

EXPERIENCING THE FUTURE, TODAY

AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF ZAGREB

THE AISZ LEARNING ECOSYSTEM





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Dear AISZ Community,

The American International School of Zagreb is a mission and vision-driven school. We are a Professional Learning Community where our success is achieved through collaboration and interdependence; we work together as a community to achieve the best results possible for all our students. This Learning Ecosystem provides a roadmap for our journey to enhanced success, confident in our purpose of nurturing each child's growth and learning.

This latest iteration of the American International School of Zagreb's Learning Ecosystem was born from the collaborative aspirations of our stakeholder groups commencing with a Community Summit. During the Summit, we used a process of **Appreciative Inquiry** to capture the best of AISZ since its establishment in 1966. The summit intended to provide time, a sense of occasion and a place to have generative conversations focused on embracing and articulating the shared aspirations of our school. We wanted to articulate our vision, identify our dreams and set the future direction of the school. Following the Summit, we conducted small task force work, tested our ideas with focus groups, built collaborative teams and reviewed current research literature to inform and shape our new destiny.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is directed towards organizational analysis and learning, uniquely intended for discovering, understanding, and fostering innovations in social-organizational arrangements and processes. In this context, AI refers to two things:

- A search for knowledge.

- A theory of collective action designed to identify and evolve the vision and will of a group, organization or society as a whole. It is based upon the assumption that every organization has positive attributes that function effectively, and by starting with this assumption, positive change is created.

Following Cooperider & Whitney, participants at the summit collaboratively engaged in the tasks on which *Appreciative Inquiry* is based. They engaged in dialogues and shared stories about their past and present achievements, unexplored potentials, innovations, strengths, elevated thoughts, opportunities, benchmarks, high point moments, lived values, traditions, core and distinctive competencies, expressions of wisdom, insights into the deeper ... spirit and soul, and visions of valued and possible futures.

From those dialogues, a *positive change core* was identified. The commitment was made to harness the drive, motivation and aspiration to move towards a shared concept of what AISZ could become. How we as a community could enhance our school. Collaboratively, the community discovered the *life-giving systems* of our school; when AISZ is most effective, alive and constructively capable in economic, ecological and human terms, what does that look like sound like and feel like (Cooperider & Whitney). This is the destiny of our school. We used the four stages of the *Appreciative Inquiry* process to **discover, dream, design**, and then mold our work towards this **destiny** in a positive way.

