ISS NEWSLINKS

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SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT!

Photo above from International School Dhaka

Open doors to a community of international school life on **#ISSedu**

EDITION SNEAK PEEKS



"This recruitment season is about building connections that can shape careers and strengthen schools."

Meagan O'Gallagher and Jason Brown on page 6



"Improving student literacy hinges on one critical factor: access to engaging books at school and home"

James Pond and Michael Haggen on page 9



"Your school is part of a larger global story, but there are still actions you can take to set yourself up for success."

Tom Hawkins on page 17



SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT!

Photo above from Shekou International School

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About ISS: International Schools Services (ISS) works with more than 1,200 international schools and tens of thousands of educators each year across its suite of services, creating one of the largest global footprints in international education support. Since its inception in 1955, ISS has promoted innovative best practices. Core services include starting and operating student-centered, future-oriented schools; recruiting world-class educators and leaders; providing cutting-edge professional learning opportunities; sourcing essential school supplies; administering school foundations; and encouraging more diverse leadership in international schools. As a nonprofit organization with offices in Princeton, NJ USA and Shenzhen, China and staff located across the globe, ISS invites all to join in making a world of difference. For more information, visit ISS.edu

Learn more about how ISS can support you and your school at ISS.edu



A NOBLE PROFESSION AND COMMUNITY

By **Liz Duffy,** ISS President

My son Teddy, who is 23, just started teaching and coaching at the boarding school that he attended. He switched to education after a year working as a consultant, seeking a job that was more active and interactive, and where he would have the chance to work directly with young people. I was thrilled that he made the change for many reasons – one obvious, others perhaps less so.

First the obvious, I firmly believe that teaching is a noble profession. The opportunity to make a meaningful difference in even one person's life is a privilege; teachers affect generations of students. To be entrusted by parents with the education of their children is an honor, so teaching is an honorable way to use your time and talents and spend your life. I'm glad that my son is getting to experience firsthand the responsibility, challenge, and joy that come with teaching and the passion and purpose that motivate educators.

Effective schools, particularly boarding schools and international schools, are also exemplars of communities. While not all communities are positive, most schools are constructive places, because the adults in them share a common purpose and a genuine commitment to learning.

The strongest communities — and I would argue, the strongest schools — provide a deep sense of belonging for all community members. Such belonging is essential for both student learning and teacher and staff performance. We all do better when we feel seen, heard, and valued.

The notions of community and belonging are sometimes contrasted with the concepts of innovation and change. That is a false dichotomy. As **Margaret Wheatley** articulates so well in her book *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope for the Future:* "There is no more powerful way to initiate significant change than to convene a conversation. When a community of people discovers that they share a concern, change begins. There is no power equal to a community discovering what it cares about." (p. 22)

Teddy is just at the beginning of his teaching journey, so it's too early to tell whether it becomes a profession for him as it did for me. I hope it does, but regardless — I'm confident that the time he spends teaching and coaching and being part of a school community will be valuable and will shape how he views our shared future.

As we all grapple with the many challenges confronting the world today, may we all remember and celebrate the many people who took the time to teach and nurture us. As thanks, let's do the same for others.

You can connect with Liz on LinkedIn.

There is nothing like a class of students to ground you in the present, even as you prepare students for their futures.

Now, some of the more subtle reasons that I am excited that my son has become a teacher: In this age of the metaverse, when it seems like we all spend increasingly more time online and in the virtual world, it is easy to become untethered to reality. There is nothing like a class of students – be they early childhood, elementary, middle or high schoolers – to ground you in the present, even as you prepare students for their futures. I have always found that time flows quickly when I teach, because I have to be fully engaged and attentive.

