposed by Stanford professor Carol Dweck in her book *Mindset*, describes people who believe that their success depends on time and effort. People with a growth mindset feel their skills and intelligence can be improved with effort and persistence.

HIGHER-ORDER THINKING SKILLS (HOTS)

Higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) is a concept of education reform based on the concept that some types of learning and thinking are more complex than others. While more difficult to teach and difficult to learn, higher-order thinking skills such as critical thinking and problem solving are associated with complex judgment skills that are necessary for adults to thrive.

IMPACT VS. INPUT/OUTPUT

Impacts

An Impact is a long-term transformational change we wish to see in learners over time. Some schools define Impact through their Vision of the Graduate statements, IB Approaches to Learning (ATLs), and Learner Profile or their Transdisciplinary Transfer Goals (TTGs). NEASC uses Impact Statements to help schools measure the result of their efforts through the accreditation process. NEASC Visitors and the schools themselves look for evidence of the Impact Statements for each of the ten Learning Principles.

Notice that Impacts typically start with “Learners...”

Outputs

Schools have often gauged their success as Outputs such as standardized test scores, summative assessments, or similar forms of academic achievement. We encourage schools to expand their understanding of success to include Impacts that describe the school’s highest aspirations for its learners – learners who are prepared to tackle 21st – century challenges.

Example: Learning Principle 4.3, Learners demonstrate insights gained through mistakes.

Inputs

Inputs describe the resources that schools use to impact student learning such as specific pedagogies, programs, curriculums, policies, resources, or learning spaces. These inputs do not necessarily guarantee impact. That is why we encourage schools to stay focused on their chosen Impacts to gauge whether the inputs are having the intended result. Impacts are developed by focusing on the role of the

student and the role of the teacher in the learning process, and the type of learning tasks that students engage in.

Note that Inputs typically start with “The school...” or “The teachers...”

Example: The school has a revised Assessment Policy that allows for students to redo assessments to attain mastery.

INCLUSION

The inclusion and celebration of diverse stakeholders and varying perspectives, anti-racism and anti-sexist policies and actions, equity, and the building of belonging for all are hallmarks of an inclusive learning community. An inclusive school is also one that successfully educates the students with disabilities whom they have admitted according to their Admission Policy. ACE Learning challenges schools to review the ways and means in which all stakeholders feel included in shaping the culture and direction of the community.

INTERDISCIPLINARY LEARNING

This learning involves connecting the academic disciplines via challenging, relevant, and engaging tasks.

INTERNAL REFLECTION

The school’s Internal Reflection represents the core of ACE Learning. Following the award of Candidacy for Accreditation (or Re-Accreditation) status, the learning community commits to 12-18 months of self-reflection, which culminates in the learning community’s Internal Reflection Report.

NEASC LEARNING SURVEYS

To launch the Internal Reflection, the school issues surveys to gather input about learning. Students, parents, staff, and leaders/Governing Body members complete a survey. The ACE Design Team and individual committees analyze the results of the survey as one set of evidence.

LARGE LANGUAGE MODELS

Models trained on massive amounts of text data.

LEARNING GOALS

The long-term understandings, competencies, knowledge, and dispositions that the learning community has prioritized for its learners. Learners will build skills and experiences toward these goals throughout their years at the school so they can transfer this learning to real-world situations. Learning tasks will be designed to support growth and competence in these areas. Learning goals are not to be confused with the individual outcomes of a lesson, unit, or course, but rather the overarching, transdisciplinary goals that can be applied across disciplines.

MAJOR LEARNING PLANS

Toward the end of the Internal Reflection, the learning community is ready to prioritize a few Major Learning Plans (MLPs) that will create lasting Impacts on its learners. Plans may take many forms and may be individualized to contribute to the school's own strategic objectives.

SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF HIGH-QUALITY LEARNING

- a definition of the characteristics, skills, and attributes desired of the learners/graduates (which is the ultimate Impact)
- a description of the type of pedagogy and conditions that result in learners developing in those ways
- a statement/story to illustrate what learners will be doing, what teachers will be doing, and the learning tasks expected from learners

The school's Shared Understanding is supported by a description of the specific pedagogy, chosen by the school, that is used to achieve the desired goals. For example, if a school's Shared Understanding of High-Quality Learning includes language and/or graphics that focus on self-directed learning, learner agency, and autonomy, then they would likely be using some form of open inquiry or co-created inquiry, rather than teacher-directed inquiry.

In ACE Learning schools, the Shared Understanding of High-Quality Learning is grounded in the ten ACE Learning Principles and Impacts, as well as other Impacts a school might have chosen. As the community develops its Shared Understanding, it can more easily identify the Major Learning Plans that can close the gaps between what the school aspires to and its current reality.

SELF-DIRECTED/PERSONAL(IZED) LEARNING

Personal(ized) learning places the learner at the center of the learning process. Learners have choices in what they want to learn, how they want to learn it, and the ways they want to demonstrate their learning. The resources of the learning community are dedicated to supporting learners in achieving their goals, following their passions, and developing their knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Personal(ized) learning as conceived by ACE goes well beyond differentiation and accommodating diverse learning styles.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

TRANSDISCIPLINARY LEARNING/SKILLS

Learning that aims to develop skills that rise above the traditional disciplines, and which will transcend the school years and serve learners into adulthood, such as collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking. These skills are defined by the learning community and are often referenced as a learning community's desired Impacts for learning.

TRANSACTIONAL AND TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING

Transactional learning is often defined as the formal relationship between the teacher and learner, between learning content and learner, between learning environment and learner. It is focused on achieving specific, common learning goals defined by the school. Transformational learning focuses on nurturing holistic learning, expanding the learner's potential, and promoting deeper engagement with making meaning. Transactional learning produces transcripts. Transformational learning changes lives.