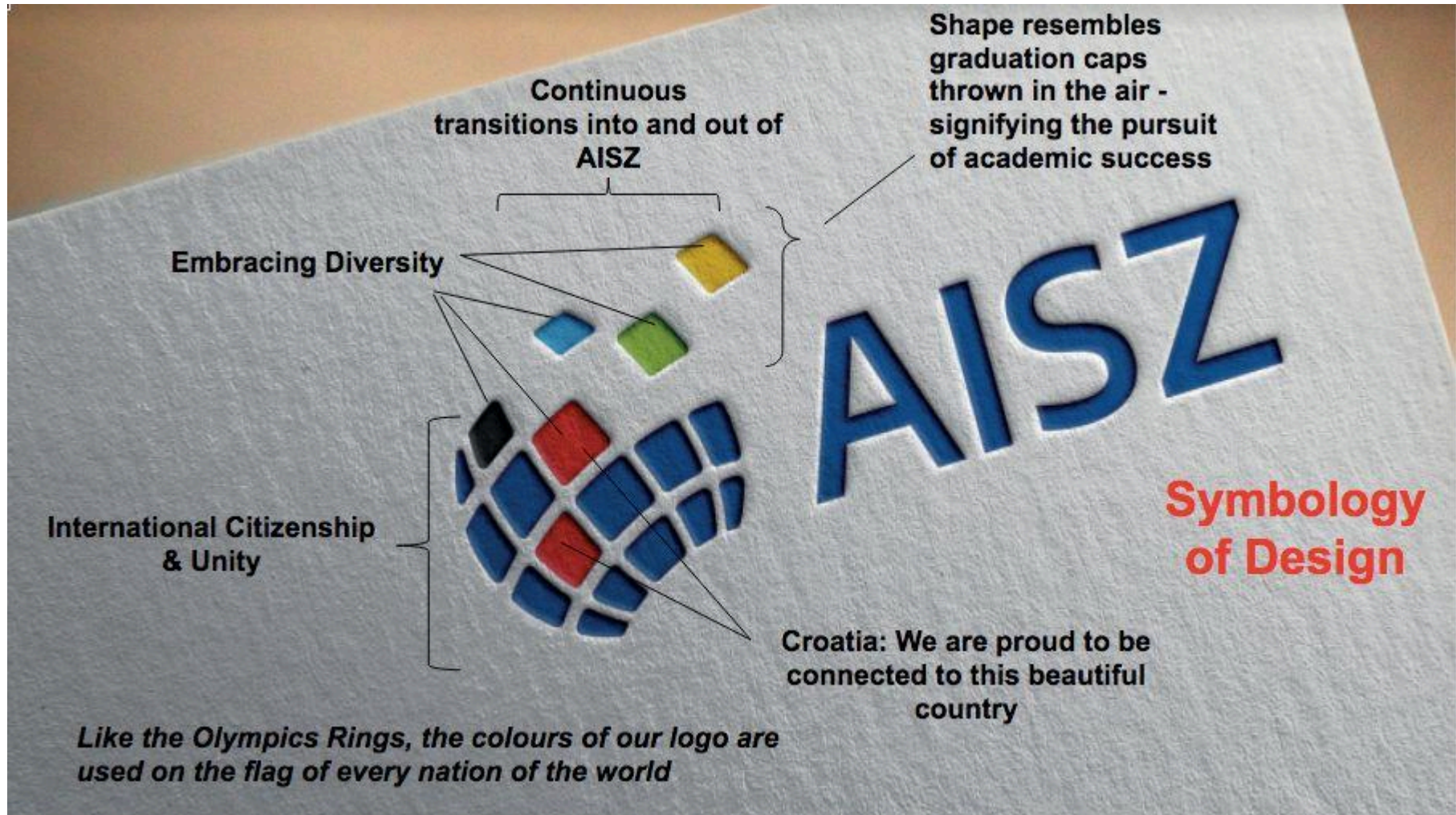
We are confident that the aspirations held by our community to transform AISZ into a Concept School for the Future are well grounded. We are proud of our school and the dedicated efforts to seek continuous improvement. We sincerely thank you for the input from our community to this important strategic task. We welcome your positive involvement and support as we commence this next exciting phase of the American International School of Zagreb.

Paul Buckley Director,
AISZ



Symbology of Design.

The values and essence of AISZ is incorporated into our image intentionally.





Our Vision

Experiencing the Future, Today.

The American International School of Zagreb offers an academically rigorous international curriculum from Early Childhood to Grade 12. Our Early Childhood Program (3 and 4 year olds) is inspired by the *Reggio Emilia* Approach; our Grades 1 to 10 is anchored in the framework of the *Process of Inquiry* and our Grades 11 and 12 consistently achieve above world average results in the *International Baccalaureate Diploma*. We offer an accredited, coherent, balanced and personally engaging learning environment, based on current research and best practice.

Our learning engagements are future-oriented, focused on acquiring the interdisciplinary skills and character dispositions necessary for a successful future in the age of innovation.

We look to what is to come and ground our actions on the belief that learning is for now as well as the future. We also believe that balance and fun should always be present.

Our Mission

We develop skills and character for futures rich with promise.

We believe in all of our students and that the futures our students have before them are filled with remarkable opportunities.

Learning at American International School of Zagreb prepares capable and empathetic students with the skills competency and character to be equipped for an ever-changing and dynamic future where the large majority of employment opportunities have yet to be invented.

We believe that the attributes of a successful international citizen are empathy, the making of ethical choices, a service-minded attitude to others, a concern for our environment and resources, a commitment to integrity and the personal resilience to learn from disappointments and failures.

Our Learning Principles

The AISZ community believes:

We subscribe to these learning principles:

1. *We can all learn and have a right to do so.*
2. *Learning is a personal and social, as well as an emotional and cognitive activity.*
3. *Learning environments have a significant impact on our learning.*
4. *Transfer of learning happens best in rich and relevant contexts.*
5. *Common learning cultures need to construct common meaning through a common learning language.*

Introduction to the AISZ Learning Ecosystem

We believe that stakeholder collaboration and input is an essential part of planning and that excellence is never an accident. The origins of this plan were articulated during a two-day Community Summit in March 2017. The aspirations of our community can be summed up in the desire to become a **Concept School for the Future**. This document represents this collaborative work and a roadmap to the destiny so clearly articulated by our stakeholder groups.