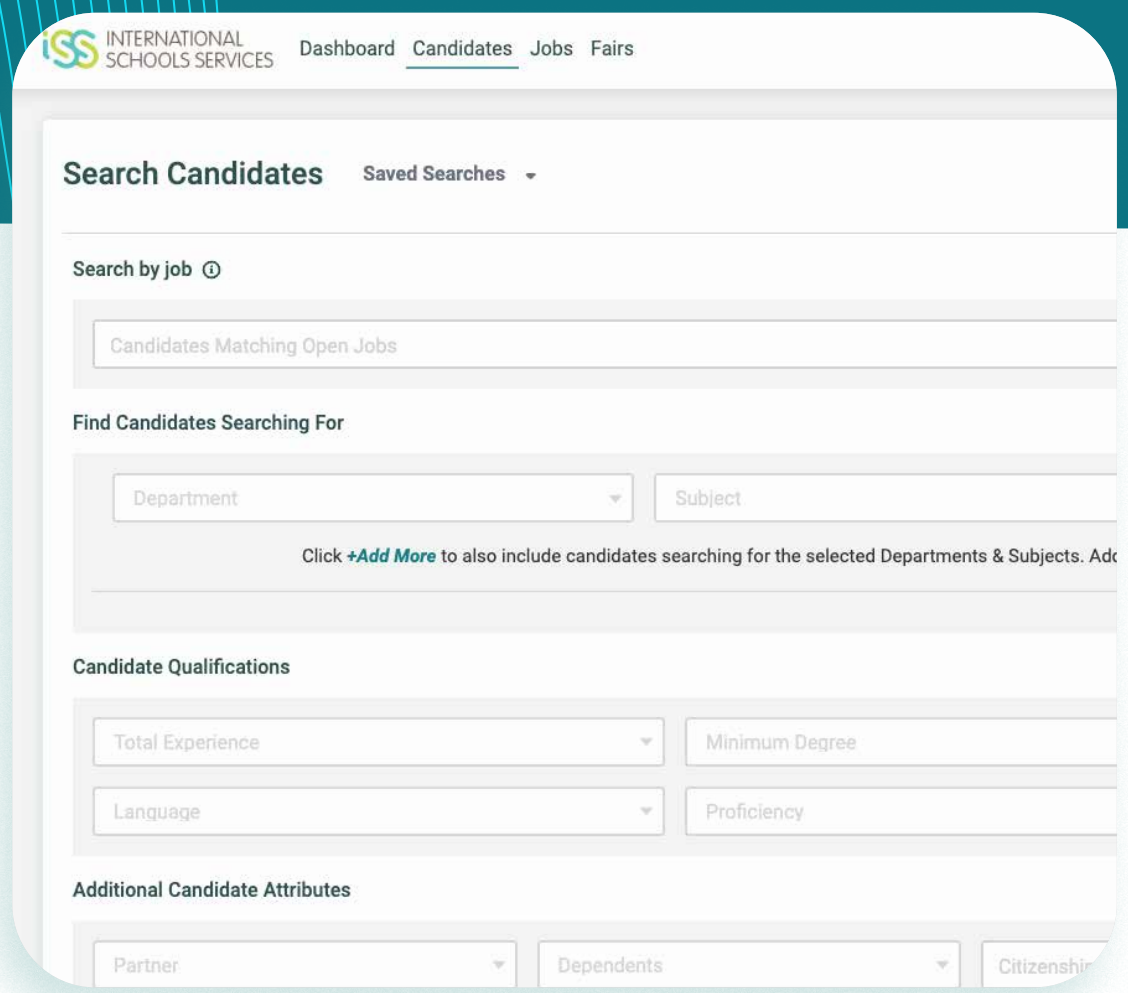


Teaching and learning at International School Dhaka

ENHANCING YOUR RECRUITMENT JOURNEY THIS SEASON

By **Meagan O'Gallagher**, ISS Events & Engagement Manager, Global Recruitment and **Jason Brown**, ISS REO Manager, Global Recruitment

As international school positions become more sought-after and competitive, both applicants and recruiting schools need tools that are more user-friendly and efficient to find the right professional fit. The ISS Global Recruitment team is excited to roll out several new enhancements to the ISS EDUrecruit® platform and fair experience this school year, making it easier than ever to find the ideal match between candidates and schools.



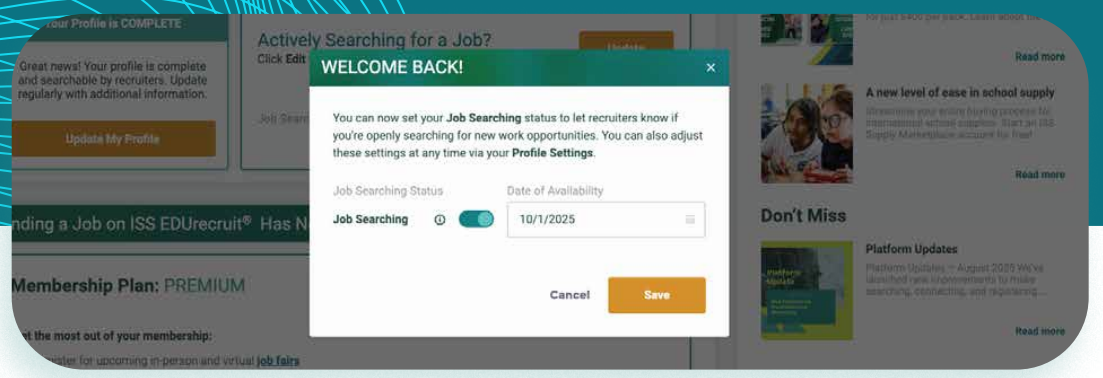
New filters to help schools find great-fit candidates

Platform Updates For Schools and Recruiters

Search Updates: Finding qualified candidates just got simpler. Search results now highlight the most active educators on our platform and those highly recommended by referees so the most promising matches rise to the top. Updated filters also allow you to search directly by the attributes of your open jobs. Finally, you can now search multiple departments and subjects at once, giving you a wider pool of candidates across related departments and subject areas.

Event Updates: Recruitment fairs are also getting a refresh! With a new event management platform, registration is faster and smoother, ensuring higher attendance and more opportunities to meet engaged, quality educators. All of our schools will receive updated registration and fair guidance from their Recruitment Relationship Manager as we get closer to event dates.

