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KEY READS

Curriculum Conversations – Dr. Marta Medved Krajnovic, Stephen Taylor, Irina Mach | As AI reshapes what learning looks like, Western Academy of Beijing is asking a harder question: are our systems of assessment keeping up? This piece traces WAB's work with global partners like the IB, Melbourne Metrics, and the Mastery Transcript Consortium to build competency frameworks that capture what grades can't. It's a practical and honest look at adaptive leadership, student agency, and what it actually takes to evolve a school's systems without losing the humans at the center. | Page 05

Leadership Development – Melissa George, Ph.D | Uncertainty isn't a problem to solve; it's a skill to develop, and this research-backed piece maps exactly how international school leaders grow from crisis firefighters into leaders who find creative energy in ambiguity. Drawing on interviews with 13 directors across four continents, Melissa George identifies four stages of ambiguity intelligence and five practical strategies for leading with confidence when the guideposts disappear. | Page 29

Wellness and Belonging – Ilaria Cortesi | Teacher shortages aren't just an HR problem; they're a signal that schools need to get intentional about the full experience of working in their community. This piece by Ilaria Cortesi introduces the Teacher Value Proposition, a practical framework built on six pillars that helps leaders articulate, design, and deliver what makes their school worth staying in. | Page 58



The International School Nido De Aguilas



International School of Brussels

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FROM THE EDITOR



Dear Colleagues,

In this issue of InterEd, a clear and compelling theme emerges: international education is not standing still; it is actively redefining itself in response to complexity, uncertainty, and possibility.

Across the articles, we see schools and leaders grappling with some of the most pressing questions of our time. What does meaningful learning look like in an age of artificial intelligence? How do we lead when clarity is elusive? What must we do to ensure that our communities remain places where individuals feel seen, valued, and inspired to stay? And throughout the wellness and belonging articles, we are reminded that none of this work is sustainable without care for our teachers, our leaders, and our communities.

In *Adaptive Leadership in Action*, Krajnovic, Taylor, and Mach challenge us to rethink traditional systems of assessment, reminding us that student agency and competency-based learning must move beyond theory and into practice. Similarly, Palsha's exploration of high-quality teaching at ACST highlights the power of shared definition and coherence. His work reminds us that excellence is not accidental; it is intentionally designed, collectively owned, and continuously refined. The leadership pieces in this issue further extend this conversation. George's research on ambiguity intelligence reframes uncertainty not as a barrier, but as a capacity to be developed—an essential mindset for leaders navigating increasingly complex global environments.

Finally, surrounding wellness and belonging, Cortesi and others remind us that sustainable schools are built not only on strong systems, but on strong human connections. Retention, culture, and community are not peripheral concerns—they are central to the success and longevity of our institutions.

What connects all of these contributions is a shared understanding: progress in international education is not about having all the answers. It is about asking better questions, staying grounded in our values, and continuing forward together.

With appreciation for all that you do to advance this field,

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FROM THE AAIE PRESIDENT: THE QUIET WORK OF UNDERSTANDING



One of the things I appreciate most about international education is that, despite our different contexts, we seem to be wrestling with similar questions, challenges, and opportunities.

As I read this edition of InterED, I noticed that many of the articles, in different ways, return to the same underlying challenge of remaining thoughtful, grounded, and connected to one another while navigating the increasing complexity in our schools and communities.

The articles themselves explore very different aspects of school life and leadership, yet I found myself returning to the same thought while reading them: beneath the strategies, initiatives, and frameworks, there is something deeply human running through all of this work.

Perhaps that is partly why, over the past months, I have found myself drawn to a small side project called Moments of Joy. The idea is very simple. People send short reflections describing a moment that brought them a sense of joy, gratitude, or pause in their everyday lives. What has stayed with me, across the many reflections people have shared, is how ordinary most of these moments are: a conversation with a parent, watching children play, a walk with a friend, cooking for family, or simply sitting quietly after a long day.

Not seemingly grand or extraordinary moments, but rather the quiet, everyday experiences people chose to notice and hold onto.

I think part of why this has resonated with me is that life in schools can easily become consumed by urgency. There is always another challenge to address, another decision to make, another initiative moving forward. Leadership today also asks us to navigate competing tensions simultaneously, balancing innovation with stability, ambition with wellbeing, and individual needs with collective responsibility.

Recently, I came across a line from the scholar Jane Ellen Harrison that I have found myself returning to often:

"I am long past blame and praise, or, rather, I am not yet ready for them; there is so much still waiting to be understood."

There is something quietly reassuring in that perspective. Not because it dismisses accountability or conviction, but because it leaves room for humility, for listening, and for the possibility that even after years of experience, there is still more to learn about people, about community, and about ourselves.

One of the things this edition reminded me of is that the most impactful leaders and educators are rarely the ones who claim to have all the answers. More often, they are the ones willing to remain curious a little longer, ask thoughtful questions, stay steady through uncertainty, and keep people at the centre of their decisions.

That feels especially important at the moment.

In schools around the world, educators continue to do deeply meaningful work under increasingly complex conditions. And while much of our attention understandably goes toward systems, strategy, and change, I sometimes wonder whether the quieter human dimensions of our work deserve equal or even greater attention, particularly the relationships, trust, kindness, humour, and sense of belonging that not only sustain communities over time, but help people feel seen, valued, and connected to something larger than themselves.

Perhaps that is partly why those simple moments of joy matter. They remind us to notice what is already good and meaningful around us, even during demanding seasons.

As always, I am grateful to everyone who contributed to this edition of InterED. I continue to learn a great deal from our community and from the generosity with which colleagues around the world share their thinking, questions, and experiences with one another.

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CURRICULUM CONVERSATIONS

ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP IN ACTION: RETHINKING COMPETENCY, ASSESSMENT, AND STUDENT AGENCY AT WAB

By: Dr. Marta Medved Krajnovic, Stephen Taylor, Irina Mach

Contexts of Change

As international school leaders, we live with a paradox. On one hand, our mission is to prepare students for a world shaped by accelerating technologies, climate uncertainty, global conflict, and shifting economies. On the other hand, our systems of assessment and recognition are still grounded in models designed for stability and uniformity. In a world still dominated by academic grades, GPA, and transcripts, we must ask: Is there a better way to capture the skills and attributes of our learners? What makes them unique and prepared to flourish in an uncertain world?

"Adaptive leadership is not about having all the answers, but about creating coherence amid contradiction, making room for innovation to take root, for adults to feel supported, and for students to succeed in existing structures while also questioning and reshaping them."

This tension calls for adaptive leadership. In practice, this means navigating competing pressures: reassuring families who want the certainty of familiar transcripts, supporting teachers already stretched by existing demands, and working with students whose learning increasingly spills beyond classroom walls. It means making space for experimentation while maintaining the integrity of the core curriculum, holding conversations about innovation, and ensuring exam readiness. Adaptive leadership is not about having all the answers, but about creating coherence amid contradiction, making room for innovation to take root, for adults to feel supported, and for students to succeed in existing structures while also questioning and reshaping them.



American School of Warsaw

“No matter the technological challenge, we are first a community of learners; a human system in which we commit to the flourishing and engagement of all involved.”

At Western Academy of Beijing (WAB), our approach to adaptive leadership is closely tied to rethinking competencies, assessment, and student agency. Through partnerships with the Mastery Transcript Consortium (MTC), Melbourne Metrics from the University of Melbourne, the Council of International Schools (CIS), the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), and the International Baccalaureate (IB), we have been exploring how schools might move beyond grades to recognize and credential learning in richer ways. Alongside these collaborations, we have drawn on AI research and global frameworks to develop student-facing competencies aligned with UNESCO and OECD standards, balancing disciplinary knowledge with transferable skills. A common thread throughout this work is a commitment to protecting powerful thinking and promoting learner agency.

Leading in Complexity

At the heart of our work is the conviction that promoting powerful learner agency must remain the central goal of education in the AI age. Agency is emerging as a focus across domains. Where the IB defines agency as “voice, choice and ownership” of learning (IBO, 2025), in which students are “agents of their own learning and partners in the learning process” (IBO, n.d.), the University of Melbourne’s New Metrics project defines agency as “the capacity to produce learning of value to self or community” (MelbourneMetrics, 2025, p.13). Agency drives purpose; in our context, energizing our mission to connect, inspire, challenge, and make a difference.

Artificial intelligence (AI) adds new dimensions to this task, as more powerful models and agentic AI compete for attention and the power to own learning. These tools expand access to information and enable personalization, but they also raise pressing questions about bias, shallow learning, and the erosion of critical thinking. The symmetry of agency between human and machine may be shifting (Kaptelinin and Nardi, 2006). International frameworks that emphasize protecting and promoting human agency play a foundational role in shaping practice (UNESCO 2023, OECD 2024). For schools, this means ensuring AI strengthens rather than substitutes powerful thinking, and that students develop the ethical, creative, and collaborative capacities needed to flourish.

There is no singular, simple fix to these emergent tensions. Educational issues emerge at the intersections of technology, pedagogy, wellbeing, and culture. A new classroom tool, for example, is never just about technology; it also impacts assessment practices, professional growth, academic integrity, and student well-being. Adaptive leadership, therefore, requires an ecosystem perspective: aligning innovation with school philosophy, engaging accrediting agencies, and pacing change so that faculty and students are supported. No matter the technological challenge, we are first a community of learners; a human system in which we commit to the flourishing and engagement of all involved.

From this foundation, we have been developing the Profiles of WAB Alumni, a competency framework that guides the development of student agency and provides a structure for capturing evidence of learning. Aligning our work with frameworks from UNESCO, OECD, Melbourne Metrics, ISTE, and CASEL has deepened our understanding while also highlighting the tensions schools must navigate:

- Competencies move beyond checklists. When competencies become a tick-box exercise, the spirit of agency is lost. Competencies should illuminate learning, not narrow it.
- Balancing knowledge and skills. Students need both disciplinary depth and transferable competencies. Holding these together is a key leadership task.
- Sustaining teacher wellbeing. Innovation adds complexity. Without careful pacing, clear purpose, and recognition of effort, change risks becoming overwhelming.

Adaptive leadership in this space is not about eliminating contradictions. It is about recognizing them and holding them productively, ensuring that change remains anchored in mission, equity, and the flourishing of learners.

“Adaptive leadership in this space is not about eliminating contradictions. It is about recognizing them and holding them productively, ensuring that change remains anchored in mission, equity, and the flourishing of learners.”

Rethinking Competencies

As mentioned above, our work on competencies has been shaped through collaboration with global partners and brought to life in our students’ learning.

- With the Mastery Transcript Consortium, we are piloting portfolio-based mastery learning records that highlight competencies and evidence of learning, allowing them to shine beyond traditional assessments and transcripts.
- With Melbourne Metrics, we are exploring assessment of hard-to-measure competencies: agency, collaboration, ethical action, active citizenship, and socially responsible leadership; qualities employers and universities increasingly value, yet rarely see credentialed.
- With CIS, we have participated in dialogues that bring together universities and schools. One recurring theme has been the “tail wagging the dog” of large-scale standardized assessments. Universities themselves recognize that reducing students to a single score is inadequate. CIS has encouraged more collaborative approaches to admissions. Through the Deep Dive pathway to evaluation, we used the aspirational standards and practices to refine and enhance our strategic developments.
- Through NEASC, we have experienced the shift from compliance-driven accreditation to an impact-driven model that asks whether practices truly change learning. In partnership with the IB, we undertook the innovative Collaborative Learning Protocol pathway to evaluation, with a focus on impact, innovation, and excellence in teaching and learning.
- Within our IB programmes, we are incorporating “number-less,” competency-driven assessment in several grade levels, encouraging innovative pedagogies (including the use of AI), and creating new pathways and courses for personalized learning and agency.

These collaborations have come together in meaningful ways. At our Future of Education Now conference in March 2025, students facilitated a keynote panel with leaders from IB, NEASC, CIS, MTC, and Melbourne Metrics, underscoring that the future of assessment must place agency, wellbeing, and intercultural understanding at its core.

Student Agency in Action

The reality of this work is most clearly seen in student actions. In a Grade 4-Grade 9 science partnership, older students mentored younger peers through hands-on experimentation, translating high school concepts into meaningful investigations. Grade 4 students gained space to inquire and make choices, while Grade 9 students strengthened disciplinary understanding through teaching, collaboration, and reflective communication. Beyond classrooms, student agency emerges powerfully through Global Citizenship in Action (GCiA) projects. Three examples illustrate the breadth of competencies students develop when given space to lead:

- Light Up Club – Partnership with Our Learning House: Students work biweekly with neurodiverse children and young people, designing and leading art, music, gardening, and storytelling sessions. Their long-term project—co-creating a sensory playground—demonstrates inclusive design, empathy, and sustained community partnership.

- Pollinator & Biodiversity GCiA: Students researched declining pollinator populations, designed micro-habitats around campus, and partnered with Shanshui Conservation at Peking University to deepen their ecological understanding. This project showcases systems thinking, environmental citizenship, and science-driven action.

- Happy School English Buddies: Students lead weekly virtual English-learning sessions with children recovering from leukemia, building cross-regional relationships grounded in care, communication, and well-being. Their work models compassion, intercultural awareness, and a long-term commitment to service.

Alongside these examples, the Middle School SEL Ambassadors offer another important expression of student agency. In this program, students assume intentional leadership roles to help shape the school's social-emotional climate. They co-design advisory activities, lead empathy-building campaigns, and gather peer perspectives on wellbeing and belonging. Their work demonstrates that agency is not limited to academic or service contexts; it also emerges through building community, fostering connection, and contributing to a culture where every student feels seen and supported.

Agency also drives students to create new opportunities. High school students organized WAB's first STEMx science event, building a student-led conference that moved science "beyond the classroom." In Grade 10, a student carried out an environmental DNA (eDNA) project to measure biodiversity in a local lake, while another applied AI, coding, and design to create a low-cost device for at-home heart health monitoring inspired by her grandfather. In creative fields, a student used ancient Chinese oracle bone scripts to teach language to younger peers, combining cultural research with pedagogy. Others have pursued dance, advocacy, and service projects that link personal interests with community impact.

These stories show that students are already demonstrating agency and competencies in ways that go far beyond what grades can capture. For leaders, the challenge is to ensure assessment and recognition systems evolve to honor this learning, and to create the conditions where it can thrive.

Ecosystem Leadership in Practice

There are no finish lines, only continuous evolution. Deepening student agency requires ongoing support, attention, and reflection, and the systems that support them must remain adaptive and human-centered. For schools imagining how this might look in their own contexts, a useful starting point is to identify one or two existing examples where students already demonstrate meaningful agency, whether in a project, a partnership, or a wellbeing initiative, and ask:



What conditions made this possible? How might we recognize this more formally? What structural adjustment could allow more students to experience this kind of ownership? Adaptive leadership begins with noticing and amplifying what is already working, then building the systems around it.

From our journey, several lessons stand out:

- **Partnerships are essential.** Systemic change cannot be carried out by individual schools.

- **Ground innovations in credible frameworks.** With multiple guidelines on AI and new competency sets emerging, schools must carefully evaluate and adapt, ensuring alignment with their mission and context.

- **Keep mission and equity at the core.** New initiatives should be judged by how they deepen learning, expand equity, and strengthen belonging.

- **Prioritize wellbeing.** Adaptive leadership requires care for both students and adults, sustaining energy and optimism alongside technical solutions.

- **Pace system change.** Redesign takes time. Building trust with faculty, families, and students is critical.

The future of international education is shaped by networks of cooperation that align around shared purpose. At WAB, our work on competencies, assessment, and agency shows that adaptive leadership is about cultivating ecosystems where students and adults can flourish together. Innovation, in this sense, is not only about technology but about creating the conditions for deep learning, ethical action, and resilience, shaping environments in which young people and their communities can grow with integrity in a rapidly changing world.





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FROM DEFINITION TO PRACTICE: BUILDING A SHARED VISION OF HIGH-QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING.

By: Dr. Zak Palsha

Why Define High-Quality Teaching in International Schools

Every student deserves access to excellent teaching - but in international schools, that promise can be hard to keep. Teachers arrive from different systems, each with their own ideas of what "good teaching" looks like, while families bring varied expectations about learning. The result? Inconsistency, not inequity of intent, but of definition. At the American Cooperative School of Tunis (ACST), we recognized that without a shared vision of high-quality teaching and learning, coherence and equity were at risk. We identified this challenge as central to our Strategic Priority 1: Teaching and Learning. Without a shared definition of what excellent teaching looks like, professional development might lack focus, evaluation processes could vary in application, and students' learning experiences could differ significantly from class to class. Our solution was both simple and ambitious: define what excellence looks like together - and make it the foundation of everything we do.

In 2023–24, the American Cooperative School of Tunis (ACST) launched an ambitious initiative: to collaboratively define High-Quality Teaching and Learning (HQTL), ground it in evidence-based frameworks, and connect it directly to teacher evaluation and professional growth. What began as a conversation about our collective "ingredients" has evolved into a shared framework that now informs curriculum, assessment, and instructional practice across PK-12.

This article traces ACST's journey - our theoretical grounding in the Danielson Framework, our collaborative process of definition-building, the creation of a new evaluation tool, and the lessons we are learning as we implement this shared vision. Developed through broad faculty collaboration and shared with the wider school community, the HQTL framework has generated strong engagement and enthusiasm, including from the Board, which has welcomed its clarity and direction.

"Without a shared definition of excellent teaching, professional development lacks focus, evaluation varies, and students' learning experiences differ from class to class."

Theoretical and Research Foundation

Any attempt to define teaching quality must be grounded in credible research. ACST anchored its initiative in the Danielson Framework for Teaching (Danielson, 2013), which organizes effective practice into four domains:

- Planning and Preparation – deep content knowledge, thoughtful instructional design, alignment with standards, and effective assessment strategies.
- The Learning Environment – fostering respect, rapport, equity, and positive classroom culture.
- Instruction (Learning Experiences) – active engagement, critical thinking, questioning, and formative assessment.
- Professional Responsibilities (Principled Teaching) – reflection, collaboration, communication, and contributions to the school community.

> "We did not want our definition to become a checklist, but a catalyst for dialogue and development."