At our school, our excellence and success depend upon how well we deliver our plans. Our aspirations and goals for AISZ are outlined in this plan. It charts our future direction and the strategic initiatives that will take us there.

The work on this plan is grounded on current research and internationally recognized best practice. Education and the *world of work* in general are currently undergoing immense change in order to remain relevant in the *Age of Google*. The demands society now hold as benchmarks of success in the age of innovation are different than they were in the industrial and information ages, which parents and teachers experienced as students. Therefore, schools must also look and feel different from what they once did. We recognize that this may be challenging for some of our stakeholders and so will support them on this important journey of change.

We embed our goal of developing exceptional international citizens at the center of our culture of expertise, extraordinary care and the belief that what can be imagined can sometimes be made real. We use conceptual understandings of the human condition to explore the specific and interconnectedness of disciplined academic thought and practice. *

We must move our model from the industrial age model to one more appropriate for the age of innovation, where the necessity to think outside the box and make connections across traditional disciplines becomes increasingly vital - where creativity and entrepreneurship must be applied to an increasingly sophisticated range of problems where no one solution exists.

Four Strategic Initiatives and three Strategic Student Impact Goals are at the core of this plan. A two-year Action Plan outlining the development, implementation, and evaluation of our journey towards our destiny as an internationally renowned concept school for the future will support each *Initiative* and *Impact Goal*.

Key Strategic Initiatives

Our community defined four key outcomes during the Summit. These have been crafted to be the four *Key Strategic Initiatives* that are the foundation of this plan and hence will operationalize the new AISZ Mission and Vision. These *Key Strategic Initiatives* outline the steps we can take over the coming years to advance our school towards its future-focused, inclusive, student-centered destiny. These *Key Strategic Initiatives* are:

1. *A school community united around our Mission and Vision and more connected to the local and global community.*
2. *Create learning opportunities indicative of a concept school for the future.*
3. *Facilitate each students' growth through personal, self-directed, authentic learning.*
4. *Become a place that provides opportunities for emotional, physical and psychological balance.*

These *Key Strategic Initiatives* are our medium and long-term goals. As part of our learning ecosystem, all the actions are interrelated and contingent upon each other. It is necessary to unite our community around our Mission and Vision and to become a greater part of a local and international community. With this solidarity and commitment to purpose and future direction, we are able to create an environment that enhances each student's learning journey. To achieve these initiatives, we realize that all our school systems must be optimized and reflect the best of professional practice. We also need to increase the flexible utilization of space, time and technology.

Strategic Student Impact Goals

As community focused upon student learning, all decisions at AISZ are Mission and Vision based. How we embed any "technical change" is of vital strategic significance and has an immense impact upon the success of our Ecosystem. Attention to the *culture* of the school is necessary to facilitate the implementation of any strategic *technical* change. The nature of this culture can be conceptualized as having three significant *Strategic Student Impact Goals*.

Initially, these may be a challenge to measure and careful thought needs to be applied to the metrics and tools that we use, but we are committed to ensuring that all our school strives to fulfill them to the best of their ability. Our *Strategic Student Impact Goals* are:

1. *Every student will become an expert in his or her learning.*
2. *Every student is known, advocated for and supported.*
3. *Every student personalizes learning and pursues dreams.*



Strategic Initiative 1.

A school community united around our Mission and Vision and more connected to the local and global community.

Croatia many has natural and human-made opportunities for getting connected and staying connected - environmentally and socially.

How we approach this is reflected in our new mission - We build skills and character for futures rich with promise. We believe that the future of each one of our students will be filled with exciting opportunities. By being united as a school around our mission and vision, we are better placed to provide a strong, coherent educational program with enhanced outcomes for all our learners.