Platform Updates For Candidates

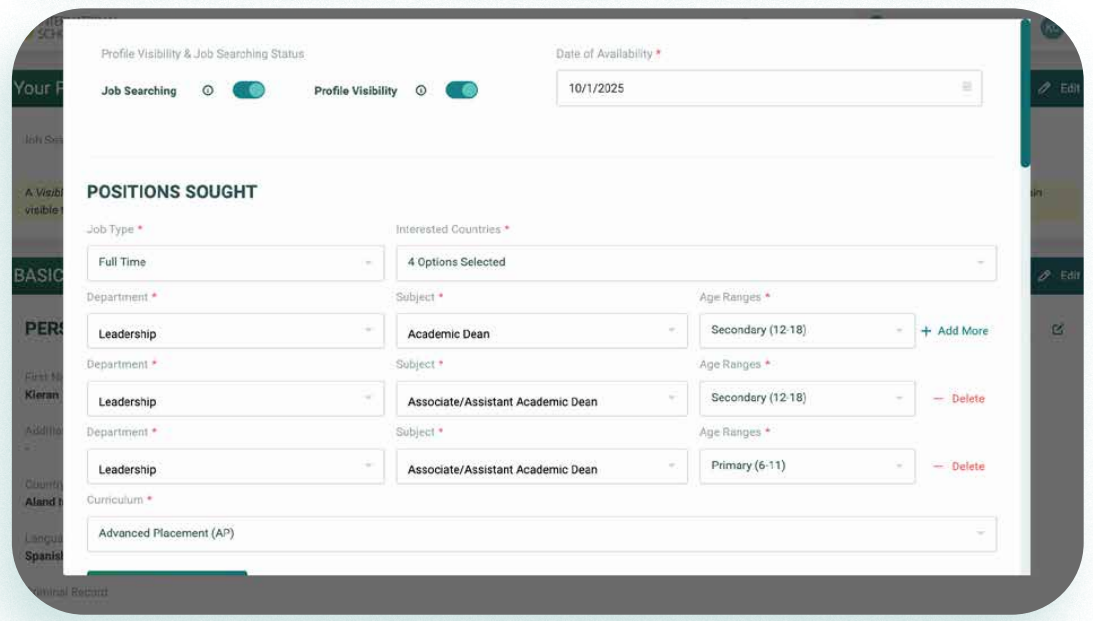


Availability Updates: Job seekers will notice a new pop-up lets candidates mark when they're actively searching for a position, keeping profiles fresh and visible to schools.

Profile Updates: To ensure schools find the most relevant matches, subject areas and departments have been realigned. Candidates are encouraged to update their profiles, particularly in the Positions Sought section, so their expertise is reflected accurately.

Event Updates: The events process has also been simplified for candidates—registration for all in-person and virtual events now begins directly on ISS EDUrecruit®, with just one click under the Events tab. New this year, both free and premium ISS EDUrecruit members can join our in-person fair in Toronto on January 31, 2026. Our premium members will also gain exclusive access to the three virtual iFairs® in November, December, and March.

Continued on page 6



New candidate availability and profile updates

"Enhancing Your Recruitment Journey This Season," continued from page 5

Looking to the Recruitment Fair Season

In addition to the exciting updates to our system that are designed to make recruitment faster, and more effective through our platform, we encourage candidates and schools to check out best practices to have further success at our upcoming events, both in-person and virtual!

Event Tips for Candidates

Keep Your Profile Fresh: Your profile is often the first impression a recruiter will have of you. Make sure it reflects your most recent experience, certifications, and skills. Update your job searching status and availability so recruiters know exactly where you stand. And don't forget about referees — new or refreshed recommendations can strengthen your profile and your search ranking.

Research Schools Ahead of Time: Schools want to know you're genuinely interested in their community. Before applying, take time to read about the school's mission, values, and curriculum. Look into the region's culture and lifestyle. When you can confidently explain why you're drawn to a particular school, you stand out from other applicants.

Be Fair-Ready: Recruitment fairs are one of the best ways to connect with schools, whether online or in person. Register early, check the requirements for your fair type (in-person vs virtual), and complete your profile before the event. For virtual fairs, test your internet connection, audio, and video setup so your interviews go smoothly.

Network Actively: Don't wait for schools to come to you. Visit virtual and in-person booths, ask thoughtful questions, and make yourself visible. A quick follow-up message after a conversation shows professionalism and enthusiasm, both qualities recruiters remember.

Reflect on Your Career Goals: Before the season picks up, take a moment to think about where you want to go next. Are you ready for leadership responsibilities? Are you curious about teaching in a new region? Knowing your priorities will help you focus your search and communicate your goals clearly in interviews.

Event Tips For Schools and Recruiters

Plan Early: Recruitment season moves quickly. Post open roles early to attract candidates, well ahead of fair dates. Prepare interview questions tailored to your school's needs so you can make the most of your conversations with candidates at the events.

Engage During Fairs: Fairs are busy, but being visible and approachable goes a long way. Make sure someone from your school is consistently present in your booth (whether physical or virtual booth) to answer questions and connect with candidates. Schedule interviews early, and follow up quickly to maintain momentum with strong applicants.

Highlight School Culture: Candidates who attend fairs aren't just looking for a job — they're looking for a community. Share what makes your school unique, whether it's a supportive staff culture, innovative curriculum, or general daily life in your city. Details about relocation support, mentorship, or professional development can be just as attractive as the position itself.

Build Relationships, Not Just Hires: Even if a candidate isn't the right fit today, a positive interaction can make them a strong future applicant. Staying connected helps build your school's reputation in the international education community.

See you this season!

This recruitment season is about more than just finding or filling jobs — it's about building connections that can shape careers and strengthen school communities. With the latest platform improvements and a busy recruitment fair schedule, both candidates and recruiters can look forward to a smooth, successful season ahead!

Connect with Jason on LinkedIn here, and connect with Meagan here. Vlew all upcoming ISS job fairs and learn more at ISS.edu.

Hear from attendees of one the latest ISS events

ISS EXPO, Shenzhen, China

"It was a fantastic day, really. […] It can be hard to create such a space for networking, but you've done it and your reputation proceeds you. I'm glad we all made the good choice of coming"

"An amazing collection of schools and impressive presentations from most knowledgeable colleagues.

It was a pleasure to connect to some of you, hope for fruitful cooperation down the road!"

"Today's ISS Expo was so awesome! Big thanks to the organizers for all your hard work—everything ran so smoothly because of you. And huge props to the [presenters] too, your insights and the cool stuff you shared were really great."




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*Candidates must be an ISS EDUrecruit® member with a completed profile to attend.

iss.edu/events



Shekou International School

HOW A BOOK DELIVERY PROGRAM IS TRANSFORMING STUDENT LEARNING

By **James Pond,** President of Governor's Early Literacy Foundation (GELF)
and **Michael Haggen,** , Chief Academic Officer, Scholastic Education

Reading on grade level continues to be a struggle around the world. In 35 countries surveyed by UNICEF, only 41% of children aged 7–14 demonstrated foundational reading skills expected by the second or third grade.