The framework is widely used for teacher evaluation and professional development, and more recent studies continue to affirm its adaptability and reliability across a range of educational contexts (Danielson Group, 2022; Learning Policy Institute, 2023). For ACST, Danielson's work provided not just structure but legitimacy - anchoring our process in a research-based framework.

Equally important was the concept of instructional coherence. Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, and Bryk (2001) describe coherence as the degree to which a school's instructional guidance system provides consistent messages about priorities for teaching and learning. Subsequent research has reinforced that coherence contributes directly to equity - ensuring that all students, regardless of background or mobility, have access to consistent expectations and quality instruction (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Fullan & Quinn, 2016). In international schools, where mobility and diversity are constants, coherence is essential for maintaining fairness and shared standards. A shared definition ensures that students encounter consistent expectations across classrooms, and teachers can collaborate around common standards.

Furthermore, research on teacher evaluation underscores the importance of framing it as a growth-oriented process. Darling-Hammond (2013) argues that evaluation systems should be integrated with professional development, promoting reflection and improvement rather than compliance. At ACST, this principle became central: We did not want our definition to become a checklist, but a catalyst for dialogue and development.

Launching the Process: The HQTL Kick-Off

Our journey began with a question posed at the start of the 2023–24 school year:

"What are our collective ingredients of high-quality teaching and learning?"

This question served a dual purpose. It invited faculty across divisions to begin building a shared foundation of beliefs about teaching and learning, and it ensured that teachers themselves would shape the definition from the very start. By engaging the whole community in identifying what great teaching looks like at ACST, we aimed to create both clarity and ownership.
To illustrate the importance of shared ingredients, I offered a simple metaphor: imagine being asked to cook Italian food. One person makes pizza, another pasta, and another gelato. All are skilled, but without common ingredients, the results vary widely. That was our challenge.








The analogy resonated with our teachers. It captured a familiar truth in international schools - highly skilled professionals can interpret "good teaching" in different ways, shaped by their training, experiences, and cultural contexts. While variety enriches a school, it can also lead to inconsistency. Without shared "ingredients," students may encounter very different approaches to teaching and learning depending on the classroom.




The kickoff activity reframed this challenge as an opportunity. Working in PK-12 groups, teachers identified the "ingredients" they believed must be present for high-quality teaching and learning at ACST. Common themes emerged - equity, engagement, clarity, and belonging - alongside calls for creativity, joy, and flexibility. These conversations marked the first step toward a shared framework that would guide professional development and align teaching practices across the school.



We used interactive tools such as Mentimeter to capture input, creating a word cloud of collective ideas.

Importantly, we emphasized that this definition would be a living document - revised and refined throughout the year through faculty discussions, classroom observations, and division meetings. As teachers applied the shared language to real classroom practice, we planned to revisit and adjust the definition, ensuring it remained authentic, practical, and truly representative of ACST's teaching culture.

The metaphor of Italian food - and the need to agree on shared ingredients before cooking - helped us see the value of instructional coherence. As one teacher reflected, "We need to know what we expect from each other, no matter the grade level." That call for clarity became central to the process, guiding how we organized our discussions and categorized our ideas. Each subsequent step, from identifying instructional "ingredients" to drafting the framework, was anchored in the question: What does clarity look like in practice for teachers and for students?

Following the initial kickoff, the work of defining high-quality teaching and learning unfolded over several months. Teachers continued the conversation within their divisions and departments, testing the emerging ideas against classroom realities. Leadership teams gathered teacher feedback and looked for common patterns across grade levels. Through faculty meetings, cross-divisional dialogues, and leadership retreats, the initial "ingredients" evolved into shared language describing what excellent teaching looks like in practice. By midyear, we were ready to translate these collective insights into a formal, schoolwide definition.

The ACST Definition of High-Quality Teaching and Learning

By the end of the 2023–24 academic year, ACST faculty finalized a comprehensive definition of HQTL. This was the culmination of months of collaborative work, grounded in the Danielson Framework and shaped by teacher voice across PK–12. The final product expanded the four domains into clear, specific descriptors that guide practice, professional development, and evaluation:

> ***"For international schools, where mobility and diversity are high, a shared definition of high-quality teaching is more than helpful; it is essential for equity, continuity, and cultural cohesion."***

1. Planning & Preparation

- Design lesson plans with clearly stated learning outcomes.
- Use equitable assessment practices to inform instruction and monitor progress.
- Select instructional materials and resources that support diverse learners.
- Apply data to differentiate instruction and provide opportunities for students to
  demonstrate learning in varied ways.
- Collaborate to align curriculum, assessment, and instructional strategies.

2. Learning Environment

- Foster a classroom culture that supports student well-being and a sense of belonging.
- Ensure all student voices are heard, valued, and respected in discussions and activities.
- Establish routines and procedures that promote active engagement and student ownership of learning.
- Create a challenging, stimulating environment that fosters deep thinking and sets high expectations for growth.
- Model and promote mutual respect and responsibility within the learning community.

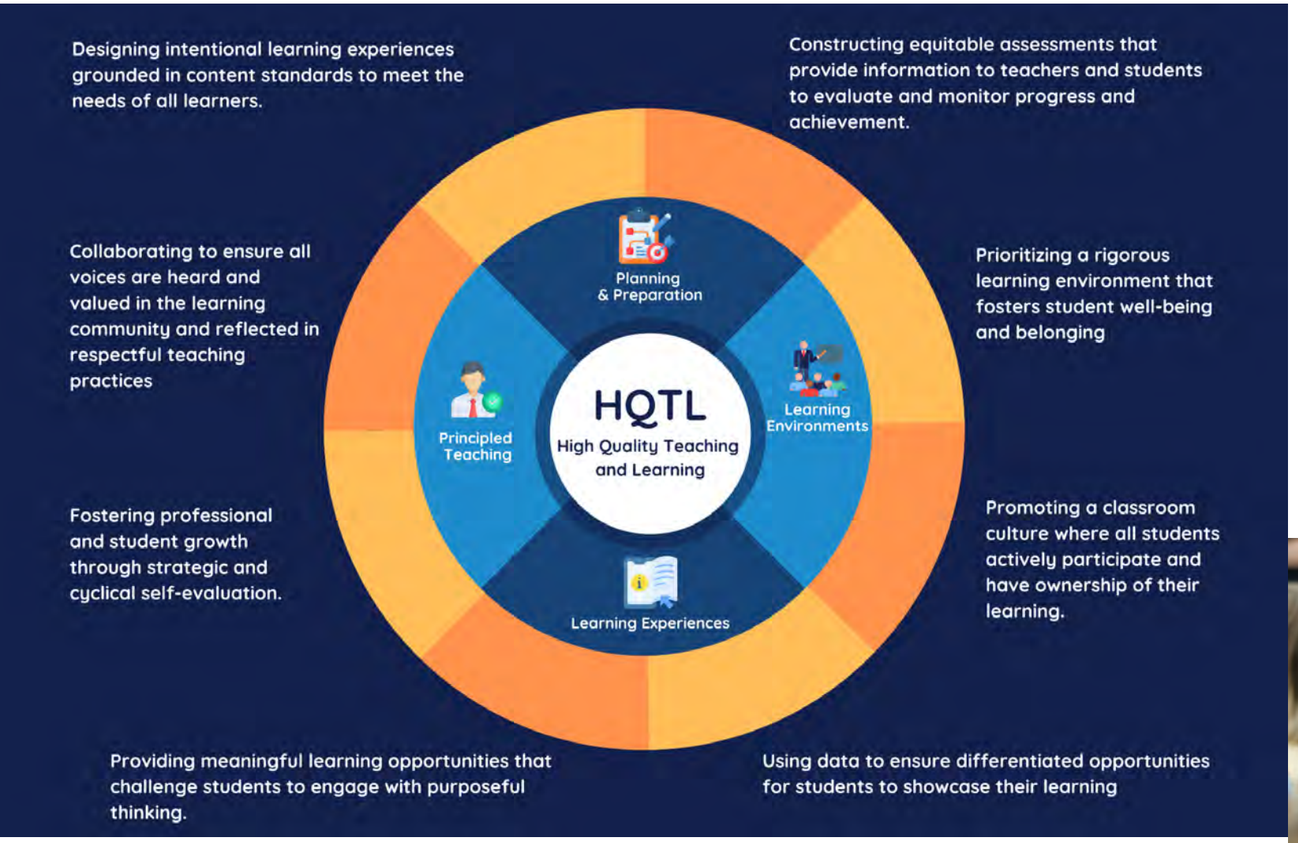
3. Learning Experiences

- Design lessons that are meaningful, challenging, and encourage purposeful thinking and reflection.
- Engage students in inquiry, collaboration, and problem-solving.
- Provide diverse assessment opportunities for students to demonstrate understanding and mastery.
- Offer learning tasks that stimulate higher-order thinking skills.
- Integrate technology and other tools to deepen and enhance the effectiveness of learning.

4. Principled Teaching

- Engage in professional inquiry and reflection through ongoing collaboration and learning.
- Deliver instruction that is accessible, student-centered, and fosters active participation and agency.
- Commit to creating an equitable and inclusive environment where all students feel safe and challenged.
- Apply research-based best practices to maximize student learning.
- Involve families and communities in a respectful and culturally responsive manner.

Following faculty feedback and further reflection by the instructional leadership team, the original descriptive lists were refined and synthesized into a single visual representation. This graphic captures the essence of each domain and highlights their interconnectedness - illustrating how planning, learning environments, experiences, and principled teaching work together to define High-Quality Teaching and Learning at ACST.



This final definition provided ACST with a systemic tool—one that informs curriculum decisions, guides professional development, and underpins the new evaluation model.

From Definition to Practice: Developing the Evaluation Tool

The next challenge was translating the definition into practice. As Fullan (2007) notes, many well-intentioned school initiatives fail to influence daily teaching because they remain at the policy level rather than the classroom level. At ACST, we were determined to avoid this gap by embedding HQTL directly into our teacher evaluation process. A Danielson Task Force of volunteers was formed to lead this work. Their goals were to:

1. Align HQTL definition onto Danielson's four domains.
2. Draft evaluation rubrics that reflected both the framework and ACST's unique context.
3. Ensure alignment between evaluation, professional development, and daily practice.

By involving teachers in design, evaluation became an extension of our shared framework - not an external imposition.

This approach also shifted the culture of evaluation. Instead of being perceived as punitive or focused on identifying errors, the new system is framed as developmental. Feedback conversations are anchored in shared language, making them more meaningful and constructive.

Implementation and Professional Development

Implementing the HQTL framework required more than documents; it required professional development opportunities that aligned with the new definition.

The Danielson Task Force organized workshops and readings around each domain:

- Planning and Preparation: designing equitable lessons, integrating formative assessment.
- Learning Environment: building cultures of belonging, managing classroom norms.
- Learning Experiences: using questioning techniques to deepen thinking, leveraging high-yield strategies.
- Principled Teaching: reflective practice, peer collaboration, and contributing to the professional community.

These workshops reinforced coherence. Through all these efforts, teachers could clearly see how professional development sessions, classroom observations, and evaluation conversations all connected to the same framework.



As the workshops progressed, opportunities for feedback were intentionally built in. Faculty were invited to share reflections on the clarity and usefulness of the HQTL framework—both during the sessions and afterward through surveys and discussions—and adjustments were made accordingly. This iterative approach reinforced the sense of ownership and adaptability.

Early Impact and Evidence of Change

Though still in its early stages, the HQTL initiative has produced tangible impacts at ACST:

- **Shared Language:** Teachers across school levels now use common terminology when discussing instruction.
- **Clarity of Expectations:** New faculty report that the HQTL definition provides valuable guidance for aligning with school culture.
- **Equity Focus:** The emphasis on belonging and access has sparked new conversations about inclusive practices.
- **Reframing Evaluation:** Teachers increasingly view evaluation as a tool for growth rather than compliance.
- **Embracing Assessment:** The HQTL definition has sparked renewed attention to assessment practices. Building on this momentum, ACST introduced a mid-term progress report, providing families with earlier feedback.

Challenges remain. As with any systemic change, embedding a shared definition of teaching and learning across all grade levels takes time and persistence. The next stage of ACST's work focuses on ensuring consistency of practice across divisions, so that the HQTL principles are not just understood but lived in every classroom. Sustaining momentum will also require continued investment in professional development and leadership modeling - especially as new faculty join and institutional memory evolves. Finally, fully integrating HQTL into curriculum design and assessment practices remains a long-term goal. Doing so will help ensure that coherence is not only a feature of teacher evaluation but a hallmark of the entire learning experience.

Implications for International Schools

Through this process, I've come to see that strengthening instructional quality in an international school requires both structure and shared ownership. ACST's journey reinforced several key lessons about how schools can move from definition to practice with coherence and integrity. Four insights, in particular, stand out:

1. Co-create to Build Ownership: A definition of high-quality teaching imposed by leadership will lack traction. When teachers are active contributors - brainstorming, clarifying priorities, and refining the language - they are more likely to feel a sense of shared purpose and accountability.

2. Anchor in Research, Adapt Locally: Using a framework like Danielson provides credibility and structure. But adaptation is essential—language must reflect the school's culture and context.

3. Align Systems for Coherence: The true power of a definition emerges when it connects evaluation, professional development, and curriculum. Without alignment, definitions risk becoming symbolic.

4. Balance Consistency and Creativity: The 'need to have vs. nice to have' framing ensured that ACST's definition set clear expectations while respecting individuality. This balance is especially important in international schools where teacher autonomy is valued.

For international schools, where mobility and diversity are high, a shared definition of high-quality teaching is more than helpful; it is essential for equity, continuity, and cultural cohesion. At ACST, our journey affirmed that building coherence across classrooms begins with shared language and collective purpose.

Defining high-quality teaching at ACST has proven to be one of the most practical levers for school improvement. Anchored in the work of Danielson, co-created with teachers, and embedded in evaluation and professional development, HQTL is already reshaping how we talk about teaching and learning. While it is too early to measure direct impact on student achievement, the cultural shift is unmistakable. Classrooms feel more intentional, professional dialogue is richer, and teachers report greater clarity and confidence in their practice - early signs that coherence in teaching leads to coherence in learning, and ultimately, to lasting student growth.



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International School of Phnom Penh

DEVELOPING AND SUSTAINING A MULTI-CAMPUS INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING PROGRAM: CASE STUDY OF SHANGHAI AMERICAN SCHOOL

By: Kim Cofino and Scott Williams

In a complex and rapidly changing environment, where both academic achievement and community connections are prioritized, Shanghai American School has long valued on-site professional learning for all staff. A key component of this professional learning has been instructional coaching, which fosters relationships between staff and a peer instructional coach that can lead to impactful professional growth over consecutive years.

Instructional coaching is a significant investment at SAS, having recently grown to involve a team of 15 full-time coaches working across two campuses and six divisions. The ongoing, sustainable nature of the professional growth these instructional coaches provide allows SAS to tightly align whole-school strategic goals with the daily professional learning and teaching carried out by individuals. This case study will highlight the history of the program, the rationale behind the decision to invest more deeply in instructional coaching in the last year, the process followed by those involved with the coaching program, the foundational documents that were created, and the current and still-evolving structure of instructional coaching at this large, multi-campus international school. To embrace this key change to the professional learning program, ongoing conversation and dialogue were essential to building community understanding.

Program History

Instructional coaching is not new to SAS and has been in place at the school for multiple decades in various forms. In the academic year 2023-2024, SAS made a strategic decision to build a comprehensive professional learning system, including intentional, research-grounded development of the coaching program to ensure sustainable impact. This commitment continues to shape how coaching at SAS evolves, as it becomes a transformative process that amplifies educators' capacity, individually and collectively, to deepen student learning through purposeful dialogue and reflection.

Staffing

As of 2025, SAS has positioned one full-time instructional coach and one instructional technology coach in each division on each of its two campuses, with Chinese language coaches serving cross-divisionally, for a total of 15 coaches on the team.

Though coaches can fulfill many roles in a school context, SAS holds the core belief that coaches should spend as much of their day-to-day time as possible in the actual coaching process. As articulated in the SAS Coaching Framework (a document described in more detail below): "We believe coaching is the most transformative pathway for educator growth and student success." (Williams, 2025). Grounded in reflective dialogue, inquiry, and goal setting, coaching fosters a culture of curiosity, collaboration, and continuous improvement. Each coach maintains their own portfolio of educators engaged in cycles of planning, implementing, and reflecting on improvements to their practice. Coaches are encouraged to provide what the Coaching Framework calls "just-in-time" and "reactive" support, i.e., a responsive, flexible approach to help teachers when they need it (Williams, 2025).

As part of its recent investment in instructional coaching, the school provided professional learning for instructional coaches throughout the 2024-25 school year, focused on time for conversation and community building, as well as skill development. In his role as SAS's Associate Director of Ed. Programs, the co-author of the present article, Scott Williams, facilitated Cross River Retreats for internal professional development, so-called because they united coaches from SAS's two physically separated campuses. In addition, the other co-author of this article, and the CEO of instructional coaching professional development firm Eduro Learning, Kim Cofino, facilitated a custom cohort of Eduro's The Coach Certificate and Mentorship Program (an academic-year-long, cohort-based course for instructional coaches). SAS also invested in a School Membership to the Association for the Advancement of Instructional Coaching in International Schools (AAICIS). According to feedback from the coaches involved, these varied opportunities for focused conversation and targeted professional growth had a positive impact on their understanding of the program and its goals: "The school making the time for us to have that luxury has been very important," noted Alex Braden, HS Tech Coach. (Cofino, personal communication, 4 June 2025).

> ***"When there is an intention to shape system-wide change, intentionally opening the space for dialogue allows for shared understanding and community to emerge."***

Building Toward Shared Understanding

At the start of academic year 2024-25, the Educational Programs team applied strategic planning principles to develop SAS's coaching program with intentional precision. Aware that instructional coaching programs often suffer in the end due to a lack of clear definitions and measurable outcomes, the team began with what the SAS Coaching Framework calls "making the pathway explicit—connecting coach behaviors to educator practice, and ultimately to student learning." (Williams, 2025).

The team started by clarifying the program's Theory of Change. This set forth why SAS invests in coaching, what transformative outcomes they sought, and how to ensure coaching advances five of the school's desired impacts: empowered educators and students, enhanced educator effectiveness, collaborative and reflective culture, data-informed decision-making, and a sustainable professional-learning ecosystem (see Figure 1).