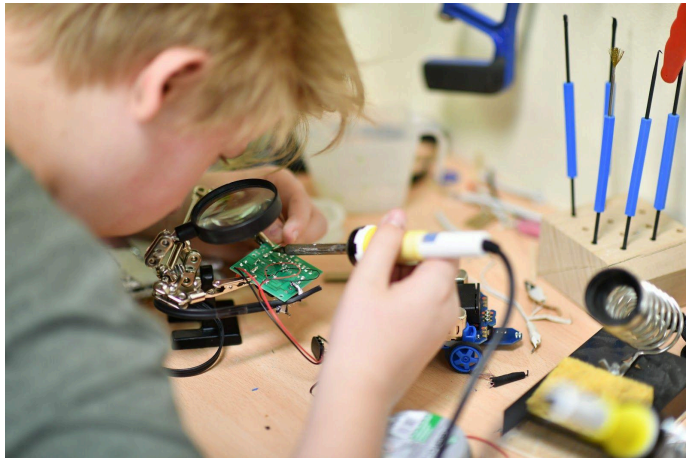
We want to establish strong, positive, connections with the local communities of AISZ, Zagreb, and Croatia and leverage these to promote unity within our diversity. We also wish to enhance our ethical and robust sense of service. We want to encourage, build, nurture and benefit from the diversity that comes as an international school of quality. By utilizing the strength of these networks, authentic learning opportunities exist for our students to participate in real-world scenarios.

Collaboration has a powerful impact on future success. We have a growing network of learning partnerships, internationally and locally, which help build meaningful learning experiences for all our students. By building upon existing opportunities and relationships with current and future stakeholders, we will build partnerships with enhanced possibilities for our students - both locally and internationally.

By using existing and emergent technologies, we can bring the world to our school; establishing learning networks for students and adults and expanding the perspective and opportunity that already exist for us in Croatia.

Strategic Initiative 2.

Create learning opportunities indicative of a concept school for the future



Our Summit defined a *Concept School for the Future* as one where innovative, and authentic learning was at the heart of our engagements. A school where advanced teaching methods are utilized and students engage in inquiry into concepts of broad scope and pursue personalized learning. The aspirational vision of the school is seen as motivational to all. A place where teaching methods, technology, and self-directed learning are the basis of what we do.

Framing learning within the three pillars of *conceptual learning*, *competency learning*, and *character learning* will develop international citizens with the personal attributes and transferable skills capable of finding significant success in an ever-changing and complex world. Using the latest international research and recognized best practice to frame our design, AISZ students will harness the competencies and capacities allowing them to be creative learners, able to transition well, adapt quickly and exercise flexibility of thought and action.

We have three main pillars of Learning in our Learning Ecosystem as described and defined by the *Common Ground Collaborative*, designed at the International School of Brussels :

[Conceptual Learning; Competency Learning; Character Learning](#)

Conceptual Learning...

is about making connections, constructing theories, testing these theories and revising them in light of new learning. Content is important, however, not the most crucial aspect of learning because, in the age of Google, content is readily available. The content within our learning becomes illustrative in that it allows theories to be created and generalizations around a concept to be transferable. David Perkins (Harvard) refers to this as "Learnings of Wide Scope" or learning that really will matter in 5, 10, 15 years and these needs to take precedence over the narrow and deep traditional subject knowledge only learned for test-taking. Disciplined thinking - to think as an author, as a scientist, as a mathematician - is vital but also being able to think across disciplines and work solutions from a multidisciplinary perspective.

Conceptual Understanding happens when students:

- *Connect new, potentially disruptive, knowledge to prior understanding and to important concepts.*
- *Construct and reconstruct theories of how things work and why things are the way they are.*
- *Within different contents, evolving theories will be tested to increase students' ability to explain and defend ideas*

Competency Learning...

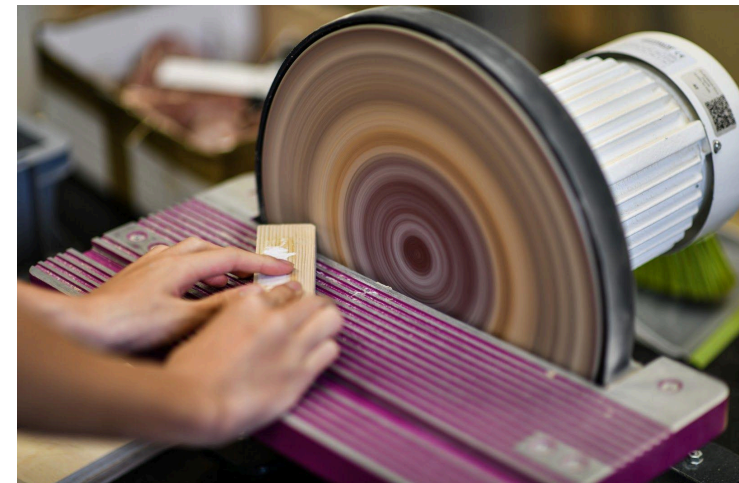
reflects the transdisciplinary skills that will be necessary for success in a highly complex and dynamic world. The majority of Fortune 500 companies (Wagner) regard these seven skills as being necessary for success in the innovation age. They are also the same competencies required for successful and contributing to global citizenship.