This global challenge is mirrored in the United States where many states grapple with similar concerns. Recognizing the urgency of the issue, Tennessee emerged as a state determined to change the narrative. After facing low literacy rates — with more than half of third-grade students reading below grade level — the state took decisive steps to reverse the trend. The impact of COVID-19 and extended school closures only deepened the crisis, widening gaps in access and achievement, but Tennessee responded with renewed focus and bold initiatives.

Whether in Tennessee or across the globe, improving student literacy hinges on one critical factor: access to engaging books at school AND home. Without it, children miss out on opportunities to build reading skills beyond the classroom. This challenge intensifies during the summer months, when schools close and access to books becomes even more limited. According to the Scholastic *Kids & Family Reading Report™*, 63% of children rely primarily on public, school, and classroom libraries for their books—resources that are often unavailable during summer break.

Whether in Tennessee or across the globe, improving student literacy hinges on one critical factor: access to engaging books at school AND home

To address this concern in Tennessee, Governor's Early Literacy Foundation (GELF) partnered with Scholastic to launch a statewide initiative to close that gap — one that puts books directly into the hands of the children who need them most. Working with more than 100 school districts and charter schools across the state, GELF ensures broad and equitable access to reading materials. In participating districts, students are automatically enrolled, with families given the choice to opt out. At no cost to families, schools, or districts, each child receives a shipment of six high-quality, grade-level books and evidence-based literacy resources—delivered straight to their doorstep throughout the year.

What began as a summer reading pilot in 2020 has grown into a large-scale effort that has distributed 6 million grade-level books to students, teachers, librarians, and media specialists across Tennessee. The results of the K-3 Home Library program are clear: consistent access to high-quality books is a key driver of improved reading proficiency. According to research from Statewide surveys conducted by GELF, 33% of participating students have 100+ books in their home and proficiency in third-grade readers has increased to 41% from 32% in 2021.

Continued on page 10



Books at International School Dhaka

"How a Book Delivery Program is Transforming Student Learning," continued from page 9

GELF is demonstrating that targeted investment in book access isn't just aspirational—it's entirely achievable. By meeting families where they are and putting high-quality reading materials directly into children's hands, GELF is turning a bold vision into measurable impact. In just six years, the number of school districts served has grown by 164% and the number of books has grown by 145%.

Katie Spears, PK-8th grade Librarian, reflects;

> **"One of my favorite things about the K-3 Home library is the connections it has provided for so many across our state," "It has provided my own family connections through stories and exposure to fun facts and places. I have connected with my students through book talks and activities provided with book delivery. An added bonus is the connections with the talented educators across Tennessee. The impact of this program on literacy in our state is invaluable, and I hope to see book deliveries for many more years to come."**

Not only has access to resources improved, but kids and families are showing excitement about reading again. This program is not only about academic growth, but also personal growth for each child. From research, we know that positive attitudes toward reading and writing are associated with high levels of resilience, motivation, self-esteem, and confidence — all important characteristics to instill in young people (Scholastic *Reading for Life*).

This kind of autonomy — this joy — isn't a luxury. It's a necessity for building lifelong literacy

There's something quietly revolutionary about a child opening their own mailbox to find a book addressed just to them. At that moment, literacy becomes personal. Families gather to share stories, and students begin to see themselves not just as readers, but as curators of their own at-home libraries. This kind of autonomy — this joy — isn't a luxury. It's a necessity for building lifelong literacy, and it's exactly the kind of experience we should be scaling across communities. GELF surveys reveal that 97% of parents said their children were excited to receive the books and 96% reported the books were valuable to their family.

A participating student said:

> **"I am so excited for books to come to my house for me. I love getting my own mail and opening it up and seeing what books are inside! The animal books are my favorite, because I love animals!"**

While summer book access is vital, literacy doesn't operate on a seasonal schedule. If we're serious about closing reading gaps, access must be consistent year-round. That's why initiatives like the Governor's Early Literacy Foundation's *Opportunities with Literacy* (OWL) Fest matter. This fall, GELF brought mobile bookstore experiences to 40 Priority elementary schools, giving K–5 students and educators the chance to choose books and literacy materials — entirely free of charge.

It's not just an event; it's a statement: every child deserves the dignity of choice and the power of a personal library, no matter the month. It is crucial that we continue to provide students and educators with literacy resources in order to improve both proficiency and a child's relationship with reading.

James Pond is President and CEO of Governor's Early Literacy Foundation (GELF), whose mission is to strengthen early literacy in Tennessee. As President & CEO, James leads statewide efforts to build a culture of reading and expand access to literacy resources for children and families. He champions long-term strategies and partnerships that spark innovation and fuel growth across Tennessee. Under his leadership, GELF has grown into a key thought leader for early literacy, achieving significant program expansion and completing its strategic plan two years ahead of schedule.

Michael Haggen brings more than 30 years of academic experience. As Chief Academic Officer, Michael ensures that Scholastic Education is best able to support educators and improve student learning through its focus on instructional materials, classroom libraries, and magazines for literacy achievement, and professional development programs for teacher effectiveness.

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Supplying Furniture and Equipment

THOUGHTFUL PLANNING, LASTING SUCCESS

By Vicki Merlo, ISS School Supply Assistant Director, and Joan Ramos, ISS School Supply Senior Educational Account Representative

Acquiring the right furniture and equipment is central to creating safe, welcoming, and effective learning environments. Whether for a new school, rebuilding, or upgrading an existing facility, good procurement requires careful planning.