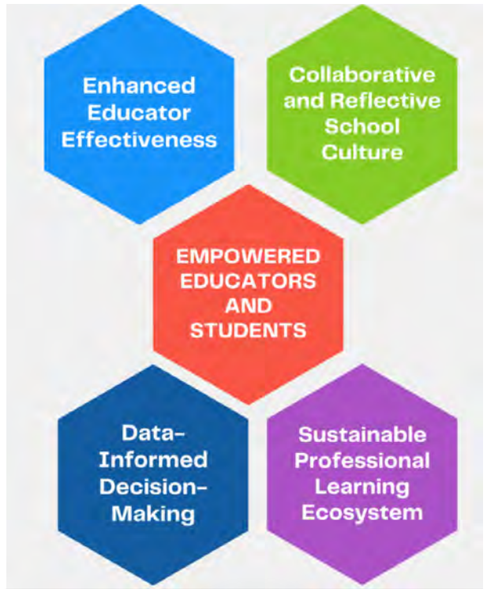


Figure 1
SAS Desired Impacts
Note. From Shanghai American School Coaching Framework: A Living Document by S. Williams, (2025). [Unpublished internal document]. Reprinted with permission.

This backwards-design approach guided the development of the following four foundational documents, which together were intended to outline a coherent, adaptive system for professional learning support:

- **The Coaching Framework:** a comprehensive guide that articulates all aspects of the coaching program—from core beliefs, to coaches' main functions, to program integrity protocols and impact measurement systems;
- **The Coach Competency Map:** defines ten core competencies across forty performance areas, each mapped along a four-level growth continuum: Investing, Implementing, Deepening, and Generative (see Figure 2);
- **The Coaching Toolkit:** a coach-facing resource that houses practical protocols, templates, and tools that support daily coaching practice;
- **The Instructional Playbook:** an educator-facing resource, including research-based, high-impact instructional strategies that coaches and educators select from during coaching cycles.



Figure 2
The Architecture of the Coach Competency Map

Note. From Shanghai American School Coaching Framework: A Living Document by S. Williams, (2025). [Unpublished internal document]. Reprinted with permission.

Collaborative Development Through Conversations

The creation of these four outputs exemplified the partnership principles essential to SAS's coaching philosophy: mutual engagement, strategic alignment, and continuous growth. Multiple stakeholders, including coaches, principals, and curriculum leaders, across various levels participated in deep conversations about coaching's purpose and practice in order to build a community around the work. This collaborative approach ensured each document reflected both research-based best practices and the lived experience of the SAS community. Through working groups, feedback cycles, and iterative refinement, these outputs evolved from static documents into dynamic tools that continue to shape and respond to SAS's evolving coaching culture.

There were many models for engaging stakeholders in conversations throughout the year. Coaches were engaged in:

- Open drop-in times and open online drop-in times for coaches to work with Scott individually or in small groups;
- Cross-River Retreats to bring together SAS's two campuses, in person, with the full coaching team;
- A private cohort of instructional coaching consulting firm Eduro Learning's The Coach Certificate and Mentorship Program for the entire coaching team, during which coaches worked with Kim Cofino to develop coaching competencies and engage in ongoing conversations around the unique coaching culture that was developing.

Leaders were engaged in:

- Segmented, focused time during academic leadership team meetings and strategic meetings with principals for Scott to share feedback with leadership teams. These times were structured to allow space for conversation and sense-making around the work that the coaches had done.

Both coaches & leaders were engaged in:

- Events facilitated by the Association for the Advancement of Instructional Coaching in International Schools (AAICIS), of which SAS is a Founding Member, including monthly Leader Speaker Series events designed to support ongoing dialogue between leaders and coaches around making coaching successful in an international school context.

One example of the ongoing collaborative development process is the unique SAS Coaching Cycle (see Figure 3), where all team members can find their thinking represented, and feel a sense of belonging within the work.



Figure 3
Coaching Cycle

Note. From Shanghai American School Coaching Framework: A Living Document by S. Williams, (2025). [Unpublished internal document]. Reprinted with permission.

> " It is the ongoing, sense-making conversations that have helped establish and develop this core foundational work, despite the significant challenge of working within a large school across two campuses. "

Navigating Complexity: From Parallel Tracks to Partnership

As the year progressed, a challenge to the evolution of SAS's coaching work emerged. It became clear that, while progress was being made on many fronts, the instructional coaches, the Educational Programs team, and school leaders were beginning to diverge in their understandings of the program. In essence, each group was operating in what Dave Snowden's Cynefin framework would identify as separate "domains of practice," beginning to make sense of the coaching program through their own contextual lenses rather than building shared understanding across boundaries (The Cynefin Company, 2025). More opportunity for conversation, collaboration, and community building between leaders and coaches was needed.

Creating Conditions for Shared Understanding

Spring 2025 marked a pivotal shift. Kim Cofino, CEO of the instructional consulting firm Eduro Learning and Executive Director of the Association for the Advancement of Instructional Coaching in International Schools (AAICIS), led a two-day facilitation that brought coaches and leaders together to develop a shared vision and clarity of purpose, as defined by the AAICIS Conditions for Success. These sessions focused on establishing partnership agreements and exploring the nuanced relationship among confidentiality, evaluation, trust, and trustworthiness that the competency map identifies as foundational to the creation of a sense of psychological safety. A key insight was the importance of bringing both stakeholder groups into the room to create space for conversation about assumptions and perspectives, thereby developing a shared understanding of the rationale behind the coaching program.

The shared understandings developed with Kim became reference points that continue to work across different groups while respecting each division's unique context. This approach directly supports what SAS's Coach Competency Map calls cross-divisional coherence, i.e., maintaining consistent coaching language and practice while honoring legitimate differences between divisions. The partnership agreements developed during Kim's sessions now serve as the instruments the Competency Map describes as outlining collective responsibility for program success. Time spent in these conversations demonstrated the powerful impact that dialogue between stakeholder groups can have when a school is embracing change. These sessions have directly led to ongoing conversations between coaches and principals in the new academic year.

Measuring Transformative Change

Building Evidence Before Impact

With the intention of demonstrating impact, SAS took a strategic approach to establish clear, compelling goals before attempting measurement. Academic Year 2025-2026 will serve as the baseline year, piloting documentation practices and Partnership Agreements to identify meaningful impact indicators. Informed by Joellen Killion's "Assessing Impact," SAS is tracking five essential domains to measure coaching effectiveness (Killion, 2017):

1. Educator Practice: Observable instructional shifts
2. Student Experience: Engagement and achievement patterns
3. Implementation Fidelity: Adherence to the roles that coaches fulfill
4. School Culture: Collective efficacy growth
5. Program ROI: Impact relative to investment

To determine measurable outcomes from the coaching process, SAS will track the full progression of a coach's work, rather than just the activities coaches engage in. This includes coach actions (what does the coach do), which lead to educator growth (what changes does the educator make), which leads to student outcomes (student engagement and achievement results), and then impacts the health of the school system (development of collective efficacy) (Killion, 2017).

Reflecting on the Process

To identify best practices in coaching, SAS bridged working with experts, exploring the research (see selected research list below, works cited), and tailoring the work to SAS's core mission and vision. Crucial to this process were several important steps. First, the Educational Programs team applied a strategic program development process to the context of instructional coaching. Then, the team collaboratively developed the program's key outputs by building on adaptive, iterative, loop-type processes for conversation, alignment, and the development of shared understanding and ownership (i.e., a community around the coaching program). Finally, the school demonstrated a sustained commitment to the work, including adapting to provide additional professional learning for both coaches and leaders when needed.

For organizations that are considering embarking on this process, the factors that contributed to the effective process were:

- Recognizing the unique site-level conditions and needs;
- Creating space and time for dialogue around the "why" behind the coaching program with coaches and leaders together, with the guidance of an expert facilitator to build community around school-wide change;
- Sustained commitment to the process of program development with the intent of evaluating the work in the context of the strategic plan.

As leaders, we know that managing change is complex. It is the ongoing, sense-making conversations that have helped establish and develop this core foundational work, despite the significant challenge of working within a large school across two campuses. When there is an intention to shape system-wide change, intentionally opening the space for dialogue allows for shared understanding and community to emerge. While this particular case study focuses on coaching programs, space for evolving conversations is essential in any system-wide change.




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International School of Prague

> "Rather than being victims of uncertain circumstances, the most effective leaders had learned to transform what could be paralyzing situations into opportunities for growth and innovation."

FROM PARALYSIS TO INNOVATION: HOW INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL LEADERS DEVELOP AMBIGUITY INTELLIGENCE

By: Melissa George, Ph.D.

The Daily Reality of Leading in the Unknown

Picture this scenario: You are heading an international school in Bangkok when, within the same week, a government policy change affects your curriculum, a cultural misunderstanding erupts between teachers from different countries, and a group of parents demands answers about a viral social media post showing an incident on campus—footage you haven't seen yourself, depicting events you're still trying to piece together from conflicting accounts. Each situation could mean different things to different people, and your usual decision-making guideposts have vanished.

This is not an exceptional week—it is typical for international school leadership. These institutions bring together stakeholders from dozens of cultures, navigate multiple legal systems, balance competing educational philosophies, and manage constant staff and student turnover. Leaders who succeed in these environments have developed capabilities that every organization needs in our VUCA world—volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (Heifetz et al., 2009)—but few may know how to cultivate these very capabilities: bringing together diverse stakeholders across cultural divides, navigating competing systems and frameworks, balancing paradoxical demands, and leading effectively amid constant change.

The Research: Mapping the Journey from Confusion to Confidence

Over 16 hours of interviews with 13 international school directors from Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas, combined with formal developmental assessments using the **Leadership Development Profile (LDP)** (Cook-Greuter, 2013), revealed insightful patterns in how leaders learn to work with ambiguity. The participants led schools ranging from 200 to 3,000 students, with 5 to 25 years of experience in international education, and represented diverse contexts, from IB World Schools to curriculum-integrated institutions. The LDP assesses how leaders make meaning across nine developmental stages, from conventional problem-solving to post-conventional systems thinking, revealing what leaders do differently and how they fundamentally perceive and process ambiguous situations.

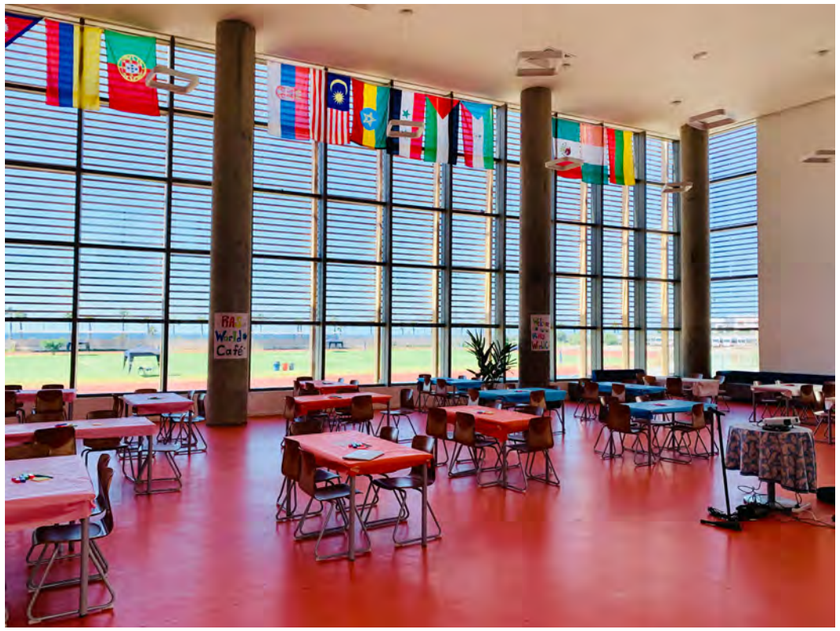
Rather than being victims of uncertain circumstances, the most effective leaders had learned to transform what could be paralyzing situations into opportunities for growth and innovation. The LDP assessment revealed that leaders' developmental stage significantly influenced their relationship with ambiguity. Those at conventional stages sought to eliminate uncertainty through procedures and expertise. Leaders at post-conventional stages had learned to see ambiguity as an essential curriculum for organizational learning, creating what one director called "generative space for innovation."

Four Stages of Ambiguity Intelligence Development

The research revealed that leaders' relationship with ambiguous situations evolves through four predictable stages, regardless of cultural background or school context, reflecting patterns identified in constructive developmental theory (Kegan, 1994; Torbert et al., 2004).

Stage 1: Crisis Firefighting

Early-career leaders described themselves as "crisis firefighters"—constantly reacting to problems as they emerged, feeling overwhelmed when facing situations they could not immediately solve. One head reflected: "I was busy going, 'Hey, I can fix this. I can do this' and then make mistakes because I did not recognize this was an unknown for many of us, not just me."



This stage reflects the common belief that good leaders must have immediate answers and that uncertainty signals weakness. Leaders operate from what one participant called the "fix-it mentality," trying to impose quick solutions even when dealing with complex, multicultural dynamics.

Stage 2: Recognizing Complexity

As leaders gain experience, they understand the layers beneath seemingly simple situations. One director, reflecting on implementing an "English Only" policy, realized: "We would have accomplished one thing and lost in many other ways. There is emotional, psychological scarring when someone says, 'Your language is not valued here.'" This recognition—that what appears straightforward reveals hidden complexity, where solutions often create new problems across multiple dimensions—can initially discourage leaders accustomed to measuring success through clear outcomes. However, it marks the beginning of systems thinking and acknowledging that sustainable solutions must account for multiple perspectives and unintended consequences.

Stage 3: Proactive Engagement

More sophisticated leaders move beyond reactive problem-solving to proactive engagement with ambiguous situations. Instead of asking "How do I solve this?" they ask "Who needs to be part of this conversation?" This shift represents a fundamental move from individual problem-solving to collaborative sense-making. Leaders at this stage begin to see their role not as eliminating ambiguity but as helping their communities work with it productively. They understand that some of the most critical learning happens precisely in spaces without clear answers.

Stage 4: Creative Emergence

The most developed leaders view ambiguous situations as inherent to educational environments and essential for learning. One director described this evolution: "We will get better by the situations we go through. That is normal. So, revising it is not because it was broken. Revising it is because we have learned more." These leaders understand that eliminating ambiguity would be counterproductive in dynamic educational environments. They see unclear situations not as problems but as what another director called "the unknowable edge"—a space where new understanding emerges.

Five Critical Strategies for Developing Ambiguity Intelligence

Understanding these four stages reveals how leaders evolve in their relationship with ambiguity. But the research also uncovered what these leaders actually do. The five strategies that follow integrate patterns observed in participant descriptions with established frameworks from somatic leadership (Siegel, 2010; Strozzi-Heckler, 2014) and presencing work (Scharmer, 2009). While participants didn't always use explicit language like "embodied awareness," their accounts of learning to work with uncertainty consistently involved physical and emotional self-regulation, cultural perspective-taking, and reflective practices—lending support to these approaches as practical pathways for developing ambiguity intelligence at any stage:

"Leaders at this stage begin to see their role not as eliminating ambiguity but as helping their communities work with it productively."

1. Cultivating Self-Awareness as an Internal Compass

Just as a ship's compass remains steady regardless of storms, self-awareness provides stability when external reference points disappear. The most effective leaders developed what might be called "emotional radar"—the ability to sense their reactions and those of others.

One leader described her growth: "I am okay with the ambiguity. I am okay with not knowing." This was not passive acceptance but active meta-awareness—the ability to observe her thinking processes as they happened, enabling her to choose how to respond rather than being unconsciously driven by reactions.

Practical Application: Leaders can develop this through regular somatic check-ins—pausing daily to notice physical sensations, emotions, and breathing patterns (Siegel, 2010; Strozzi-Heckler, 2014). This builds capacity to stay connected to internal experience during stressful periods.

2. Evolving Navigation Strategies

Effective leaders develop sophisticated strategies for engaging with ambiguous situations rather than trying to eliminate them. They learn to ask different questions: instead of "What should I do?" they ask "What wants to emerge here?"

This shift reflects a move from seeing leadership as providing answers to creating conditions where collective wisdom can emerge. Leaders learn to facilitate rather than direct, recognizing that in multicultural environments, no single person's vision can capture the full complexity of community needs (George, 2025).

Practical Application: Leaders can practice pausing and slowing down before responding to unclear situations—what Scharmer (2016) in Theory U calls "presencing"—and asking: "What am I sensing? What assumptions might I be making? What else might be possible here?"

> "We will get better by the situations we go through. That is normal. So, revising it is not because it was broken. Revising it is because we have learned more."

3. Building Emotional Intelligence and Resilience

International school environments serve as natural training grounds for perspective-taking, where leaders regularly encounter cultural differences that challenge their assumptions. This constant cultural negotiation forces leaders to confront their biases more frequently than leaders in homogeneous environments do.

Leaders develop the capacity to hold multiple cultural perspectives simultaneously without forcing singular interpretations onto complex situations. They understand that the richness of international education emerges from the multiplicity of viewpoints and creative tensions.

Practical Application: Leaders can cultivate curiosity as a deliberate practice—approaching ambiguous situations with bodily curiosity rather than mental anxiety, asking "What wants to emerge here?" instead of "Why is this happening to me?"

4. Creating Collaborative Ecosystems

Advanced leaders understand that ambiguity requires collective intelligence rather than individual brilliance. They create what one director called "inclusive decision-making" processes that bring together diverse perspectives before major choices, reflecting principles of adaptive leadership (Heifetz & Laurie, 1999).

These leaders model comfort with not knowing while remaining actively engaged, creating environments where others can learn, experiment, and discover new possibilities. They demonstrate that not having immediate answers does not mean being ineffective; rather, it creates space for collective wisdom to emerge.

Practical Application: Leaders can build explicit time into decision-making processes for sensing and reflection, creating forums where leaders can share uncertainty without it being seen as incompetence.

5. Prioritizing Stakeholder Flourishing

The most sophisticated leaders recognize that their development in handling ambiguity directly benefits their entire school community. As leaders become more comfortable with uncertain circumstances, they create cultures where innovation and adaptation can flourish.