Competency Learning happens when students:

- *Deconstruct expert performance and compare it with their own.*
- *Identify the adjustments they need to make.*

Practice a skill in order to refine it and make it increasingly automatic. (in order to refine a skill and make it automatic, it must be intentionally practiced.)

¹ Tony Wagner: Global Achievement Gap



Character Learning:

builds the necessary attributes to become an expert learner. Intelligence is not an innate ability - preset at birth - and everyone can learn to be smarter and how to learn better. Current research into the importance of mindset and resilience ground the findings that one can enhance one's learning power by developing and consciously practicing four character traits evident in powerful learners.²

These character traits are:

Resilience:

Being absorbed in one's learning, managing distractions, being aware and noticing the world (and opportunities) around us and persevering through difficulty.

Reflectiveness:

Being able to plan, revise, distill information and understanding how one learns best and influences this learning.

Resourcefulness;

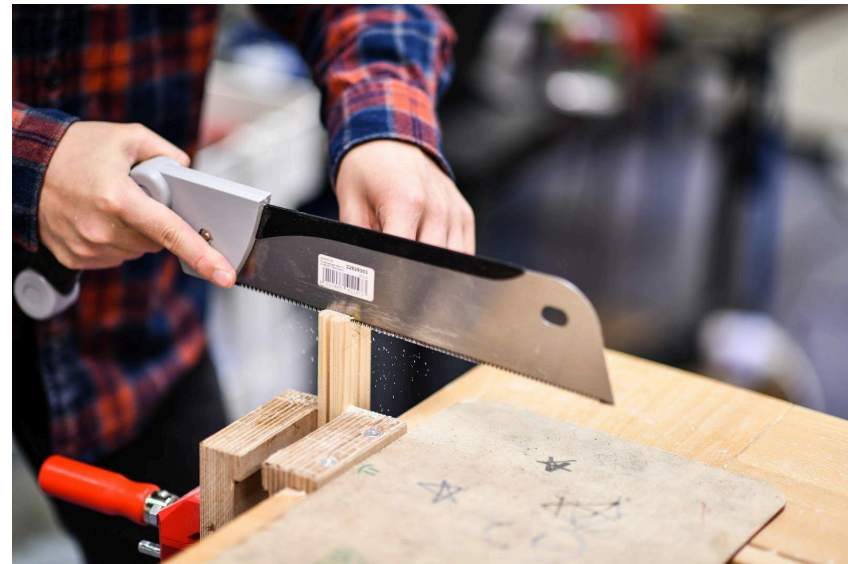
Being able to question, make connections, imagining a range of possible solutions, reasoning ones position effectively and making the most out of what one has.

Reciprocity:

Acting interdependently with others, collaborating successfully, having empathy and listening to others perspectives and being able to imitate expert practitioners.

Character Learning happens when students:

- *Consider what particular dispositions and values would 'look like' when applied in specific authentic contexts.*
- *Act as a result of these considerations*
- *Reflect on the effects of these actions.*



² Guy Claxton: Building Learning Power

Enhancing our skills for success beyond the school

By working with the explicit Conceptual, Competence and Character Skills through Pre-K - Grade 10, the Approaches to Learning (ATL) Skills required by the IB Diploma will have been practiced and internalized by our students and teachers over many years. The IBDP focuses on five Approaches to Learning Skills, and six Approaches to Teaching Skills.

International Baccalaureate Diploma Requirements:

Approaches to Learning Skills & Approaches to Teaching Skills are outlined below:

ATL Skills

- 1. *Thinking skills,***
- 2. *Communications skills,***
- 3. *Social skills,***
- 4. *Self-management skills,***
- 5. *Research skills***

Teaching is

- 1. *based on inquiry***
- 2. *focused on conceptual understanding***
- 3. *developed in local and global contexts***
- 4. *focused on effective teamwork and collaboration***
- 5. *differentiated to meet the needs of all learners***
- 6. *informed by formative and summative assessment***

We believe that the future of each of our students is rich with promise and opportunity. We want our students to capitalize on these emerging opportunities by enhancing the skills that have been identified as the critical survival skills of the 21st Century and optimizing personalized, student-centered learning. We understand that every one of us learns differently and has different strengths and areas for growth. We have different interests and experiences, dreams and goals. But we also believe that we all can learn at a high level, and have a right to do so. By increasing personalization and individualizing instruction, we put the interests of students' at the center of their learning. This way we can facilitate students' own efforts to achieve their maximum potential and harness their dreams.