While cost is important, it should not be the only consideration! ISS can help to outfit your classrooms based on the unique needs of your school. Here are some of the factors to consider:

Modular / Mobile furniture

Furniture that can be reconfigured (mobile desks/ tables, stackable chairs, foldable tables) will adapt to changing class sizes or grade levels. Ergonomic furniture can improve posture and well-being and is adaptable for the comfort of different size students.

Technology integration

You will need furniture that supports all of your device use. Plan for things like power, data, charging, and cable management;

Multipurpose spaces

Spaces like libraries, cafeterias, and multipurpose rooms should have furniture that can be used in multiple spaces and repurposed for different needs.

Safety/Health

Look for furniture that is sturdy and constructed from non-toxic materials. Consider rounded edges. Think about adding corner guards and door finger guards. Choose stable bases to prevent tipping, and consider sturdy and heavy-duty frames that can withstand rough handling.

Durability/Maintenance

Your desks and chairs should last 10-15 years, so look for furniture made of high-quality materials and implement good maintenance practices. Thoughtful purchasing and upkeep will help to protect your investments, extend the lifespan of your furniture, and equip your school community for success.







Top to bottom: Shekou International School, Yangon International School, International School Dhaka.







Top to bottom: Cayman International School, Shekou International School, and Dostyk American International School

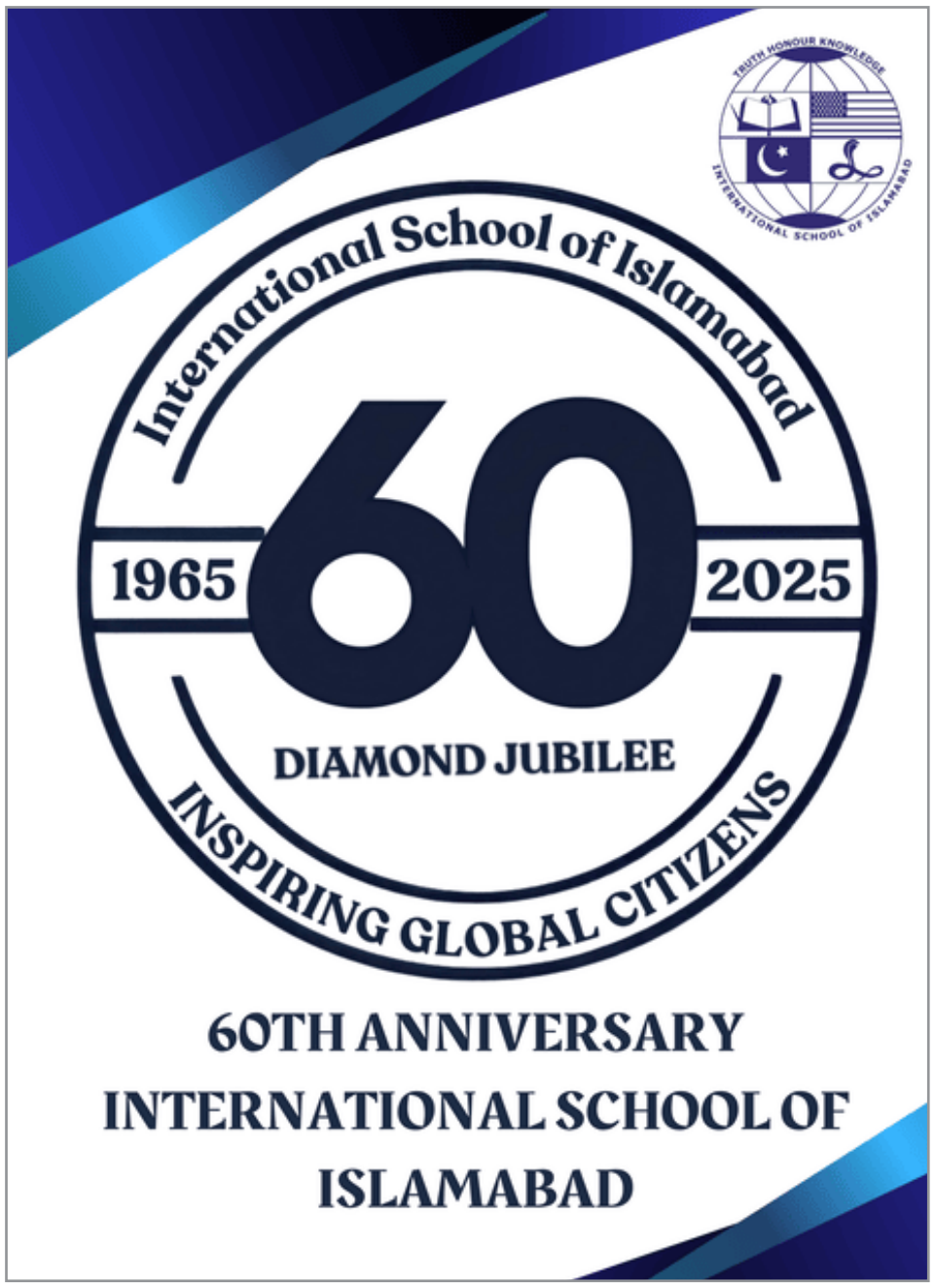
Thoughtful purchasing and upkeep will help protect your investments and equip you for success