When leaders model curiosity rather than anxiety in unclear situations, they create energetic fields that invite similar responses from their teams. They reduce pressure on others to pretend they are certain when they are not, and create conditions for collective sensing and emergence.

Practical Application: Leaders can explicitly name uncertainty in team meetings, saying things like "I don't have the answer yet, and I'm curious what we're all sensing about this situation." This permission to not-know creates psychological safety and opens space for collective insight to emerge.

"The future belongs not to leaders who can eliminate uncertainty but to those who can help their communities find creative energy within it."

Implications for Practice

For Current International School Leaders

If you struggle with situations where multiple interpretations are possible, recognize that this struggle is part of the learning process. Every experienced leader interviewed described similar feelings early in their journey. Start by paying attention to your physical responses to uncertainty—the tightness, quickened breathing, or tension that signals discomfort.

Experiment with slowing your response time in ambiguous situations. Instead of immediately seeking solutions, practice sitting with questions and sensing what different stakeholders might be experiencing.

For School Boards and Hiring Committees

Consider prioritizing candidates who demonstrate comfort with ambiguous circumstances over those with extensive experience in similar contexts. Ask candidates to describe times when they led without clear solutions, listening for whether they focus on controlling outcomes or facilitating collective discovery. Questions like "Tell me about a decision you made without having all the information you wanted" reveal how candidates actually work with uncertainty. The most valuable leadership capacity for schools in rapidly changing environments may be the ability to help communities discover new ways forward rather than implementing predetermined solutions.

Look for progression through the four stages of ambiguity intelligence development—from avoiding ambiguity to recognizing complexity to proactive engagement to embracing paradox—in how candidates describe their relationship with uncertainty and approaches to complex, multicultural challenges.

For Leadership Development Programs

Traditional programs focusing primarily on strategic planning and decision-making frameworks may miss the most crucial capacity for modern educational leadership. Consider incorporating experiences that deliberately invite developing leaders to engage with ambiguous circumstances.

Create opportunities for leaders to develop somatic awareness, a practice supported by research in embodied leadership (Siegel, 2010; Strozzi-Heckler, 2014) and evident in how the most sophisticated leaders in this study described working with uncertainty—helping them notice how ambiguity feels in their bodies and how different ways of holding uncertainty create different possibilities for action.

The Ripple Effect: From Individual to Organizational Transformation

One of the most encouraging findings was how individual leaders' development in ambiguity intelligence benefits entire school communities. Leaders who are comfortable with ambiguity create environments where others can learn, experiment, and adapt to changing circumstances. Researchers term this "virtuous cycles"—as leaders develop greater capacity to work with ambiguity, their communities become more resilient and innovative, creating conditions for further leadership development (Nicolaides, 2015).

Looking Forward: Leadership for an Uncertain World

The international school context provides a glimpse into leadership capacities that all organizations increasingly need. As globalization brings diverse perspectives together, technology accelerates change, and traditional structures evolve, the ability to work creatively in ambiguous circumstances becomes essential for organizational vitality.

The leaders in this study are pioneering approaches that may become necessary for success in any dynamic, interconnected environment. Their experiences suggest that the future belongs not to leaders who can eliminate uncertainty but to those who can help their communities find creative energy within it.

The Learnable Art of Leading in the Unknown

The capacity to work skillfully with ambiguous situations is not a mysterious talent—it is a set of learnable capabilities that develop predictably over time. The journey from feeling paralyzed by unclear situations to finding them energizing and creative is challenging but achievable, and it benefits not only individual leaders but also entire communities.

For international school leaders, embracing the discomfort of not knowing becomes an invitation to develop one of the most crucial leadership capacities in our interconnected world. The ability to sense ambiguous circumstances and help communities discover emergent possibilities may be the most important gift leaders can offer to the students, families, and colleagues who depend on their guidance.

As one director reflected: "Schools are not linear places where you do X and Y happens. It matters who is doing X and who X is. The ambiguity comes from dealing with learning, a messy process, viewed through many different lenses." Learning to thrive within this messiness—and help others do the same—represents the cutting edge of educational leadership in our rapidly changing world.





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STRATEGIC PLANNING IN ACTION: APPLYING THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL GROWTH FRAMEWORK (ISGF) TO NAVIGATE CHANGE

By: Andrew Sherman and Zakaria Laaraj

Walk into almost any international school today, and you will hear the same concern from school leaders: change is happening all around us. A rising middle class is reshaping the demand for schooling, ministries increasingly require local compliance, and artificial intelligence (AI) is challenging education systems.

For those leading international schools, these challenges find their way into boardroom discussions, staff meetings, and conversations with parents. To address these challenges effectively, strategic planning is an essential process for navigating change through an evidence-based approach.

In this article, we explore how international schools can strengthen their planning processes by introducing the International School Growth Framework (ISGF), a strategic planning tool designed to help leaders align strategic direction, operational priorities, and organizational growth.

In the next section, we first review the dynamic nature of the international education market. We then introduce the ISGF as a strategic planning tool for navigating these factors of change. Finally, we apply the framework through two school examples, each illustrating distinct strategic challenges.

"We began conversations with teachers and students about how to use AI tools responsibly. This openness has helped our community feel part of the journey rather than left behind by technology."

The Dynamics of the International Education Market

Over the past decade, the international education sector has experienced one of the fastest periods of expansion in its history. The number of international schools increased by 45%, rising from 10,408 in 2015 to 15,075 schools in 2025, collectively serving 7.7 million students and generating approximately $69.4 billion in annual fee income (Yosef, 2025). This growth reflects not only demographic shifts but also broader social and economic transformations that are redefining what it means to offer an international education.

Alongside this expansion, the profile and composition of international schools have evolved considerably. A majority, approximately 78%, now deliver hybrid curricula that integrate international frameworks with national standards, reflecting growing demand for both global recognition and local relevance.

Bilingual provision has also expanded, increasing from 32% in 2020 to 37% in 2025, as families and policymakers emphasize the advantages of multilingualism for academic and professional mobility. Meanwhile, institutional consolidation is accelerating: about 38% of schools currently belong to international groups or networks, a proportion projected to reach 56% in the coming years as schools seek economies of scale, shared governance models, and consistent quality assurance mechanisms (Yosef, 2025).

These trends reveal that international education is no longer confined to a niche expatriate market. It has become a mainstream segment of national education ecosystems, shaped by cross-border mobility, technological innovation, and policy reforms. Understanding this evolving landscape is essential for school leaders, as it sets the stage for the strategic decisions that determine how institutions adapt, aggregate, and grow, a challenge the International School Growth Framework (ISGF) is designed to address.

The International School Growth Framework (ISGF): A Strategic Planning Tool

As international schools operate within increasingly complex and competitive environments, strategic planning becomes an essential process for aligning institutional vision with evolving external factors. In this context, the International School Growth Framework (ISGF) provides a structured model for understanding and guiding international school growth.

Research on effective school planning identifies five characteristics consistently linked to successful implementation across education systems: clear mission statements, selective and measurable goals, alignment between evidence and strategy, internal coherence across departments, and defined monitoring processes (Chiong & Pearson, 2023).

Whereas Chiong and Pearson's (2023) framework is process-oriented and system-agnostic, outlining how schools plan effectively across contexts, the International School Growth Framework (ISGF) offers a strategic and context-specific model that defines what international schools must balance to translate planning into sustained growth (Sherman & Laaraj, 2025). International schools face the two-fold challenge of meeting local expectations while maintaining global scope (Sherman & Laaraj, 2025). Their success depends on balancing these demands rather than choosing between them. The ISGF articulates this balance through four dimensions that organize strategic decision-making within complex educational environments.

> ***"Planning is not an administrative task but a human process of aligning vision, people, and action."***

- **Adaptation:** Alignment with local regulations, cultural expectations, and languages while maintaining the school's international character.
- **Aggregation:** Standardizing frameworks, teaching practices, and policies to ensure coherence across different contexts.
- **Arbitrage:** Leveraging organizational capacities and the diverse expertise of staff to allocate resources and strengthen programs.
- **Agility:** Building the organizational capacity to pivot quickly in response to changing conditions.

Applying the ISGF: Strategic Planning in Practice

Balancing the four dimensions of the ISGF in times of change means that school leaders should establish processes that help their communities adapt, learn, and monitor progress. To illustrate how this unfolds in practice, we look at two contrasting examples from the Global South:

- Colegio Granadino, a brick-and-mortar international school in Colombia
- Crear Online, a fully virtual international school based in Ecuador.

Though they operate in different environments, one as a physical campus and the other as a digital ecosystem, both demonstrate how the International School Growth Framework (ISGF) can guide institutions in structuring adaptive, evidence-based planning processes.

At Colegio Granadino, head of school, David Esch, explained that adapting to change began with creating space for open dialogue about technology. He described how the school initiated conversations with teachers and students on the responsible use of artificial intelligence (AI):

> "We began conversations with teachers and students about how to use AI tools responsibly. This openness has helped our community feel part of the journey rather than left behind by technology."

Meanwhile, Erika Laínez, director of Crear Online, emphasized that adapting to change required preparing students for the future rather than reacting to it. As she noted,

> "If we do not educate our students and develop future-ready skills, we will end up failing to prepare young people with the competencies needed for a world that is coming into existence."

Both leaders highlight the same challenge: how to translate purpose and dialogue into measurable, adaptive processes. The ISGF provides a framework for doing so. It structures institutional reflection and monitoring around four interconnected dimensions: Adaptation, Aggregation, Arbitrage, and Agility, each linked to indicators that make strategic progress observable. Through this lens, schools can design systems that connect planning, implementation, and evaluation in a continuous cycle of learning and improvement.

Because every school applies strategy differently, the ISGF must be interpreted in context. Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate how the framework's four dimensions, Adaptation, Aggregation, Arbitrage, and Agility, manifest in two schools with very different realities. Each table connects strategic intent with measurable indicators and actions, showing how planning becomes a process of organizational learning.

Table 1

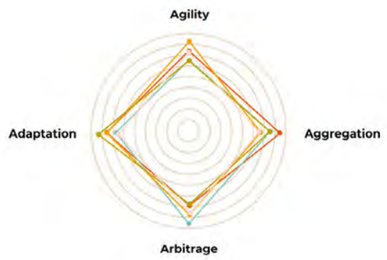
Application of the ISGF at Colegio Granadino (Colombia)

Dimension	Description	Potential Metrics	Strategic Actions
Adaptation	Adjustment of teaching practices to align with the school's culture and values.	Community perception surveys; curriculum alignment with digital ethics.	Conduct ethics and responsible AI use workshops; involve parents in the design of policies.
Aggregation	Integration of internal and external knowledge on educational AI.	Number of partnerships or shared training programs.	Collaborate with other schools or local universities.
Arbitrage	Efficient use of resources and talent to enable sustainable innovation.	Budget optimization for technology; allocation of human resources.	Reassign teacher hours toward AI pilot projects.
Organizational Agility	Capacity to adjust institutional policies and practices in response to AI.	Percentage of teachers trained in AI; response time to new tools.	Establish an innovation committee; implement quarterly technology review cycles.

Table 2

Application of the ISGF at Crear Online (Ecuador)

Dimension	Description	Potential Metrics	Strategic Actions
Adaptation	Contextualizing virtual learning experiences to students' cultural and environmental realities.	Level of access to technology; linguistic diversity addressed.	Develop local mentorship programs; design culturally relevant learning modules.
Aggregation	Leveraging global networks and partnerships to enhance quality and access.	Number of agreements with technology partners.	Expand partnerships with international EdTech organizations.
Arbitrage	Using differences in cost, talent, and technology to ensure sustainability.	Reduction of operational costs; efficiency of AI-driven platforms.	Outsource technical support or specialized content based on expertise.
Organizational Agility	Capacity to redesign processes in virtual environments.	Time required to adapt to new platforms; student satisfaction rates.	Integrate AI into formative assessment; establish agile cycles for course redesign.



These two examples illustrate how the ISGF can be contextualized to fit the unique realities of different institutional models. At Colegio Granadino, the framework supports change within a traditional, community-based school environment, while at Crear Online, it drives innovation in a fully digital learning ecosystem. In both cases, the ISGF transforms strategy into a continuous learning process, linking purpose with measurable outcomes and enabling schools not only to adapt to change but to lead it with clarity and coherence.

Reflections for Strategic Planning in International Schools

As the experiences of David Esch at Colegio Granadino and Erika Laínez at Crear Online illustrate, strategic planning is most powerful when it grows from dialogue and shared purpose. Whether through community conversations about the responsible use of AI or the design of future-ready learning experiences, their work reminds us that planning is not an administrative task but a human process of aligning vision, people, and action. The International School Growth Framework (ISGF) builds on that principle, transforming reflection and collaboration into a structured roadmap for navigating change with clarity and purpose.

By examining how Adaptation, Aggregation, Arbitrage, and Agility manifest in different institutional contexts, the ISGF helps leaders translate strategic intent into action and evidence into growth. What distinguishes successful schools is not uniformity across these four dimensions but the ability to balance them in ways that reflect their unique context and mission. Whether through refining internal coherence, leveraging partnerships, or developing agile responses to emerging challenges, the ISGF enables institutions to align their vision with evolving realities.

"Strategic planning is most powerful when it grows from dialogue and shared purpose."

What distinguishes successful schools is not uniformity across these four dimensions but the ability to balance them in ways that reflect their unique context and mission. Whether through refining internal coherence, leveraging partnerships, or developing agile responses to emerging challenges, the ISGF helps institutions align their vision with evolving realities.
Ultimately, strategic planning in international schools is an ongoing process of learning, reflection, and renewal. The ISGF offers a starting point for reflecting on how your school grows, learns, and adapts. The next four questions are there to help you reflect, start conversations, and decide what meaningful change could look like in your own context.





- How well does our current strategic plan balance local responsiveness with our international mission and identity?
- Where are the opportunities to create greater coherence and consistency across our programs, practices, and partnerships?
- How effectively are we leveraging our resources, talent, and networks to innovate sustainably and extend our impact?
- How prepared is our organization to anticipate, respond to, and learn from change?

As international education continues to evolve, the ISGF invites schools to see strategy not as a fixed document but as a living process. In doing so, planning becomes more than a routine exercise, it becomes the starting point for collective learning and growth.





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Pan American School of Bahia

LEADING THROUGH UNCERTAINTY: EVIDENCE FROM TEACHERS AND LEADERS WORLDWIDE

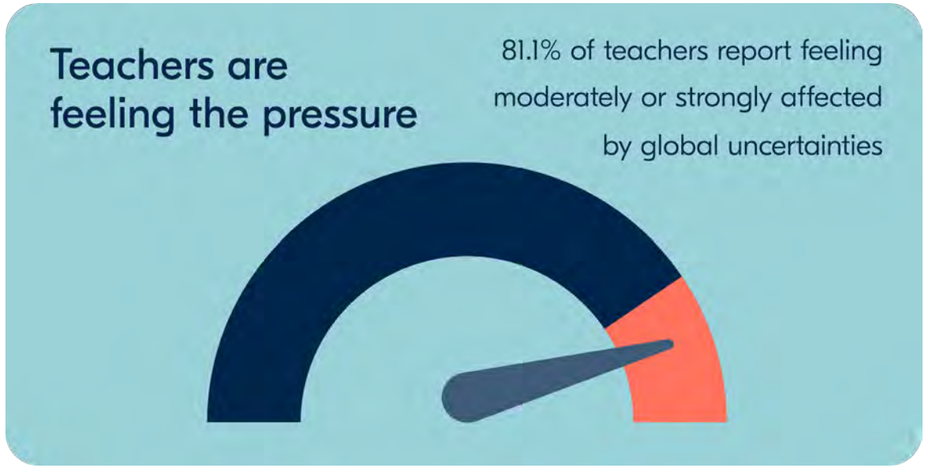
By: Alex Reynolds, Shaun Walling, and Mayk Schupfer

The world is changing fast, and schools are feeling the uncertainty more than ever. For leaders, the stakes are high: What will these changes mean for the future of education? How will they ripple through our wider communities? And crucially, how can we navigate them with confidence and care?

Drawing on Teacher Horizons' research with over 1,000 teachers and 119 school leaders across 127 countries, this article highlights not only the challenges but also the opportunities ahead. Even in times of disruption, our findings show that leaders can strengthen their schools by building community, fostering trust, and creating a genuine sense of belonging. Using a mixed-methods approach, supported by one-on-one interviews with experienced school leaders, our analysis is grounded in the lived experiences of the sector and offers a balanced view of the key issues schools face, from recruitment and retention to staff wellbeing, to institutional resilience.

The initial data reveal a critical conflict: while the sector demonstrates remarkable institutional stability, the individuals within it are strained. The international school market continues its robust growth, now comprising 14,833 K-12 schools, an increase of 376 schools in just six months, and experiencing a 24.3 % rise in teacher applications in the 2024/25 academic year. Yet this stability masks a deep emotional toll, as 81.1% of teachers report feeling moderately or strongly affected by global uncertainties. The pressure is also felt heavily by leadership, with 49.6% of school leaders reporting that these same global uncertainties affect their contract renewal decisions. This figure is a clear sign that stability in school numbers does not equate to security in staff wellbeing, underscoring why intentional leadership, focused on people, is the most critical challenge for the years ahead.

"...teachers cited student wellbeing six times more often than their own financial concerns or job security."