Strategic Initiative 3.

**Facilitate each students' growth through personal, self-directed,
authentic learning**

Historically (and in the school days of parents and teachers) the education model was one based on an industrial framework characterized by collective and not individualized instruction. By recognizing the personal nature of higher level learning, we allow our students to have time within the curriculum to explore, find and develop their passions and interests. While high levels of academic success and studious application remain an essential goal of our school culture, we realize this as is only one element of our total learning ecosystem. It is only possible for learners to achieve their individual levels of success, when we support and nurture their personal social and emotional growth. We strive to ensure that each student becomes an expert in their own learning, evaluated through a range of different measurements of achievement.

Our students become articulate advocates of their own learning. They know what they are working on and why they were doing it. They can explain where their ideas came from, where they are in their learning, and what next steps they need to take. In other words, they are expert learners fully aware of how learning works. Sir Ken Robinson states, "Whether or not you discover your talents and passions is partly a matter of opportunity. If you've never been sailing, or picked up an instrument, or tried to teach or to write fiction, how would you know if you had a talent for these things?" ("How to Discover Your True Talents", 2013). "Passion Time" is an opportunity for students to discover their talents and passions and take ownership of their learning journey.

Strategic Initiative 4.

A place that provides psychological balance and emotional and physical wellness.

For a student to reach his or her individual potential our school will focus on nurturing each students' intellectual, physical, social and emotional well-being. Being resilient, learning and implement coping and stress management strategies and managing time effectively, come more readily when children feel safe and secure. Balance, therefore, is essential to our lives, so diverse learning environments and a comprehensive program of after-school activities enhance our total school experience. Participating in our after school and sports activities is strongly encouraged as it promotes a healthy life style and also builds friendships. Being physically fit and active assists all learning as well as life style. Creativity is enhanced through the fine and performing arts program.

Promoting social and emotional development at AISZ is the role of everyone at our school. With the enhanced simple system of homerooms

and identified mentors, every student will feel connected to at least one significant adult and a cohort of peers. Social and emotional skills are explicitly taught and modeled, providing opportunities for students to practice and hone those skills as well as the ability to exercise them in a range of contexts. Our Outdoor Education program and Unity Trips allows students to implement these skills in a real-world setting unfamiliar to most.

It is increasingly being recognized that the qualities for successful international citizenship include **empathy**, a strong sense of **ethical behavior** and a **service minded attitude**. International citizens are **concerned** for others and the environment and have a sense of **commitment** and **resilience**. The International Baccalaureate Learner Profile also represents ten attributes valued by IB World Schools. As part of this global community, we believe these attributes, and others like them can help individuals and groups become responsible members of local, national and global communities .

Our community recognizes and supports diversity and equality and respects individual differences. These ideals are reflected in policies, procedures, shared beliefs and actions. To encapsulate the range of positive attributes we wish to see in our students, these can be considered under the concepts of Fairness, **Compassion**, and **Integrity**. **Balance** and **Fun are** essential elements to any learning engagement and we want our students to love coming to school each day. We want them to arrive with an excited anticipation for the day ahead - and leave with the regret that their school day has come to an end.

³ Tony Wagner - Most Likely to Succeed

³ [International Baccalaureate Learner Profile](#)

Optimizing our school systems

International schools can be notorious for generating "idea and initiative overload". All AISZ initiatives under this Learning Ecosystem will exist to support the mission and vision of the school. If there is not a direct impact on either a Strategic Initiatives or a Student Impact, the idea will not be approved. Initiatives will also need to be evaluated as to the implications and requirements of our three filters.

Likewise, current initiatives and systems will be audited to ensure that they too are high-level impactors in support of our core purpose. We will take a "professional eye" to all we do so our actions are aligned to best professional practice. The primary system filters that impact AISZ are Technology, Time and Space. These three areas will be the filters through which all initiatives at AISZ are passed. If such efforts do not positively impact our mission and vision through the aspects of these filters, they will not be considered.



Filters to Optimize Our AISZ Systems.

Technology

With the exponential growth in technology, knowledge has become readily accessible and omnipresent through platforms such as Google. What we can do with what we know is now the most important benchmark for success. We aspire to incorporate technology into student learning in transformational ways rather than substituting an old task on to newer technology.