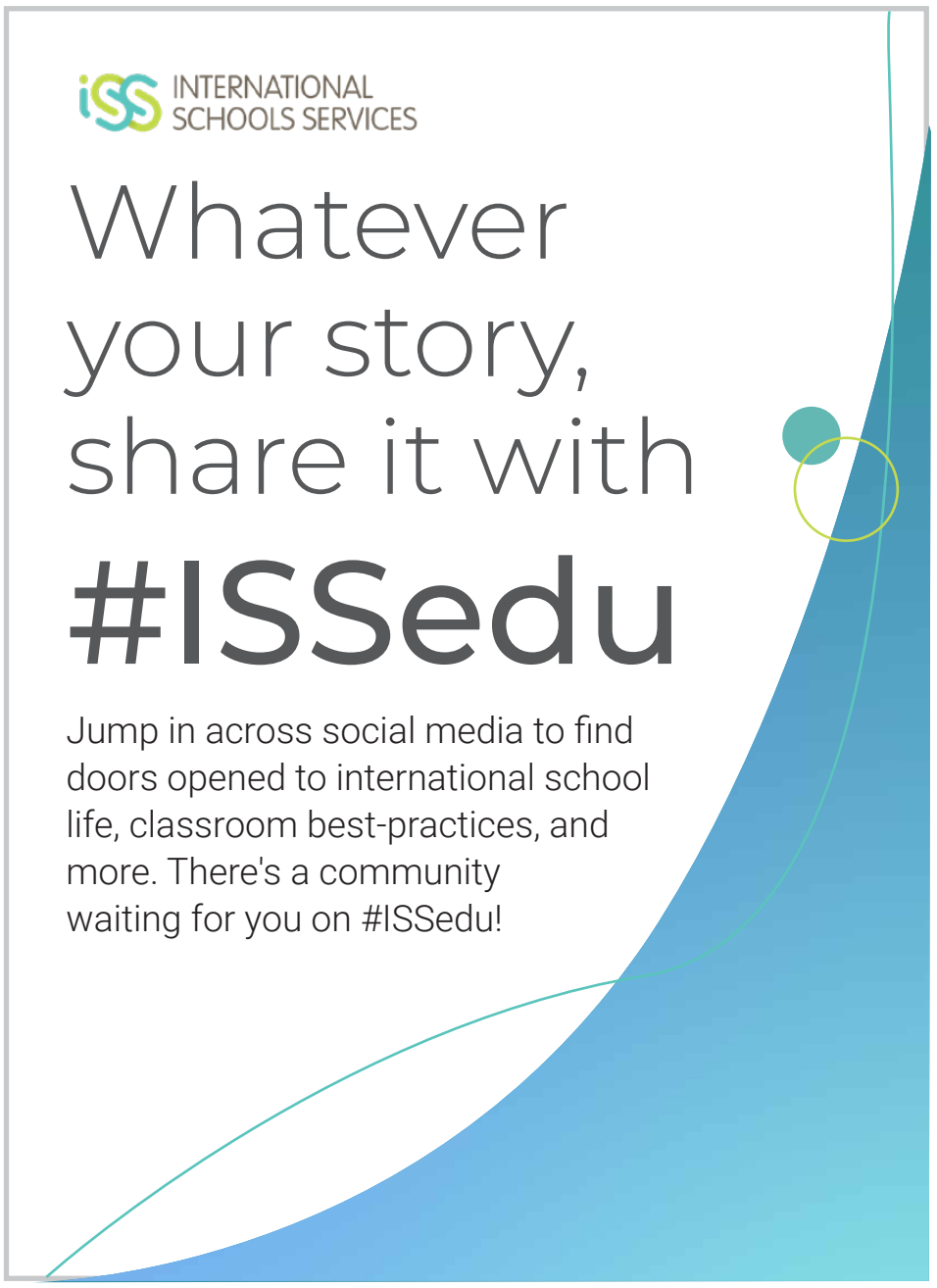
Taking Next Steps

It's never too early to start planning once you have a project approved! You will need to take into consideration all lead times. For any non-stocked items, suppliers may require a six to eight week lead time. Be sure to consider the time needed for overseas transit once a shipment is booked, clearing through customs, delivery to the school, and finally set-up on site. Consolidating your purchases into larger orders usually results in better pricing, volume discounts, and reduced shipping/handling costs.

ISS can help optimize delivery schedules and navigate the complex customs clearance process, offering you support and savings. Tap into ISS's long-standing relationships with a world of suppliers who are both well-established and provide quality service. We are here to help!