The Teacher's perspective: A gap in support and a commitment to students

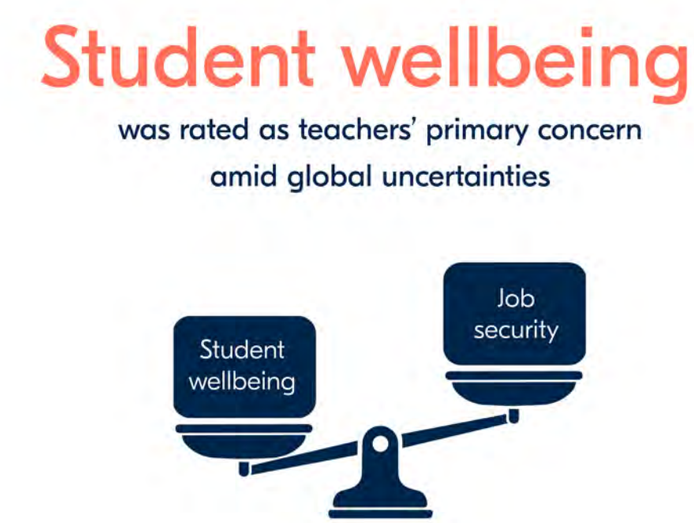
The underlying professional and emotional challenges faced by international educators are significantly escalated by global uncertainties, creating intense new pressures that demand a fundamental evolution in leadership support. Our research reveals a clear disconnect: a perception gap that compromises the sense of belonging and community at a moment when staff need it most. Globally, a concerning 85.3 % of teachers report feeling moderate to strong levels of anxiety or concern regarding global events. This deep emotional toll is widely underestimated by senior staff, creating a disparity in support. Specifically, 56.9 % of teachers report not feeling well supported by their leadership, even as more than 70 % of leaders rate their staff support systems highly.

This gap is frequently rooted in insufficient information flow, not a deliberate lack of effort. Teachers frequently report low confidence in leadership due to a lack of clear, transparent, and timely communication regarding crisis planning and long-term strategy. Being far from their home countries, educators need the institution to act as a stabilizing presence. As one anonymous educator based in Mexico articulated:

> To help navigate global uncertainties, schools can provide consistent communication and reassurance [about] long-term planning. Being far from home, it's especially important to feel that the school is a reliable anchor. Practical support like clear contingency plans, flexible policies, and regular check-ins from leadership would make a big difference.

This sentiment directly ties the need for institutional transparency to the development of a secure and resilient community.

Crucially, the data show that teachers are primarily focused outward, demonstrating a profound commitment to the welfare of their learners. When asked about their greatest concerns amid global uncertainty, teachers cited student well-being six times more often than their own financial concerns or job security. This student-centric focus highlights a critical need: the most effective way for leaders to support their staff is by providing the time, tools, and training necessary to prioritize pastoral care and mental health for students. This dedication is powerfully summarized by one teacher: *"My greatest concern is ensuring the well-being and continuity of learning for my students while adapting to rapidly changing global conditions, including political, health, or logistical disruptions."*



LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
LEADING THROUGH UNCERTAINTY...

> "...the foundation of community building, belonging, and institutional resilience stems from empathetic, transparent, and responsive leadership."

The Leader's challenge: Addressing shifting priorities

Global uncertainties are fundamentally reshaping the priorities for both teachers and leaders in the critical areas of recruitment and retention, creating a market driven by volatility and personal risk assessment. Whether considering contract lengths, the scope of benefits for families, lifestyle choices, or location stability, every employment decision is now viewed through a lens of potential disruption. This evolving landscape has revealed a significant divergence between what teachers value most and what leaders prioritize, a disconnect driven by today's global uncertainties.

This misalignment is most pronounced in three key areas: location, compensation, and flexibility. First, teachers are now far more selective about where they will work. While only 24.5 % of teachers globally reported being more selective as their primary response to uncertainty, this figure rises to 84.2 % among educators in South America, illustrating a widespread rise in regional sensitivity to political or economic instability. This shift impacts not only where teachers apply, but also how leaders must approach their long-term staffing plans; nearly half (49.6%) of school leaders report that global uncertainty now affects their long-term staffing decisions.

Second, a critical blind spot exists around compensation. Teachers consistently rank financial security as their top priority in employment decisions, yet leaders rank compensation fourth, viewing factors such as school culture and professional development as more important. This risks undermining staff stability. As one former teacher noted, this disconnect is directly leading to turnover: "I'm moving on this summer due to the salary and benefits at my current school. They are not changing to reflect the current global economic changes."

Finally, a fundamental difference in perception exists regarding contract flexibility. Leaders often report that teachers are demanding more flexible contracts, yet fewer than 5% of leaders consider flexibility an important factor in contract negotiations. This caution overlooks the strategic value of flexibility as a retention tool, a key driver of trust and engagement in volatile times. As one recruitment advisor pointed out, the emotional and financial support schools provided during the pandemic is still a major factor in current retention:

> Some schools, like Dulwich, seemed to handle the COVID-19 pandemic very well. Teachers reported being emotionally and financially supported and their concerns were listened to and heard. Lots of teachers didn't have such a positive experience with schools cutting wages or cancelling contracts at short notice.

Leaders who fail to adapt their contracts to reflect these new priorities around stability and flexibility will find themselves at a distinct disadvantage in the competitive talent market.

Teachers feel resilient

but report low confidence in their school's measures to handle crises



Building a culture of support: Actionable strategies for leading change

The data collected during this research provides guidance on tangible, actionable strategies and solutions necessary to tackle global uncertainties head-on. These findings do not reveal new, groundbreaking techniques; rather, they represent an amalgamation of proven best practices, centered on a renewed approach to leadership and a clear prioritization of human capital.

The experience of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which institutions had to adapt quickly, confirmed that leaders and school governance need to be equipped with tools, knowledge, resources, and strategies to address ongoing uncertainty. The key insight remains true: the foundation of community building, belonging, and institutional resilience stems from empathetic, transparent, and responsive leadership. When implemented with intention, these strategies help school communities feel ready and equipped to navigate the continuous, complex challenges of this era.

> ***"Making sure that you're communicating with teachers, making sure that you're listening to them, making them feel heard... if they don't feel supported by the administration, then everything just bubbles over."***

The first essential steps in building a resilient culture focus on bridging the perception gap identified in our data. Leadership must first listen to staff and act on their feedback, making it a priority to seek out honest concerns about wellbeing and workload through regular, anonymous channels, and then respond visibly. Equally important is the need to strengthen trust through transparent leadership. Acknowledging that a lack of clear, timely communication can create a sense of instability, leaders must communicate honestly about plans and challenges. As Associate Principal Charlie McAlpin at Fuhsing Private School, Taiwan, advises on this necessity: "Making sure that you're communicating with teachers, making sure that you're listening to them, making them feel heard... if they don't feel supported by the administration, then everything just bubbles over." Transparent planning and shared decision-making are therefore vital tools for establishing a stable school environment.

To ensure long-term retention and stability, schools must also offer competitive and flexible employment conditions. This involves reviewing salary and benefits to reflect current economic realities and offering flexible contract options that meet changing teacher expectations.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
LEADING THROUGH UNCERTAINTY...

"...the path to securing the future is not through new technology or complex financial instruments, but through a profound, sustained focus on the human element, the foundational principles of community, trust, and belonging."

Though caution around flexibility remains among leaders, external research supports its strategic value. As the UK Department for Education documented:

> An overriding theme was that the benefits of flexible working were generally seen to outweigh the costs, as leaders felt that flexible working helped retain good staff and improved teacher wellbeing, which was perceived to ultimately lead to better pupil outcomes.

International leaders are already adapting these measures: "We have already built in things like a completion bonus and a re-signing bonus. We also have a mid-year rest and relaxation allocation after the first year... these are reasons to come to Abuja and stay", notes Wayne Burnett, Early Childhood and Elementary School Principal at the American International School of Abuja, Nigeria.

Finally, leaders must prepare for crises with shared planning and clear systems, involving staff and the board in co-developing robust crisis plans that include clear roles, communication protocols, and structured well-being support.



The Foundation of Future-Ready Schools

The international education community stands at a pivotal moment, having proven its stability and resilience even as global uncertainties escalate the challenges facing its staff. Our research has demonstrated that while the international school sector continues its robust growth, this institutional strength masks a critical tension: the widening perception gap between leaders and teachers, and the significant emotional toll that volatility takes on educators. The data is clear: the path to securing the future is not through new technology or complex financial instruments, but through a profound, sustained focus on the human element, the foundational principles of community, trust, and belonging.

By listening to teachers, closing the communication gap through radical transparency, and adapting employment conditions to reflect new priorities around stability and flexibility, leaders can transform uncertainty from a threat into a powerful opportunity for growth. Intentional, values-driven leadership that actively cultivates this culture of psychological safety and shared resilience is the true path forward, ensuring that international schools not only survive the current era of change but also emerge stronger, more unified, and truly "future-ready" for the years to come.







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International School of Panama

'A SCHOOL THE WORLD NEEDS' - LEADING CHANGE AND BUILDING BELONGING ON OUR JOURNEY TO CARBON NEUTRALITY

By: Cdr. AJL Fernandes (Retd.)

Leading Beyond the Known Horizon

As the Association for the Advancement of International Education (AAIE) approaches its 60th anniversary, it invites us to reflect on a legacy of leading and learning through change. For international school leaders, this is more than an anniversary theme; it is our daily reality. We are tasked with preparing students for a future defined by unprecedented complexity, a world that demands not just academic knowledge, but deep reserves of resilience, adaptability, and emotional intelligence.

"It is not simply a story of sustainability. It is a case study in adaptive leadership."

For over a century, Kodaikanal International School (KIS) has been a pioneer in international education. As a not-for-profit school and the first in India to offer the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme, our history is one of looking beyond the known horizon to embrace a truly global, forward-thinking educational model. It is from this legacy that one of our most ambitious initiatives has emerged, a journey to become India's first carbon-net-neutral residential school by 2030. As we approach 2026, a year that marks our 125th anniversary and the 50th year of our IB leadership, this project has become more than an environmental goal; it is a reaffirmation of our identity and being true to our creed of being 'a school the world needs'.

And it is not simply a story of sustainability. It is a case study in adaptive leadership (Heifetz, 1994). Our Carbon Net Neutral Project (CNNP) has evolved beyond its initial scope to become a living laboratory for community-building, a catalyst for authentic, student-led innovation, and a testament to the power of data in creating a culture of shared purpose and belonging. As the AAIE marks its 60th anniversary, reflecting on a legacy of leading change, we offer our journey not as a unique achievement but as a replicable model of how a bold vision, grounded in a school's core values, can become the engine of its evolution.

The Foundation of Change - Moving from Vision to Verifiable Data

Meaningful change begins with an honest look in the mirror. KIS has always been a pioneer in honest environmental activism, with our KIS Center for Environment and Humanity (CEH) and our integral Social and Environmental Experience Department (SEED) and Creativity, Activity, and Service (CAS) programs, which have enabled us to establish deep roots within the local community for decades. This commitment is not a recent development; it is deeply woven into the fabric of our institutional identity. The CNNP, therefore, was not a departure but a deliberate escalation of our long-standing values—a decision to apply a new level of scientific rigor and accountability to our environmental stewardship.

In 2020, during the uncertainty of the evolving COVID-19 pandemic, when KIS formalized its 2030 carbon-neutral goal, our first act of leadership was to commit to radical transparency and data integrity. We commenced a rigorous process of digitising all our fossil fuel consumption details across categories of 'electrical energy', 'diesel fuel', and 'charcoal and LPG', including consumption data all the way from 2015, and established 2018 as our baseline year, a period of normal operation against which we would measure all future progress. This involved a meticulous, campus-wide audit of every energy source: every kilowatt-hour of electricity, every litre of diesel, and every kilogram of kitchen fuel.

This process yielded a stark and powerful number: 1,222,340 kilograms of CO2 were our carbon footprint in our baseline year of 2018. (Link to KIS Combined CO2 Emissions Dashboard)

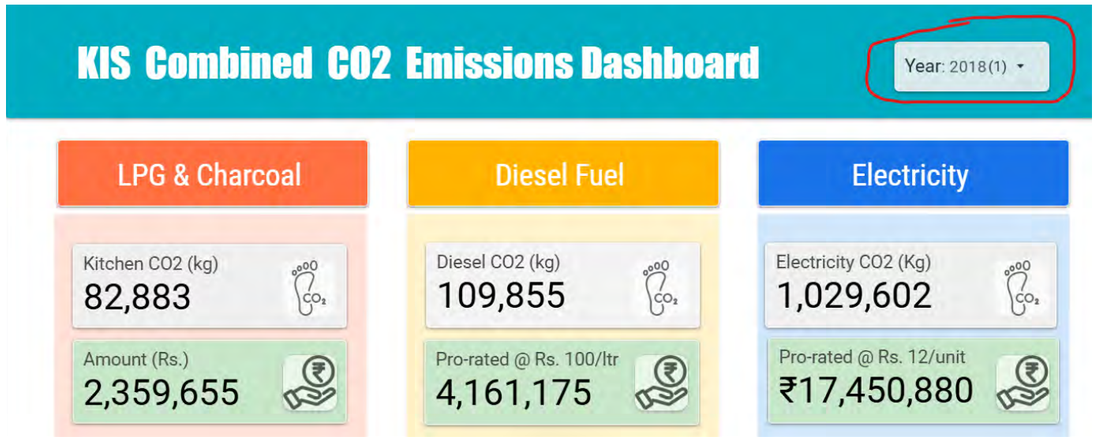


Figure 1
The KIS Combined CO2 Emissions Dashboard for our 2018 baseline year

This unenviable figure was more than a data point; it was a call to action that transformed an abstract goal into a tangible mission. For a leader, this is a critical first step in any change initiative. This aligns with the principle that effective leaders must first 'diagnose the system' before prescribing interventions (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). Data builds integrity. It moves the conversation from opinion to evidence and provides a non-negotiable "why" that can unite a diverse community. It gave us clarity, allowing us to identify our three primary emission sources—grid electricity (84%), diesel fuel (9%), and kitchen fuels (7%)—and begin the strategic work of dismantling our carbon footprint.

Fostering a Community of Agency - "We Are All Part of the Solution"

A project of this scale cannot be a top-down directive; it must be a community-wide collaboration. One of the core tenets of the CNNP was to embed the initiative within the student body, empowering them as co-authors of the school's sustainable future. This strategy has been central to building a profound sense of belonging and shared purpose.

The initial cohort of the KIS CNNP.



From the outset, over 60 student contributors across seven active student groups became involved. The project became a living curriculum, providing a rich context for the IB Programme's Extended Essays (EE) and Internal Assessments (IAs). We have seen students conduct physics IAs on the efficacy of installing horizontal-axis and vertical-axis wind turbines in our campuses, chemistry IAs on our composting systems, and economics EEs on the ROI of our sustainability investments, and CAS projects on the efficacy of rocket stoves for simultaneous space heating and family cooking for local tribal communities. This is project-based learning at its most authentic, where student inquiry has a direct and measurable impact on their own community.

This deep engagement provides our students with a compelling and authentic narrative for their university applications. They are not just participating in a school club; they are part of a multi-year, data-driven mission to solve a complex, real-world problem. They can speak with authority on topics from renewable energy to ecological restoration, demonstrating the kind of leadership and initiative that top universities actively seek.

The CNNP Workshop: A Crucible for Creativity and Trust

Beyond the formal curriculum, however, lies the beating heart of our student-led innovation: the CNNP Workshop. The CNNP Workshop is a space dedicated to tinkering, experimentation, and the joyful pursuit of curiosity, accessible to earmarked students during their free time. The key to its success lies in a radical act of trust embodied by the "CNNP Honour Code." The CNNP Honour Code began as a blank Google Doc shared with students involved in the project, empowering them to create a self-regulating document they could uphold and enforce among members. This is not a list of prohibitions but a shared agreement, created and upheld by the students themselves, based on principles of respect for the space, safety for each other, and mutual responsibility for their tinkering and collective work. Rather than a top-down list of rules, the students developed principles centered on mutual responsibility. For instance, two key principles they established were:

- **Safety as a Shared Responsibility:** The code states, "Safety is of utmost priority. In case any member is unfamiliar with the intended use of the equipment, it is required that they ask for assistance before proceeding." This shifts the onus from adult supervision to peer-to-peer support and individual accountability, fostering a culture of care.
- **Respect for the Collective Space:** The principle, "You have the freedom to make use of the workshop any way you see fit. However, clean up after yourself and leave the workspace clean and tidy after use," beautifully balances autonomy with community-mindedness. It frames the workshop not as a public facility, but as a shared home that everyone is responsible for maintaining.







Figure 3
More than just learning at the CNNP Workshop.

This model is a profound exercise in what learner-centered leadership (Wetzler & Reardon, 2025) looks like in practice. It required us as leaders to shift our mindset from control to empowerment, to create the conditions for innovation rather than directing it, a concept central to fostering agility in organizations (Kotter, 1996). The Honour Code facilitates a space where creativity flourishes because it is not constrained by constant adult supervision. Students are trusted to act honourably, manage their projects, clean up after themselves, and seek guidance when needed. This approach embodies the spirit of agile leadership, fostering a culture where students can rapidly test ideas, collaborate on solutions, and learn from both successes and failures. It is in this workshop that a true sense of authentic belonging is forged; students belong because they are trusted as capable, responsible partners in a significant endeavour. This environment is a living example of how to build team flexibility and foster the emotional intelligence required to navigate collaborative, real-world problem-solving.

"Data builds integrity. It moves the conversation from opinion to evidence and provides a non-negotiable 'why' that can unite a diverse community."

Our Evidence in Action: The Student-Led Biodiesel Project

The Biodiesel Project (YouTube Link) exemplifies the themes of this edition: an innovative, collaborative, and transformative experience born of student curiosity and grounded in scientific research.

The Problem and the Hypothesis: Each year, our school kitchens produce hundreds of litres of used cooking oil. Simultaneously, our campuses rely on diesel-powered backup generators. A group of students, working in the CNNP workshop, posed a powerful question: "Could one problem be the solution for the other?" Their hypothesis was that this waste oil could be converted into a viable biodiesel to supplement our diesel consumption, directly aligning with UN Sustainable Development Goals 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and 13 (Climate Action).

Methodology and Evidence-Based Process: The students embarked on a rigorous research project. Their method was transesterification, a chemical process to convert triglycerides (fats/oils) into biofuel.

1. Catalyst Creation: They first synthesized their own catalyst by carefully mixing sodium hydroxide with methanol.
2. Controlled Reaction: The used cooking oil was heated in a water bath to a precise 60°C. The catalyst was then introduced, and the mixture was mechanically stirred.
3. Separation: The mixture was left to settle for 24 hours, allowing gravity to separate the heavier glycerine by-product from the pure, lighter biodiesel.