Technology should supplement not substitute teaching and allow for student work that is impossible without it - in short, to be transformative to the task the student is undertaking. Technology usage will enhance both the *Survival Skills and the Innovation Skills for the 21st Century*. Decisions on the use of technology will be determined by the "appropriate tool for the job" approach. At times technology may not be the best solution.

Time

In the Industrial Age model of education, time has remained a constant element, whilst the content students learn *in that time* may vary. If we want to guarantee all students have equitable access to the development of crucial skills and knowledge, we need make more flexible use of time and schedule. This will allow for a more innovative approach to be taken to personalized student learning. Some students need different amounts of time to master a concept or skill.

To allow for personalization of the learning engagements we must investigate innovative ways to maximize the time each student has to be challenged, be successful and meet their unique potential.

Space

Learning environments have a significant impact on our learning. Along with the adult and the child, the environment is the third teacher in our school.

Multidisciplinary learning and movement are important aspects of a dynamic and engaging learning environment so the use of space should also be optimized creatively. Learning can take place in engaging physical and virtual spaces.

Our learning spaces aim to provide new learning possibilities, enhance motivation, engagement and extend interactions with local and global communities.

Survival Skills for 21st Century

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

·Agility & Adaptability

·Effective Oral and Written Communication

·Curiosity and Imagination

·Collaboration Across Networks and Leading by Influence

·Sense of Initiative and Entrepreneurship

·Accessing and Analyzing Information

Innovation Skills

·Effective Communication

·Critical Thinking

·Collaboration

*·Creativity**

*•Tony Wagner 2016
Most Likely to Succeed*

The Culture of Strategic Change

The word "culture" derives from a French term, which in turn derives from the Latin "colere," which means to tend to the earth and grow, or cultivation and nurture. "It shares its etymology with a number of other words related to actively fostering growth"⁶ Embedding Strategic Student Impact Goals within three specific cultural contexts will result in positive school change inspired by our mission and vision.

Strategic Student Impact Goal - 1:

Expertise

Every student will become an expert in his or her own learning.

Students who achieve this impact will:

- Understand how they learn best and identify the personal influencers that enhance or inhibit their own high-level learning.
- Use this insight to set high-quality goals for themselves and strive for personal achievement towards rigorous standards.
- Build a character that supports high-level learning and persevere through intellectual challenges
- Grapple with and accommodate multiple perspectives
- Gather and use a range of data and data types through meaningful inquiry and research

Strategic Student Impact Goal - 2:

Extraordinary Care

Every student is known, advocated for and supported.

Students who achieve this impact will:

- Have at least one significant adult mentor at school that contributes in positive and meaningful ways to successful development.
- Be recognized within our community as an individual who matters.
- Develop, maintain and improve healthy habits related to eating, exercise, hygiene and sleeping.
- Independently recognize and promote healthy lifestyle traits and choices.
- Be valued and listened to as a worthy member of our community.
- Feel valued within our community and have positive self-esteem.
- Contribute to the wellness of others.

Strategic Student Impact Goal - 3:

The Imagined

Every student personalizes learning and pursues dreams.

Students who achieve this impact will:

- Employ multiple strategies to effectively address challenges.
- Pursue new knowledge and skills.
- See mistakes and failures as a natural part of learning and an opportunity to learn, grow and improve.
- Demonstrate curiosity toward their personalized learning plan.
- Investigate the source and solution to various challenges.

⁶ - [Cristina De Rossi, Barnet and Southgate College anthropologist in London](#)



Strategic Plan on a page

Our Vision

Experiencing the Future, Today

Successful International Citizenship

Fairness, Compassion, Integrity;

Balance & Fun

drives ...

Our Mission

We develop skills and character for futures rich with promise

within cultures of...

Extraordinary Care

Every student will be known advocated for and supported

The Imagined

Every student personalizes learning and pursues dreams

Expertise

Every student will become an expert in his or her own learning

Survival & Innovation Skills of the 21st Century

building...

Competence Learning

*The "Survival & Innovation Skills"
for the 21st Century*

Character Learning

*The quality dispositions of a successful
international citizenship and life long
learners*

Conceptual Learning

Learning of wide scope

by connecting and exploring the ...

Subject Disciplines

The Arts; Design; Individuals and Societies; Language Acquisition; Language and Literature; Mathematics; Physical Education; Science.

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