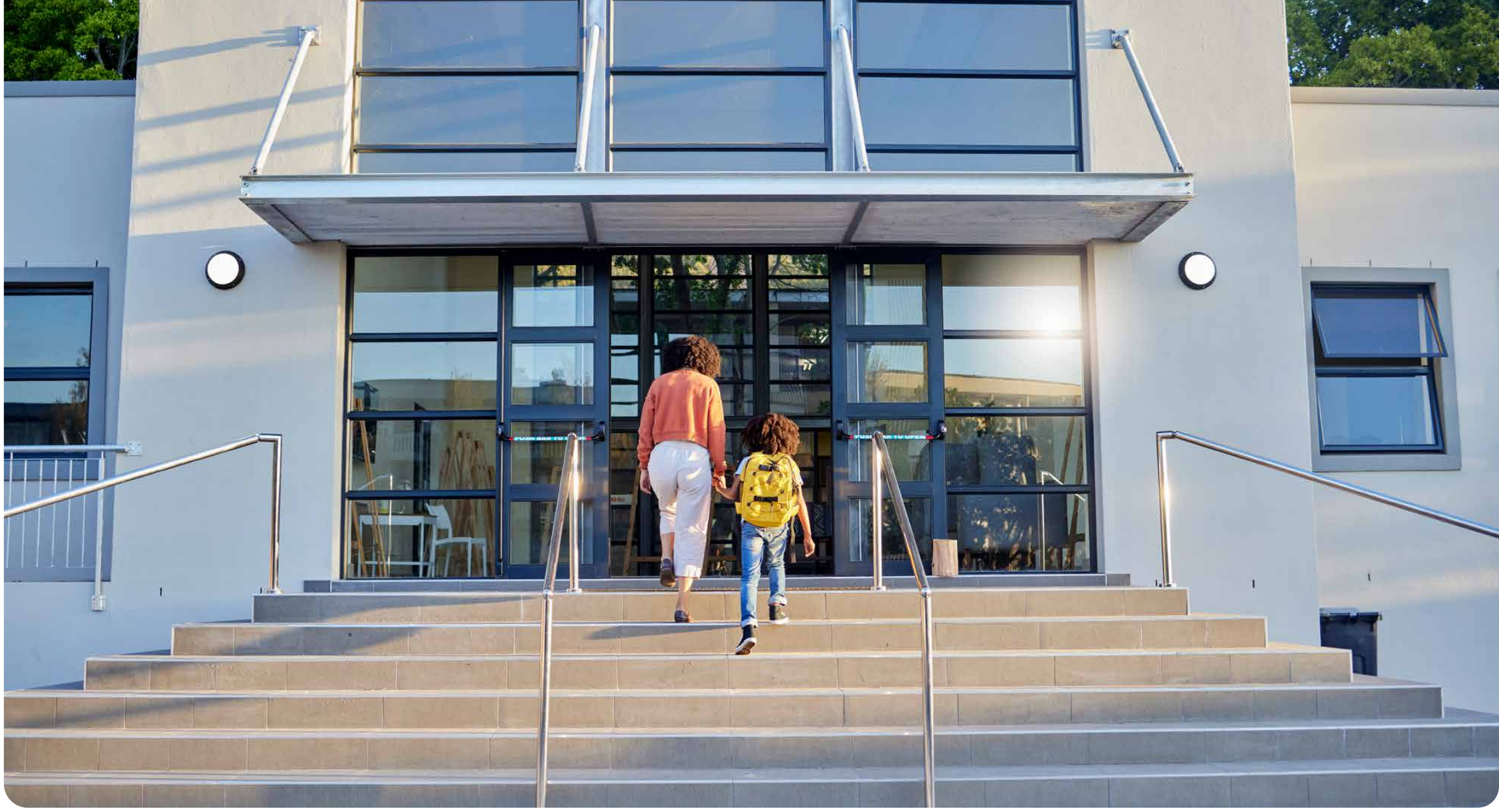
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FEELING IT? ENROLLMENT CHANGES IN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

By **Dr. Tom Hawkins,** ISS Vice President of School Start-Ups, Management, and Operations

Thanks to **ISC Research** and other research organizations, we know that the international school sector keeps growing worldwide. But as many leaders have experienced, this growth in schools is not universal. When facing changes and declines in your own school's enrollment, it is natural to find yourself asking: "What is happening?"

> **International school sector growth is very uneven in this current unstable global environment**

The bottom line? International school sector growth is very uneven in this current unstable global environment. Meeting enrollment challenges and sustaining your school's future requires an understanding of your school's context and strategic opportunities.

The Global Picture: Growth with Pockets of Strain

International school sector-wide indicators remain very positive. ISC Research reports there are roughly 14,800+ international K-12 schools educating approximately 7.4 million students as of early 2025, with annual fee income around US$67.3B — all up materially over the last five years. But the same data and commentary make clear that growth is not uniform by region or price point. (ISC Research)

- **Dubai:** Private-school enrollment rose 6% in 2024–25 (to 387,441 students across 227 schools), and Western Asia is among the strongest five-year growth regions. (KHDA, ICEF Monitor)
- **East Asia**: International-school growth has stalled to ~4% over five years, as policy and demographic factors make an impact. (ISC Research)
- **Europe:** Growth is selective and driven by affluent mobile families, investor consolidation, and secondary city expansion, rather than broad-based surges. VAT on education in the UK has opened up opportunities for less expensive schooling in central Europe.
- **Africa:** This continent now hosts 1,700+ international schools with 700,000+ students. ISC/AISA chart steady multi-year growth, notably in Kenya where demand is accelerating among middle-income families and expats. (AISASemafor)
- **Central and South America:** Growth, according to analysts and sector media, is an "exciting" expansion frontier for international schools as families prize bilingual/English-medium pathways. But enrollment can be price-sensitive and currency-exposed, and much of the growth is concentrated in the big cities. (ISCresearch, The PIE News)

Continued on page 18

"Enrollment Changes in International Schools," continued from page 17

What is driving enrollment challenges?

Regulatory headwinds

This factor is particularly felt in China and Hong Kong. China's revised private education rules (and newer patriotic-education requirements) restrict foreign curricula in compulsory years and even school naming, slowing openings and prompting closures or repositioning. These effects are now spilling into Hong Kong's tightly regulated market. Schools report static pipelines for new campuses and tougher positioning to local families who can access robust public options. (ISC Research)

Hong Kong's government-commissioned study flags employer concerns about securing non-local-curriculum schools for staff children. This can impede recruitment/relocation and nudge companies to look elsewhere. That fragility in corporate mobility translates into softer, less predictable admissions pipelines for some schools.