Making Bio-Diesel in the CNNP Workshop

Testing and Validation: Creating the fuel was only the first step. To validate their work, the students designed a series of performance tests using one of the school's diesel water pumps. They prepared two different blends—B5 (5% biodiesel, 95% diesel) and B10 (10% biodiesel, 90% diesel)—and measured the fuel flow rate of each, comparing it against standard diesel. Their data, meticulously plotted and analyzed, revealed that the B5 blend demonstrated a flow rate nearly identical to that of conventional diesel. This crucial, evidence-based finding proved that their student-produced biofuel was not just a science experiment; it was a viable, sustainable fuel source.



Testing the Bio-Diesel at a Diesel Pump

"Sustainability is not an expense, but an investment that pays for itself."

Outcomes and Community Impact: The project's success is multifaceted. Environmentally, it is projected to reduce the school's carbon footprint by up to **2 metric tonnes annually.** Financially, it represents an estimated annual saving of **₹70,000 (approximately $800 USD).** Perhaps most importantly, the students developed a "Biodiesel Outreach Program," creating presentations and demonstrations to share their findings with younger KIS students and members of the local community. This initiative transformed them from learners into teachers, completing the cycle of learning and service.

Adaptive Leadership in Action: Dashboards, Dividends, and Iterative Success

In a decade-long project, rigidity is the enemy of progress. Leading change requires agility and the flexibility to adapt as conditions evolve. Our primary tool for this has been the KIS Combined CO2 Emissions Dashboard, a suite of real-time monitoring tools that serves as our project's command centre. This dashboard is more than a reporting mechanism; it is the heartbeat of our adaptive leadership framework. It allows us to track our progress transparently, celebrate our successes, and—most critically—identify areas where we need to adjust our strategy.

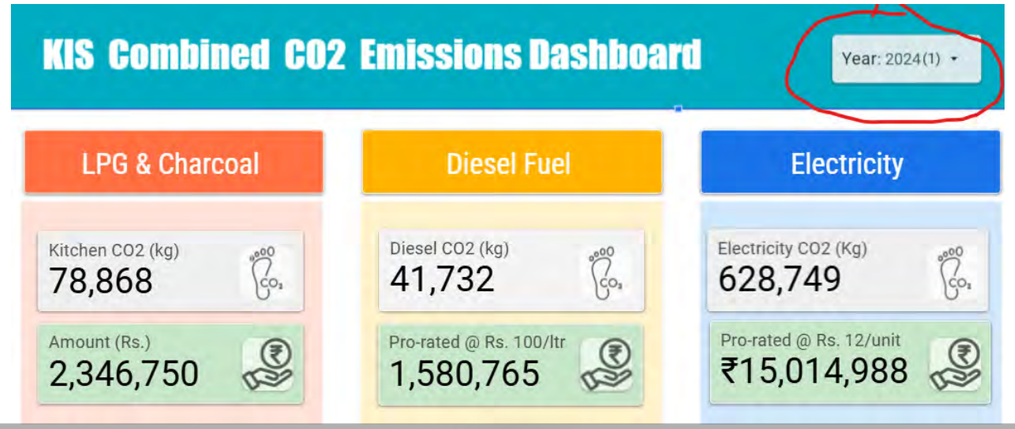


Figure 7
The KIS Combined CO2 Emissions Dashboard for the year 2024

This iterative, data-informed approach has yielded remarkable results. By the end of 2024, our focused interventions had led to a 38.7% reduction in our overall carbon footprint, a drop of over 472 metric tonnes of CO2. This was driven by a 39% reduction in electricity-based emissions and a stunning 62% reduction in our diesel footprint.

These environmental gains have been matched by a significant financial dividend. Our shift away from fossil fuels has resulted in a direct annual saving of over **₹5,029,207 (approximately $60,000 USD).** This demonstrates a powerful lesson for all school leaders: sustainability is not an expense, but an investment that pays for itself. These savings are now being reinvested into further innovations, creating a self-sustaining engine for change and demonstrating the fiscal resilience that comes from responsible environmental stewardship.

The Living Legacy: The Miyawaki Forest as a Symbol of Enduring Commitment

The ultimate goal of our project is to create a balance, with any residual emissions sequestered by nature itself. To achieve this, we are cultivating a series of Miyawaki forests across our campuses. This ecological method uses native species planted in high density to accelerate the growth of a self-sustaining forest ecosystem.

This is more than a simple tree-planting initiative. We are restoring the indigenous 'shola' forest ecosystem, a vital and unique part of our local heritage in the Western Ghats. These trees represent our commitment to not just reducing our negative impact, but to leaving our corner of the world healthier and more vibrant than we found it. (Link to our CNNP Sapling Planting Dashboard)

"Students are trusted to act honorably, to manage their projects, to clean up after themselves, and to seek guidance when needed."



Guided by a scientific Carbon Sequestration Framework and partnerships with academic institutions, we are on track not just to plant saplings, but to database and monitor over 20,000 trees across our campuses. Once mature, these forests are projected to sequester over 240 tonnes of CO2 annually, more than enough to offset our target residual emissions of under 200 tonnes. This forest is the physical embodiment of our project's spirit: a resilient, living legacy that will stand as a testament to our community's long-term vision long after our 2030 goal is met.

Sapling Planting at the KIS Miyawaki Forest





A Replicable Blueprint for Leading with Purpose

The timing of this initiative carries a special resonance. As we look toward 2026, KIS will celebrate the **125th anniversary of our founding and the 50th anniversary of being the first IB school in India.** Our journey toward carbon neutrality is, in many ways, the most fitting tribute to this dual legacy. It is a reaffirmation of the pioneering spirit that has always defined us and a tangible promise that KIS will continue to lead—not just in education, but in service to the global community—for the next 125 years.

The KIS Carbon Net Neutral Project has taught us that a school's most ambitious goals can be its most transformative educational tools. The journey has affirmed several key leadership principles that we believe are universal to the challenges we face in international education.

"Our schools can be more than just places of learning; they can be crucibles of innovation and beacons of hope."

A Replicable Blueprint: Actionable First Steps

For fellow leaders inspired to begin a similar journey of community-wide change, our experience suggests a few immediate, actionable first steps to build momentum:

1. Anchor the 'Why' in Your School's Identity: Before any action, anchor the initiative in your school's unique mission and values. Frame it not as an external mandate, but as an authentic expression of who you already are. This provides the moral and cultural foundation for resilience.

2. Commit to an Honest, Foundational Audit: The first act of leadership is to define reality. Commit to a rigorous, data-driven audit of the specific area you wish to change (e.g., energy use, waste production, etc.) to establish a clear, non-negotiable baseline. We find this to be the bedrock of integrity for the entire project.

3. Create and Empower a Hub for Student Agency: Identify a space—whether physical, like our CNNP workshop, or conceptual, like a dedicated task force—where students are given genuine ownership. Start by entrusting them with a real problem and the autonomy to propose solutions, moving from a culture of supervision to one of partnership.

4. Identify a Visible, Tangible Catalyst Project: Rather than trying to solve everything at once, empower your student group to identify a "quick win." A visible project like our biodiesel initiative provides tangible proof of concept, builds momentum, and creates powerful stories that fuel long-term community engagement. The success of the bio-diesel project, with its immediately quantifiable outcomes, has galvanised a new group of students to move onwards with this initiative as a follow-on project.

As international school leaders, we are in a unique position to model the change we wish to see in the world. Our schools can be more than just places of learning; they can be crucibles of innovation and beacons of hope. The journey to carbon neutrality has provided our KIS community with a powerful, unifying purpose, and it is a path we believe is open to any school willing to lead with courage, curiosity, and a steadfast commitment to building a more sustainable and equitable future for all.



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International School of Sosua

BELONGING AT THE HEART:
HOW A TEACHER VALUE PROPOSITION BUILDS LASTING SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

By: Ilaria Cortesi

As AAIE nears its 60th anniversary, I find myself reflecting not just on milestones, but on the deeper forces shaping international schools today. Teacher shortages, shifting work expectations, and global mobility are not just HR challenges; they are tests of our community's resilience and spirit.

More and more, the conversation has shifted from: "How do we recruit talented teachers?" to: "How do we create a place where they truly belong, and want to stay, grow, and contribute?"

In the corporate world, leaders talk about the Employee Value Proposition (EVP): the unique mix of tangible and intangible benefits that an employer offers to employees in exchange for their commitment and performance. This proposition includes tangible elements like compensation and health benefits, as well as intangible factors such as recognition, career growth opportunities, and a supportive workplace culture (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). In education, this concept remains underused. Adapted for schools, a Teacher Value Proposition (TVP) defines the combination of these elements that teachers gain from being part of a school community. When it is intentional and authentic, it becomes a powerful driver of belonging, engagement, and retention (Shields & Lewis, 2012).

"The conversation has shifted from: "How do we recruit talented teachers?" to: "How do we create a place where they truly belong, and want to stay, grow, and contribute?"

Why a Teacher Value Proposition Matters Now

In my eight years as an HR practitioner at Shanghai American School, I saw firsthand how much time, energy, and budget went into recruitment each year, and how quickly those efforts could be undone by turnover. Despite offering competitive packages, we still lost great teachers. It wasn't always because of money.

ISC Research (2023) data highlights significant challenges in attracting and retaining teachers in the growing international school market. At the same time, global reports show a widespread, escalating shortage across many education systems. For instance, the share of principals reporting that teacher shortages hindered instruction in OECD countries rose dramatically between 2015 and 2022 (OECD, 2024a). This pattern made me ask: What makes teachers choose to stay? And, equally important, do we, as leaders, really understand and communicate the full experience of working in our schools?

Globally, international schools are competing for a finite pool of qualified teachers. The post-pandemic years have amplified this challenge: candidate expectations have shifted, mobility patterns have changed, and a growing number of schools are competing for the same talent. Should the international school market recover to pre-pandemic growth levels, up to 158,400 additional teachers will be required by 2028 (ISC Research, 2023). Even if the growth continues at the slower pace seen during the pandemic, there will still be a need for 70,500 more teachers by 2028 (ISC Research, 2023). While compensation and benefits remain powerful draws, they are no longer enough on their own.

Research shows that employees are more likely to commit long-term when they can clearly see and feel the value of being part of an organization, not just in pay and benefits, but in recognition, growth opportunities, and day-to-day culture (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Veldsman & Pauw, 2018). Yet in many schools, this value is implicit rather than explicit. Leaders may offer incredible support, but if it isn't clearly articulated and consistently delivered, the impact is diminished.

That's where a Teacher Value Proposition (TVP) comes in.

A TVP:
- Signals to prospective hires what makes your school unique (Cable & Turban, 2003).
- Reinforces to current staff that they are valued (Helm, 2013).
- Aligns recruitment and retention strategies with your culture and goals (Ronda et al., 2018).

My research explored this idea in depth, examining what teachers at Shanghai American School valued most about their work environment, and how leaders could intentionally design and communicate those elements to strengthen belonging and retention.

"Compensation is a hygiene factor; if it's not competitive, other efforts will struggle."

Five Pillars of a Compelling TVP

My research identified five interconnected pillars that together create a compelling Teacher Value Proposition. These five pillars, namely Reputation, Compensation & Benefits, Recognition, Professional Development, and Working Conditions, were drawn from existing EVP literature and adapted based on the specific qualitative findings from my research at Shanghai American School.

1. Reputation

Teachers spoke with pride about working for a "reputable, well-established school" where "you show up to a conference… and people are like, whoa, tell me more." Research confirms that perceived external reputation is linked to pride in membership, job satisfaction, and retention (Helm, 2013). For example, a school actively builds its reputation by demonstrating excellence in measurable areas. These areas include international accreditation certifications, the quality and variety of extracurricular activities, and a school's commitment to inclusivity and an active alumni network (HSBC & Hurun Education, 2024).

Leadership takeaway: Reputation is built over years but communicated in moments. Share and celebrate stories of excellence, impact, and innovation that position your school as a destination workplace.

2. Compensation & Benefits

While not always the main reason for staying, competitive packages remain among the top global drivers of attraction and retention (Gartner, 2020; European Commission, 2013) and signal value and enable quality of life. As one teacher put it: "We are paid well for what we do…and the benefits are unlike any others provided in the United States."

Leadership takeaway: Compensation is a hygiene factor; if it's not competitive, other efforts will struggle. Pair competitive pay with meaningful non-financial benefits.

3. Recognition

Teachers valued both financial recognition and personal acknowledgment. As one recalled:
"We have rounds of compliments before meetings…and that goes so far." Recognition boosts morale and strengthens organizational culture (Andrews, 2011; White, 2017).

Leadership takeaway: Recognition is most impactful when it's personal, specific, and consistent. Make it part of your leadership routine.

4. Professional Development
From graduate degrees to embedded professional learning communities, growth opportunities were a major draw. One teacher explained:

"My image of working here is that I become a better teacher." Purposeful professional learning increases teacher satisfaction and retention (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; OECD, 2024b). For example, an intentional PD framework could include a Leadership Residency Program that moves teachers from classroom experts into department head or divisional leadership roles. This model works because it retains institutional knowledge and creates career-growth opportunities that are essential for effective teachers seeking to expand their influence and extend their careers (Teach Plus, 2015).

"Recognition is most impactful when it's personal, specific, and consistent."

Leadership takeaway: Link PD to school goals while supporting individual career aspirations. This fosters loyalty and future leadership capacity.

5. Working Conditions
Access to resources, collegiality, and supportive leadership were consistently cited.
"It's got a good sense of community…and faculty you're going to learn a lot from."
Supportive working conditions correlate with higher job satisfaction and lower turnover (Ingersoll, 2001; Mancuso et al., 2010).

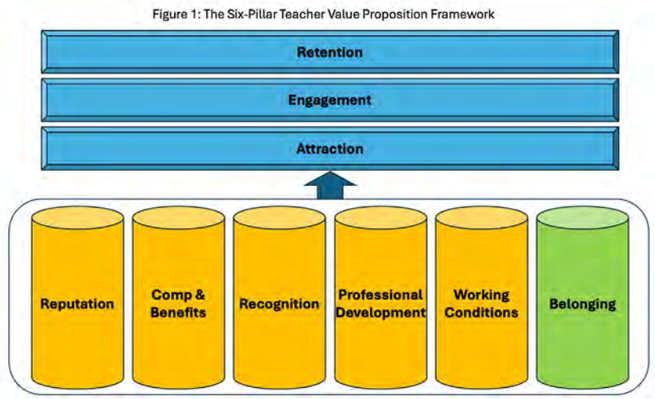
Leadership takeaway: Protect planning time, invest in resources, and cultivate a collaborative culture. These day-to-day realities define whether staff thrive.

The Sixth Pillar

As we celebrate six decades of leading and learning together, we must remember that belonging should extend to everyone in our school communities, not just teachers. My research focused on teachers, but the principles of a value proposition can—and should—be adapted for all staff: instructional assistants, operations teams, and everyone who contributes to the life of the school.

Recent peer-reviewed studies and global surveys confirm that belonging and inclusion are among the top drivers of attraction, engagement, and retention. Specifically, Carr et al., (2019) found that high belonging is linked to a 56% increase in job performance and a 50% drop in turnover risk. This dramatic impact demonstrates that cultivating a sense of belonging is an essential component of talent strategy.

Figure 1: The Six-Pillar Teacher Value Proposition Framework



"When a TVP is merely a glossy statement for recruitment fairs and does not align with the day-to-day reality of the workplace, it creates a "broken promise" that accelerates dissatisfaction and turnover."

In addition, a large conjoint analysis conducted by the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (2025) found that while compensation remains critical, "sense of belonging" played a significant role in employees' preferred job choices. This reinforces the importance of inclusive environments as core elements of a TVP.

As a result, the five pillars that emerged from my research, I would add a sixth: Belonging. Its intentional inclusion as a standalone pillar is necessary because belonging must be actively measured, managed, and reinforced through the TVP framework to ensure it is authentically delivered.

From Insight to Action

Identifying the pillars of a strong Teacher Value Proposition is only the first step. To make it meaningful, leaders need a process for translating these concepts into everyday practice. The goal is to build a living promise that shapes decisions, strengthens community, and evolves with your school's needs, going beyond a glossy statement for recruitment fairs.

The following steps offer a practical framework for designing and sustaining your TVP:

- **Audit what you offer:** Map both tangible and intangible benefits. This step is an objective inventory of the school's written policies and existing, documented programs, cataloging all official offerings. For example, this involves compiling a master list of all tangible benefits (salary scales, housing, health insurance) and all intangible benefits (mentorship programs, PD budgets, etc.).
- **Ask your staff:** Use surveys or focus groups to learn what they value most.
- **Spot the gaps:** Identify mismatches between promises, reality, and perception.
- **Communicate clearly:** Align job postings, onboarding, and internal messaging with your TVP.
- **Review and adapt:** Your TVP should evolve with your school community.

The design and communication of a TVP must be genuine; it cannot be faked or manufactured. When a TVP is merely a glossy statement for recruitment fairs and does not align with the day-to-day reality of the workplace, it creates a "broken promise" that accelerates dissatisfaction and turnover (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Ultimately, the TVP must be intentional and authentic to become a powerful driver of belonging and retention.

To borrow from John Dewey, education is not only a matter of books and classrooms; it is also about the values and relationships that surround our students every day. Every interaction in a school teaches, sometimes more than the curriculum itself. When we create a workplace where every member feels valued, supported, and connected, we strengthen the very foundation of our community and model the world we hope our students will build. This is the ultimate purpose of the Teacher Value Proposition: to build lasting and inclusive school communities.



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St. Joseph's Institution International

WHERE DO THEY BELONG?
A STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL TEACHER RETENTION

By: Alicia A. Ritter, Ph.D.

International teachers and the overseas experience

International schools have expanded rapidly. From only 50 overseas schools in 1964, this sector now has over 14,000 English-medium international schools worldwide (ISC, 2024). Expatriate teachers who work within these schools are often characterized as self-confident, adaptable, reflective problem-solvers who value change and self-reliance (Gillies, 2001; Horton, 1987; Zilber, 2009). While overseas adjustment typically has three dimensions—environmental, psychological, and work-related — individuals may adapt well in one dimension but struggle in another (Boncori & Vine, 2014; Haslberger, Brewster, & Hippler, 2013; Huang, Chi, & Lawler, 2005; Puck, Kittler, & Wright, 2008).

International teachers differ from corporate expatriates in that they typically relocate themselves and manage many adjustments without corporate relocation packages (Chen et al., 2010). Causes of turnover are multidimensional: early negative experiences, inadequate pay, weak organizational conditions, and/or low satisfaction (Zilber, 2009b). Within international schools, annual teacher turnover is about 17% (Mancuso, Roberts, & White, 2010), with attrition rates nearly double those of other professions (Ingersoll, 2004). Because staffing cycles are synchronized, the disruption is compounded and felt annually (Mancuso, 2010).

"Retention—alongside recruitment—promotes continuity, community, and student learning."

Research has shown that teachers accompanied by partners or families tend to adjust more quickly (Gillies, 2001; Horton, 1987; Zilber, 2009), and those with children often renew contracts if the conditions are suitable for both themselves and their children (Chandler, 2010; Zilber, 2009). Other motivators to remain in a school or location can vary by gender, location, and life stage (Thorn, 2009). Cross-cultural motivation also matters: the greater "cultural distance" from one's home culture can sometimes dampen motivation and require more personal resources from the educator to thrive (Chen et al., 2010). International teachers face multiple layers of adjustment—the international school, the city, the country, and the global context (Joslin, 2002). In essence, teachers often remain where they feel they belong on multiple levels. Longer stays are associated with lower stress among expatriates (Brown, 2008).

Figure 1: Joslin's Model of Cultural Influences

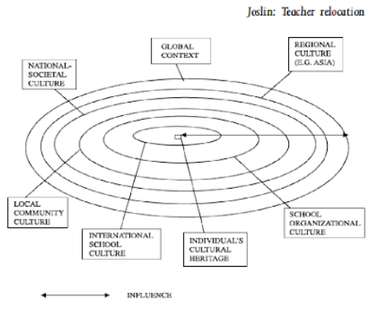


Figure 1 **A model of multi-level cultural influences that impinge on an individual teacher in an 'international school'**

Retention in international schools and the need to retain high-quality staff

Replacing international school faculty isn't always easy. It takes time for recruitment, visas, and relocation. Retention—alongside recruitment—promotes continuity, community, and student learning (Mancuso, 2010). Experienced expatriate faculty can be especially valuable because they understand the international environment and student needs (Schoepp, 2011). While most research emphasizes professional factors as reasons to stay in a school, less is known about how language, culture, social networks, and transitions influence retention and longevity.

Clarifying motivators can guide policy and save money, as replacing an international teacher can cost 20–50% (and up to 150% in some estimates) of salary (Timmer, 2003). This study addresses that gap by centering research on both professional and cultural dimensions as to why educators remain in their schools or locations.

Purpose, participants, and methodology

This study examines the full spectrum of experiences—workplace, cultural, and personal—that shape international teachers' decisions to remain in or leave their posts. Through in-person interviews with 100 teachers in four countries (Brazil, China, Germany, and UAE), it explores not only job-embedded factors to retention but also surrounding experiences (e.g., cultural distance, language acquisition, family context) that might influence retention.

The countries of origin of the participants included Canada, USA, Mexico, Colombia, England, Scotland, Bangladesh, Australia, and New Zealand. Figure 2 shows a combined total of countries these educators collectively have worked (across 65 countries).

Figure 2: Map of countries where international teachers in this study have worked: Combined total of 65 countries

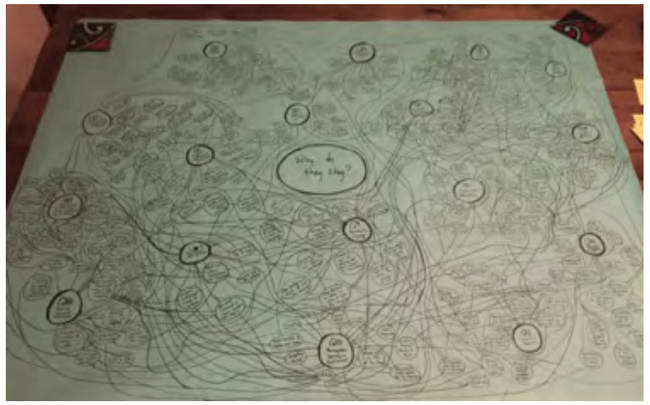


"Clarifying motivators can guide policy and save money, as replacing an international teacher can cost 20–50% (and up to 150% in some estimates) of salary."

Data collection comprised of: (a) basic demographics (gender, marital status, dependents, age, highest degree, years teaching domestically and internationally); (b) a semi-structured, face-to-face interview of 18 questions; and (c) a brief questionnaire adapted from Mancuso (2010). Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed by the researcher, and member-checked by participants. The questionnaire yielded few distinctive findings; results therefore focus on interviews. International school leaders were contacted and helped facilitate the recruitment of diverse volunteers by nationality, age, gender, education, and experience. Schools were selected through a combination of convenience (response-based) and stratified sampling across countries.

Results of the study

Twelve themes emerged of why international educators remain in their overseas schools or locations: family, school support; cultural distance; time to settle; personality and life phase; school-specific factors (leadership, schedules, etc); personal investment in the location; continually adapting and shifting personal investment over time; cultural involvement; language learning; transition and emotional support; and pathways for future decisions.



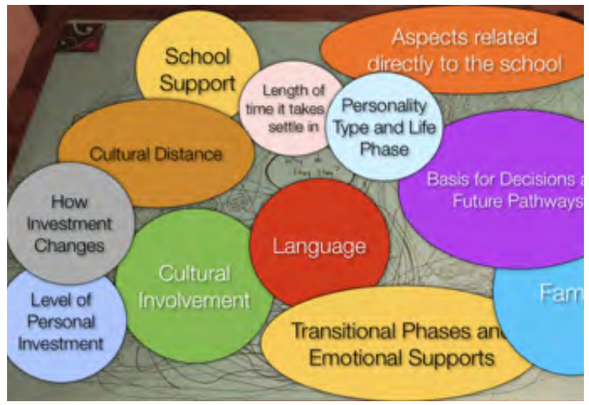


Figure 3: Connections among themes; Figure 4: Enlarged Themes

Family support

Most participants in the study had families or partners with them overseas. Many found this to be an invaluable source of support, and those with children often expanded their social networks within the community. However, some participants noted challenges of being more responsible for their family's needs compared to being in their home country, where more support was available. This was dependent on the location.

Cultural distance

Cultural differences can significantly affect expatriates' adjustment and length of assignment. Frustrations often arose due to differences in language, attitudes towards women, and personal space, with some locations causing more frustration than others. Surprisingly, even in countries with less cultural distance, some teachers experienced high levels of frustration. The most cultural frustrations were reported in China, which held a considerable amount of cultural distance for most. However, a surprising finding was that international teachers in Germany also recorded a high number of cultural frustrations, a country with seemingly less cultural distance. The frustrations in Germany often had to do with the language, as some felt that although Germans often knew English, expatriates were expected to speak German to them.

"Where international schools hold influence over teachers' decisions to remain in a location is in the support they provide related to both the school and in addressing cultural distance.."

"By attending to both the classroom and the cultural surroundings, schools can improve continuity, reduce costs, and—most importantly—enhance student learning by making sure teachers feel a sense of belonging and choose to stay and invest more in both their schools and in the host country."

Cultural differences in the workplace

Some teachers explained that cultural differences among parents, students, and colleagues shaped how they felt about their work. The challenge was not the differences themselves, but rather how those differences revealed conflicting values between the host culture and the individual international teacher. These value clashes often led to frustrations in the workplace with trying to do work and maintain professionalism while feeling the impact of these cultural differences at the same time.

Schoepp (2011) found that the UAE was ranked as the second most desirable expatriate destination in the world. However, many teachers chose to leave because of internal issues within institutions and because they felt they had little say in institutional decision-making. This pattern also appeared in the current study: some international teachers in the UAE reported similar concerns. In fact, teachers in the UAE and Brazil were more likely to plan a return to their home countries compared to teachers working in China and Germany.

Involvement in the host culture

Teachers' involvement in the host culture varied depending on their willingness to engage and based on the level of cultural distance from their own to the culture they were living in. Openness to the host culture contributed positively to a teacher's adjustment within their overseas placement. Those who enjoyed the culture or were open to new experiences were more likely to integrate into the community.

Learning the language

Language acquisition often depended on personal motivation, the level of support from the host culture, and the necessity of the language for daily life. Teachers in some countries reached higher levels of proficiency than in others. The way locals reacted to teachers' language efforts also impacted the experience, with some cultures offering more encouragement than others.

International teachers in Germany and Brazil tended to reach higher levels of language proficiency compared to those in China or the UAE. In Germany, 70% of teachers achieved intermediate or advanced levels, while in Brazil the figure was 55%.

German proved difficult to learn, as did Mandarin, but the way the two countries responded to international teachers' language attempts were vastly different. In China, the locals celebrated when foreigners attempted the language. In Germany, the locals criticized and perfected foreigners' attempts to use the language. Puck, Kittler, and Wright (2008) said that foreign language has a significant impact on foreign expatriate adjustment, which seemed to be the case in Germany. Chen et al. (2010) found that more expatriate support is needed in places where there is more cultural distance because the language can act as a barrier.

Personal investment in the experience

Expatriates who actively engage in the adjustment process and push through challenges are more likely to thrive and remain in their host country. Teachers with cross-cultural motivation tend to invest more in their overseas experience. Those who expected to stay long term were more engaged, while those preparing to leave often disengaged earlier.

Length of time to settle in

Teachers' adjustment was influenced by the cultural similarity of the host country, as well as their personal resilience and support from schools. Language played a key role in adjustment, with those who could communicate locally feeling more integrated, while those who struggled with the language often faced isolation.

Honeymoon, depression, contentment phases

Teachers often experienced a cycle of emotional phases—honeymoon, depression, and contentment—during their adjustment. The length of each phase varied by location, with some teachers adapting more quickly, while others faced prolonged struggles.

The highest number experiencing a honeymoon upon arrival was in Brazil (95% of the sample). The highest percentage of teachers who began experiences with a depression phase were in China and the UAE (25%), though teachers in Germany expressed that their struggles were prolonged over time. This was similar to the findings of Friedman, Dyke, and Murphy (2009) who found that adjustment processes could take many years, the average being around 3 years and that adjustment may not always be a continuous process but instead a discontinuous process of gains and losses. Some teachers reported that adjustment was easier if they kept a connection with home (e.g., TV shows, emails to family), made friends with colleagues, or got out into the community.

Orientation Programs

Teachers had mixed views on school orientations. Some found them essential for adjusting to the culture and job, while others felt they were less important. Those schools that provided both professional and personal support over time helped teachers transition more smoothly.

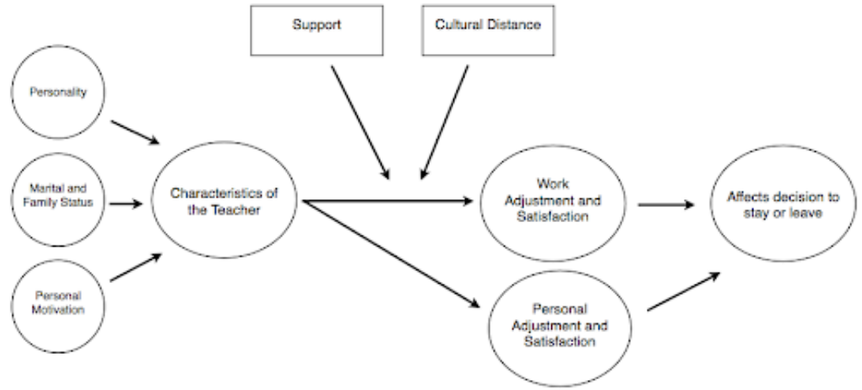
Remaining in location for school or country

This study revealed that very low salaries directly drove teacher turnover. When pay was adequate, teachers based their retention decisions more on the job and overall international experience. Few teachers stayed for the location alone. For most, the school—or the combination of school and country—was the deciding factor. Many acknowledged that no school or location was perfect; sometimes the choice came down to personal fit.

Future plans: Decision to stay or go

Teachers' decisions to stay or leave were influenced by factors such as personal or family well-being (right 'fit'), job satisfaction, and financial compensation (in that order). Many teachers who left sought stability for their families or the opportunity to experience new locations, while those who stayed valued the overseas lifestyle and the support they received. Where international schools hold influence over teachers' decisions to remain in a location is in the support they provide related to both the school and in addressing cultural distance. The model below shows the personal characteristics of an overseas teacher, and how support from the school and how cultural distance is perceived/approached affects both work and personal adjustment, ultimately affecting the decision to remain or leave. Knowing which portion potentially breaks down may help international school leaders to act as mediators in supporting their overseas staff to ultimately increase retention.

Figure 5: Ritter's Model for International Teacher Retention



This model proposes three interacting layers that shape retention:

1. **Personal characteristics:** personality, age, marital/family status, and intrinsic motivations.
2. **Cultural distance:** degree of cultural distance and language needs.
3. **Support from the school:** institutional support (onboarding/orientation, working conditions, governance voice, compensation) and ongoing mediation of cultural distance.

When the school provides continued support, it has an impact on both the individual's work and personal adjustment, ultimately affecting tenure. Breakdowns at any point can signal risks for departure. Schools have the greatest leverage over the support that can partially mediate cultural distance through targeted programs and resources.



The International School of Hyderabad

Practical Implications

For school leaders and boards:

- Broaden orientation beyond curriculum to include cultural induction, local systems (housing, banking, transportation), language starters, and family supports. Pair new staff with cultural mentors.
- Sustain support all year: check-ins at predictable transition points (end of honeymoon), social programming that includes families, access to counseling/employee assistance, and avenues to shape policy (shared governance).
- Mediate cultural distance: subsidize language classes, provide cultural briefings, and celebrate local engagement. Where distance is high, plan for longer settling-in periods and add support accordingly.
- Ensure baseline compensation and workload fairness: when pay is insufficient, it becomes the overriding driver to leave; when sufficient, other motivators can retain staff.
- Attend to family fit: vet and support schooling for dependents, employment opportunities for spouses, and community integration.
- Track and respond to mobility signals: identify early signs of disengagement, career-plateau, or wanderlust; offer growth pathways (coaching roles, curriculum leadership, PD funding) to recalibrate fit.

For teachers:

- Invest intentionally: learn the language to a functional level, build local networks, and maintain ties to home. Expect a non-linear adjustment curve; persistence often yields contentment.
- Clarify motivations and fit: articulate what matters most (career growth, family needs, lifestyle) and evaluate school/city fit accordingly.

Ritter's model offers a practical lens to diagnose and align the personal–cultural–support layers to sustain satisfaction and tenure. For many teachers, the international pathway remains attractive; more than half may continue overseas, often changing schools every few years, while roughly a third eventually return home and a minority move into other educational roles. International school leaders would benefit from shifting some resources from recruitment to retention (Mancuso, 2010): strengthening orientations, ongoing cultural mediation, family supports, and shared governance.

These findings are of interest to educators considering international careers and to international school leaders seeking to build stable, thriving faculties. By attending to both the classroom and the cultural surroundings, schools can improve continuity, reduce costs, and—most importantly—enhance student learning by making sure teachers feel a sense of belonging and choose to stay and invest more in both their schools and in the host country.



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LEADING BELONGING THROUGH THE CULTURE MAP

By: Tanya Olander

Leading Belonging Through The Culture Map

"Many of our students live in constant cross-cultural tension. At school, teachers expect direct questions, debate, and challenge. At home, those same behaviors may be seen as rude or disrespectful. Helping students balance these expectations is critical for their sense of belonging and healthy identity." This insight from Dr. Dan Long, our Director of Activities and Community Engagement, captures both the challenge and the promise of international education.

At Saigon South International School (SSIS), Respect for All is one of our five core values and has been a defining part of our identity since our school was founded in 1997. In a community with more than 50 nationalities, we recognize that living by this value requires a conscious effort. It means listening across differences, recognizing how cultural norms shape daily interactions, and continually working to build the trust that allows every student, parent, and colleague to feel like they belong.

This past summer, our faculty, together with colleagues from Human Resources and the Business Office, read The Culture Map (Meyer, 2016). The book enabled us to deepen our understanding of how to communicate, evaluate, and disagree in ways that honor cultural differences—an exercise in practicing intercultural communication while keeping our shared mission at the center.

While this initiative took place at a large, established school, the core challenge of navigating diverse communication and leadership styles is universal in international education. Whether a school is small, serves a specific regional cultural group, or operates with limited resources, adopting a shared, objective framework for intercultural understanding is a transferable model for building deep, authentic belonging in any setting. This cultural competence is not just about teamwork; it is foundational to developing global citizenship, preparing students and staff alike to thrive in an interconnected world.

Communicating with Respect for All

Head of School Dr. Catriona Moran describes the purpose clearly: "We are a multinational community, working in Vietnam, with over 170 local staff and more than 200 teachers and administrators from 57 nationalities. People come with their own cultural norms. To be successful as a community, we must communicate with respect and intercultural understanding. *The Culture Map* helped center us and provided a shared language to do that." Dr. Moran's point underscores SSIS's goal of building a community where everyone feels recognized and included through greater understanding. *The Culture Map* has become a valuable guide as we develop greater clarity, patience, and empathy, qualities that we believe contribute to a culture where belonging becomes possible.

A Whole-School Reading Approach

The Culture Map was first introduced to the senior leadership team (SLT) last year as summer reading. Through a structured sharing guide, the SLT explored Meyer's eight cultural dimensions—**communicating, evaluating, persuading, leading, deciding, trusting, disagreeing, and scheduling**. Practical questions framed the reflections: How might indirect feedback be misread by someone used to blunt criticism? What happens when a principles-first thinker and an applications-first thinker try to
solve a problem together? How can egalitarian and hierarchical leadership styles coexist in the same team?

> ***"We are a multinational community, working in Vietnam, with over 170 local staff and more than 200 teachers and administrators from 57 nationalities."***

> "As leaders, we set the tone—we read, reflect, and practice first, and then we invite the whole community into that learning."

Those early leadership dialogues laid the groundwork for bringing the study to the whole faculty as summer reading this year. At the beginning of the year in-service, the tone was already set for curiosity and reflection rather than instruction. Faculty were invited to adopt the same spirit of questioning, with prompts such as: *What are the potential benefits and challenges of your natural communication style in a multicultural setting? What is one practical step you could take to bridge a cultural gap with a colleague, student, or family member?* This continuity made the conversations feel authentic and opened the door for new voices to shape them in memorable ways.

Belonging Is in the Details

One of the most impactful examples was from Dung Nguyen, a member of the HR team, known affectionately as "Smiley." She presented at the faculty-wide in-service session with humor and candor, sharing the story of how she got her nickname and reflecting on her own experiences with cross-cultural communication: "Before, many foreign teachers would reply only to me in emails. After the discussion, they started using 'reply all.' Emails became warmer and longer, with greetings and closings that showed mutual respect. That was an immediate change I noticed."



From my desk in communications, I was struck by Ms. Nguyen's reflection about emails. Western faculty believed that responding only to her showed respect for her individual competency. But, as she shared, she felt more acknowledged when they used "reply all" and included her supervisors and colleagues in the exchange. Where Western instincts lean toward honoring the individual, she was more comfortable honoring the collective.

Belonging, as her story shows, lives in the details. For those of us shaping organizational communication, understanding these habits, such as how we define "inclusive" or "respectful," greatly benefits us. It is through this lens that we must also evaluate our own actions, and it is precisely the kind of cultural bridge-building Meyer (2016) challenges readers to practice.



Ms. Nguyen's reflections extend into hiring as well. "In interviews, I sometimes join when a local candidate is meeting a Western hiring manager. I warm up the conversation with small talk, reminding the candidate of what they shared in round one, and explaining that small talk is often an important part of the evaluation by a foreign manager." Belonging means creating space for all people to be seen, and making space for practices like this can help local candidates show their true potential. Together, these stories highlight how belonging is not abstract but grounded in daily practices that shape how people are seen and valued.

The faculty echoed this in their feedback. Many described the in-service discussions as "helpful, inspiring, and eye-opening." Several noted they wanted more opportunities to continue. "I will have that reference in my head this year as I deal with people of different origins," one teacher wrote. Another said, "The book club whole-school conversation was great . . . I think we could dive into this further." That momentum carried into the recent Teachers Teaching Teachers professional development day, where the conversations picked up again.

Extending Impact: From Teams to Students

For Dr. Dan Long, Director of Activities and Community Engagement, The Culture Map validated what he experiences in his work. "We've run into situations where good intentions still led to problems, simply because we weren't acknowledging different communication styles. The Culture Map reminded me to give my team the grace to see from one another's perspectives. It also applies to my work with the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and with vendors."

He also noted that these dynamics are present in our students' lives. While students are encouraged to voice opinions openly and question ideas at school, doing so at home may be interpreted as disrespectful. Learning to navigate the expectations of different cultural settings is part of their daily reality.

During a recent parent-teacher conference, a father mentioned feeling uneasy that his son seemed to be "learning to argue" at school. What he was really noticing was his high schooler learning to think critically, to question information, consider multiple perspectives, and express an opinion clearly. In class, this kind of engagement is encouraged as part of developing independent thought. At home, though, it can sometimes sound different, especially in cultures where respect is shown by listening quietly or not directly contradicting a parent's view. It's a delicate balance for students learning that confidence in expressing their ideas and respect for others' perspectives are both important, and that understanding when and how to use each is part of growing up in a multicultural world.

For Dr. Long, the takeaway is that student identity sits at the center of intercultural learning. Faculty who recognize this dynamic can help students navigate it, guiding them toward a balanced identity where self-perception aligns with how others see them. This intentional guidance functions as a crucial aspect of social-emotional learning, directly impacting student well-being by reducing the stress of cultural code-switching and fostering self-awareness. This critical insight resonates beyond the classroom—we all benefit when we acknowledge the cultural negotiations our students navigate each day.

"Belonging is not "an initiative" but a way of working and growing together."

Modeling, Inclusivity, and Action

Leadership modeling matters. As Dr. Moran emphasizes, "As leaders, we set the tone—we read, reflect, and practice first, and then we invite the whole community into that learning." The preparation allowed the leadership team to integrate concepts into their communication before introducing them to the full faculty. Unpacking the book across departments added great value, from Ms. Nguyen's voice in HR to Dr. Long's reflections from the Activities and Community Engagement Office, and the perspectives of dozens of teachers, all of which became integral parts of the conversation.

As the Belonging Committee's representative, Middle School Principal Dan Kerr helped connect these faculty reflections to the school's broader action planning. Building on the foundation laid by Dr. Derrick Gay's visit last year, Mr. Kerr explained, "This year, we have reshaped the Belonging Committee to represent all stakeholders, so that our action plan reflects the voices of our whole community." He realized that the first iteration of the committee was too heavily weighted toward Western educators. The restructured team now includes local staff, teachers, students, parents, and administrators. Mr. Kerr described this shift as "a celebration for us as a school—that we are taking belonging seriously, with all voices represented and an action plan to guide the work."



In addition to the committee's work, Mr. Kerr has been leading efforts to extend this reflection to families through a Parent Partnership session. "We are inviting parents into the experience that has helped us see each other more clearly and respect how our different backgrounds shape the way we live and learn together," he shared.

Mr. Kerr's reflections highlight the value of widening participation. Committees, parent sessions, and faculty-led follow-ups all signal that belonging is not a single initiative; it is shared work. At SSIS, this effort will continue to deepen under Dr. Gay's guidance as he returns for extended workshops with our community. Parents, in particular, often witness their children's cultural transformation without the language to interpret it. Providing that language strengthens the bridge between home and school, reinforcing a coherent environment that supports student well-being and social-emotional development across both settings.

A Shared Responsibility

The changes we've seen so far might seem small, but what began as a summer reading assignment has been impactful. Teachers are revising communications for clarity, staff members are adding warmth to emails, and colleagues are giving one another the benefit of the doubt. These conscious choices make belonging tangible. Meyer encourages that cultural understanding be lived, not just learned. Instead of a dramatic new program rollout, we have created space for reflection, anchored the work in our school's founding value of Respect for All, and created a platform for every member of the community to participate.

This focus has been strengthened by the broader work on belonging guided by Dr. Gay, whose insights continue to shape how we build structures and language to support our community. Together, these efforts remind us that belonging is not "an initiative" but a way of working and growing together. Above all, we have learned that belonging requires humility and shared growth. As Dr. Long reflected, it means empowering staff and approaching colleagues with a genuine curiosity about what they might teach us, rather than assuming we are the ones with something to offer.

Looking Forward

While the path ahead requires continuous learning and evolving—from leadership modeling to the structure of the Belonging Committee—it is clear that the details and daily practices are where we should focus. This ensures that our work remains continuously focused on the core challenge Dr. Long identified: helping every student understand and secure their fundamental sense of belonging and identity.

This ongoing work is not about eliminating cultural tension, but about validating the complexity of cultural code-switching and equipping people with the skills to build a cohesive identity that honors multiple loyalties. Our founders, Lawrence S. Ting and Ferdinand P. Tsien, remind us to "Ask not what you can take away, but what you can leave behind."
In this spirit, with everyday acts of inclusion, such as involving our families to build stronger home-school connections, we are turning the legacy of our founders into meaningful action.

WELLNESS & BELONGING

LEADING BELONGING THROUGH...



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A SILENT PLAGUE: PORNOGRAPHY USE IN INTERNATIONAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS

By: Dallin Bywater

The realities and effects of early pornography exposure have gone unnoticed by many adults responsible for children. Like other modern challenges, pornography can reach nearly every corner of society through digital technology. I have seen it sneak into a primary school cafeteria and a children's library.

While detrimental effects of early pornography use have already occurred, we can prevent much future social and emotional harm by being intentional about prevention and recognizing the issue for what it is, an avoidable tragedy. Let us examine the issue in detail: the scope of it, the responsibility of schools and caregivers, and simple steps to improve our current predicament.

The word "porn" is used so loosely in contemporary society that it holds various meanings for different individuals. For the purpose of clarity in this discussion, pornography is defined as: "sexually explicit media that are primarily intended to sexually arouse the audience" (Malamuth, 2001). Recognizing the prevalence and impact of early pornography use can help motivate preventative action.

Frequency of Early Exposure

Despite the abundance of adult content freely accessible on the internet, one-third of internet users are under 18 years old (Walker & Kunaharan, 2020). Peter and Valkenburg (2007) note that there is an unprecedented amount of sexual content in the media, that the content is pervasive and not limited to a single media form, and that there is easy access to increasingly explicit sexual content. This increase is not a recent phenomenon—it has been on the rise for years (Kunkel et al., 2005; Paul, 2005). Pornography content creation is also diversifying rapidly. AI-generated porn allows rapid and mass access to large amounts of unique sexual content (Lapointe et al., 2025).

Early exposure is undeniable. Data from the USA, Australia, UK, Taiwan, Italy, Greece, Cambodia, Sweden, Germany, and Israel indicate that high percentages of children and adolescents have accessed pornography through the internet (Wright, 2014). According to 2019 Australian data from an internet filtering software company used in schools, one-third of children aged eight and under attempted to access online pornography in the past six months. This includes accidental access through unwanted pop-up ads as well as deliberate searches (Koziol, 2019). UK research showed children as young as 7 years old had viewed pornography, and more than half of 11 to 13-year-olds had seen pornography—62% unintentionally (BBFC, 2019). The current online environment provides unlimited opportunities for children to be influenced by porn (Walker & Kunaharan, 2020).

Devastating Impact

Developmental psychologists recognize that young children's and adolescents' brains are especially impressionable and vulnerable to forming addictions early (Abrams, 2023). Surveys have shown that the feelings many children experience on initial exposure to pornography include confusion, anxiety, discomfort, distress, and feelings of violation (eSafety Commissioner, 2023). The body of research demonstrating the negative impacts of pornography on children and adolescents continues to grow.

> ***"Prevention is not solely the responsibility of the school's IT department or a child's guardians."***

One study showed that students who visited pornographic websites reported low mood, lack of concentration, and anxiety (Mitra & Rath, 2017). Other research found that exposure to sexually explicit internet material directly predicts adolescents' willingness to engage in casual sex (Van Oosten et al., 2016). Additional findings indicate links between exposure to pornography and an increased likelihood of engaging in group sex, the perception of women as sex objects, regressive gender role attitudes, and the perpetration of sexually aggressive behavior (Wright, 2014). In a study of adolescents aged 16–17, more than half reported trying a sexual act because they had seen it in pornography (Rothman & Adhia, 2015). Pornography is a problematic and inaccurate sex educator.

Pornography use also correlates with a higher incidence of depressive symptoms, a lower degree of social integration, decreased emotional bonding with caregivers, increased conduct problems, and higher levels of delinquent behavior (George et al., 2019).

In summary, social science literature links the following negative impacts to young people accessing pornography:

- Shaping sexual attitudes and behavior, including increased risky sexual behaviors
- Poor mental health, including distress from viewing images, self-objectification, body image concerns, sexual conditioning, and compulsive sexual behavior disorders
- Sexism and objectification
- Sexual aggression and violence, with a consistent association between regular pornography viewing and the perpetration of sexual harassment, coercion, and abuse
- Child-on-child sexual abuse, as professionals report an increase in such cases alongside children's increased pornography access (Walker & Kunaharan, 2020)

It is true that pornography does not affect each child in the same way. However, the staggering statistics and breadth of documented harms provide ample motivation for us to confront this issue with all the urgency and vigor we have as educators and carers of children.

How and Where Exposure Happens

With a little reflection on personal experience, it is not difficult to recognize the circumstances in which children may encounter pornography. Many international schools give young children devices connected to poorly filtered internet at an early age. This is also done at times with insufficient training and supervision for teachers, students, teaching assistants, parents, and other adults in the child's life. Rovolis and Tsaliki (2012) found, unsurprisingly, that children's use of the internet in private, unsupervised spaces with less adult mediation leads to a greater likelihood of pornography exposure. Unsupervised internet use increases significantly when caregivers give children and early adolescents cellphones or tablets. Schools also contribute to the risk of exposure when they fail to install appropriate content filters, lack oversight or tracing of internet use, and neglect to teach children how to use safe search engines.

> ***"It is not a child's fault if they have encountered pornography."***

Research is clear that children encounter pornography years before many parents believe that they do (Lazzer, 2022). Exposure happens at schools, homes, playdates, libraries, and anywhere with internet access. While it may be impossible to completely shield children from pornography, the risk can be limited considerably through simple, proactive measures.

Prevention Strategies

Safeguarding children from pornographic content requires a dual-focus approach. The first is to prevent or minimize exposure, and the second is to mitigate the negative effects after exposure has occurred (Wright, 2014).

The following strategies are recommended:

- Use internet filters.
- Teach children what to do when they encounter pornography. Remember that it is not their fault that they have encountered it.
- Provide timely, accurate, and developmentally appropriate sex education.
- Establish school policies and codes of conduct related to internet use.
- Designate a cyber safety contact person or team as the first point of contact for cyber safety issues.
- Review cyber safety policies annually, as technology and its uses evolve rapidly.
- Ensure attentive supervision of students' device use at school.
- Use and teach children to use safe search engines.
- Educate all stakeholders—teachers, assistants, administration, parents, guardians, and others—on digital safety and appropriate supervision. (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2016)

"We can educate ourselves and take basic, meaningful actions to improve the situation."

The home environment can serve as a protective factor against increased internet use, exposure to pornography, and cyberbullying (Mitra & Rath, 2017). Prevention is not solely the responsibility of the school's IT department or a child's guardians. Rather, it is a shared responsibility requiring a whole-family, whole-school, and whole-community effort.

It is not a child's fault if they have encountered pornography. As adults, we must take responsibility for the digital environments children are exposed to, and not shame children for a problem they neither wanted nor created.

Prioritize Progress

Have you ever heard the issue of early pornography exposure discussed openly in a school setting, or even mentioned at all? And yet, it is likely the most common form of sexual trauma that students will experience in their childhood and adolescence. I wonder what prevents us from making prevention a higher priority. Perhaps the issue is overlooked because adult pornography use is common, or because some doubt that early exposure is occurring or having an impact on school communities. Perhaps many adults do not fully understand the effects of pornography on a child's developing brain or the long-term consequences of early exposure.

Whatever the reason, the damage caused by our inaction is not a foregone conclusion. We can educate ourselves and take basic, meaningful actions to improve the situation. A comprehensive approach is necessary. We must face the uncomfortable truth that we are responsible for early exposure, which is largely avoidable with simple prevention strategies.

Let's not welcome this silent plague into our schools and homes. Instead, let's recognize it for what it is: a serious threat to children's well-being that deserves the same urgency and attention we would devote to any other crisis.

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EPILOGUE



As we continue to live through a time of significant change, school leaders around the globe are being called upon to address an increasingly broad and complex range of issues. And yet, through all of this, leaders in our international schools continue to move forward with determination, focus, and positivity as they guide and support their communities. While technology has made our world feel more connected than ever before, the role of an international school leader can still feel isolating, particularly when navigating hard decisions, uncertainty, and the complex realities many schools are facing today. Yet even in these moments, our community leaders remain committed to their schools, students, and parents, leading with resilience, purpose, and care.

In recent months, leaders around the world have had to address significant and often difficult challenges. From the geopolitical realities impacting our colleagues and communities in the Middle East, to the ongoing work of supporting and strengthening teachers to ensure students receive a world-class education, leaders are also navigating issues such as teacher retention, leading meaningful change, and responding to the rapid changes brought on by technology shaping our schools and communities around us. These are not theoretical conversations; they are the realities that school leaders face every day. In this edition of InterED, we explore many of these topics, recognizing both the complexity of the work and the extraordinary leadership required to move schools forward. Change has become a constant theme in education today, making the role of school leadership increasingly demanding, yet more important, impactful, and fascinating than ever before.

When the AAIE community gathered in February (for our first-ever conference in Toronto, Canada), a remarkable spirit of learning, connection, and shared purpose rang throughout the event. That spirit continues in this edition of InterED, which features timely articles designed to support leaders navigating an increasingly complex educational landscape. From Zak Palsha, of the American Cooperative School of Tunis, exploring the importance of building a shared vision of high-quality teaching, to Tanya Olander, of the Saigon South International School, reflecting on leading through belonging using **The Culture Map** as a framework, these articles offer meaningful insights and practical perspectives for school leaders around the world. Together, they encourage reflection, dialogue, and thoughtful leadership during times of change and challenge.

As we look ahead, it is important that we continue to focus on the future and on creating an even stronger tomorrow for the students - and future leaders- of tomorrow. AAIE remains confident that the work you are doing today, the conversations you are engaging in, and the learning you continue to pursue will have a meaningful impact on the students and communities we all serve. We hope you enjoy the Spring Edition of **AAIE InterED**, our flagship publication, which reflects the collective wisdom, insight, and dedication of our global community. We are deeply grateful to each of our contributors—and to all of you—for the leadership, care, and commitment you bring to this work every day. Because of this shared commitment, the AAIE community continues to grow stronger than ever. For a better tomorrow.

Warm Regards,
Laura

Laura Light I Executive Director - Association for the Advancement of International Education (AAIE) I laura@aaie.org

AAIE: OUR PURPOSE

AAIE is a not-for-profit association of international schools around the world promoting exemplary school leadership and research-based, effective and innovative educational practices. As an autonomous organization, AAIE was legally incorporated in 1966 with a mandate to further and continuously improve international education and cultural understanding across independent overseas schools. AAIE serves a diverse global community providing leadership development across the ever-changing and expanding spectrum of educational programming initiatives and issues. Through annual gathering(s) and outreach, we connect together ideas, perspectives, success stories, member expertise and thought leaders around the world. AAIE promotes and communicates current educational research, teaching and learning practices, best-in-class trends, and change leadership to promote continuously improving and future-ready schools. From the very beginning, and even more necessary and true today, AAIE is the worldwide organization that connects school leaders to new ideas, opportunities– serving as a disruptive influence– and change agent to ensure the viability, integrity and future of overseas schools. AAIE brings people, languages, ideas, cultural understanding and values together where everyone learns, benefits and belongs.



The International School of Hyderabad

PASSAGES

AAIE stands with you in observing a moment of silence to honor all whom we have loved and lost in the global community and those who have suffered loss from within their own communities this past year. May the memory of those we held so dear be eternal and sustain us in the days to come.

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