Affordability and fee inflation

Across many cities, fees have outpaced middle-income growth, squeezing local families who now comprise a growing share of international-school enrollment. ISC has chronicled a long-running shift in demand toward mid-market fee schools. In Qatar, for example, mid-market demand overtook premium years ago. Parents in the UK are seeking less costly alternatives to the British schools who are now responsible for 20%VAT tax for school fees. (ISC Research)

Changing expat patterns and corporate packages

Post-pandemic mobility has resumed, but with leaner education benefits and more regional relocations (e.g., within Asia rather than transcontinental). That favors cities where supply meets mid-market price points (such as Dubai, Kuala Lumpur, parts of Riyadh/Jeddah) and challenges legacy premium clusters where fees are high and seat types are mismatched to today's demand. (KHDA, AACRAO)

Competition from bilingual/national options

Where public and private national schools improve (or where policy nudges families toward them), some international schools lose their historical edge, especially in compulsory years. This dynamic is most visible in mainland China and increasingly in Hong Kong, contributing to softer growth. (ISC Research)

US Policy impact

Changes in US support of programs abroad and tariffs/trade relations have impacted international schools enrollment as early as the first half of 2025. Continued cuts in support, and changes in trade regulations and resulting trade relations will further impact schools heavily dependent on sectors impacted by the tariffs.

Implications for School Leaders and Boards

Price matters

Schools priced beyond reachable thresholds for local families will be most exposed to price sensitivity. Differentiating tuition, offering incentives or scholarships, and introducing programs or pathways which expand potential student applicant pools can stabilize enrollment without eroding the quality, brand, or ethos of your school.

As pointed out repeatedly by ISC Research, schools in the mid-market price category appear to be more durable.

Local-global program fit is now strategic, not cosmetic

Schools significantly dependent on either expat populations or local populations will need to be creative in bridging the demand and the availability of seats.

Bilingual pathways, host-country language, and locally relevant electives help schools maintain appeal where regulations or parent preferences tilt toward national content, while preserving international progression routes (e.g., IB, A-levels, AP). Program adaptability, not just marketing or promotion, will be required to ensure sustainable enrollment for schools facing challenges.

Company-sponsored enrollment's new landscape

Fewer full-ride packages mean corporate partnerships that bundle partial discounts, guaranteed places, and admissions service can replace the old HR-driven pipeline and reduce volatility in intakes tied to large employer moves.

Hong Kong's employer findings underscore how seat assurance influences talent strategy. And Europe's adaptations to U.S. policy underscore the need to stay abreast of industry changes in areas most applicable to your schools.

Enrollment needs to be part of your strategic planning should track sub-segments

International school strategic plans need to focus on enrollment as a key driver of sustainability. To be successful here, schools need to track sub-segment development (policy, price, industry indicators, etc.) Established premium-priced schools sometimes are challenged by mid-market priced schools in the city/region, as this is seen as the area of strongest demand.

Schools in slower markets can benefit from creative programing or re-profiling space (e.g., early-years densification, short-course/after-school revenue) to retain reputation as well as students. But without a robust strategic initiative to define and develop enrollment, schools risk becoming unsustainable.

Next Steps

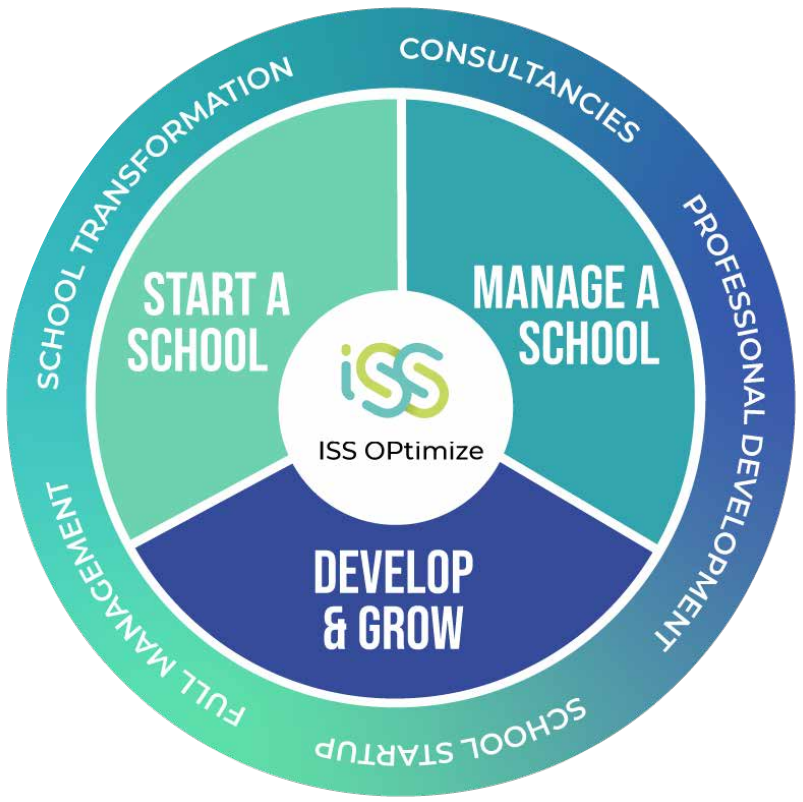
All schools will likely face enrollment changes and challenges at some point. If your school is in the situation of too many applicants, count yourself lucky!

Your school is part of a larger global story, but there are still specific actions you can take to set yourself up for success

However, if you school is experiencing a decline in enrollment or a decline in inquiries and applications, do not despair. Your school is part of a larger global story, but there are still specific actions you can take to set yourself up for success. Be proactive to ensure the sustainability of your school through robust strategic planning. Such planning initiatives not only examine what your school is good at, but looks specifically at school costs and competition from other schools in your city.

Continued on page 19

"Enrollment Changes in International Schools," continued from page 18



ISS OPtimize

For schools facing enrollment pressure, your key to success will lie in strategically addressing school fees, regulatory alignment, company or corporate engagement, and ensuring a genuinely local program design.

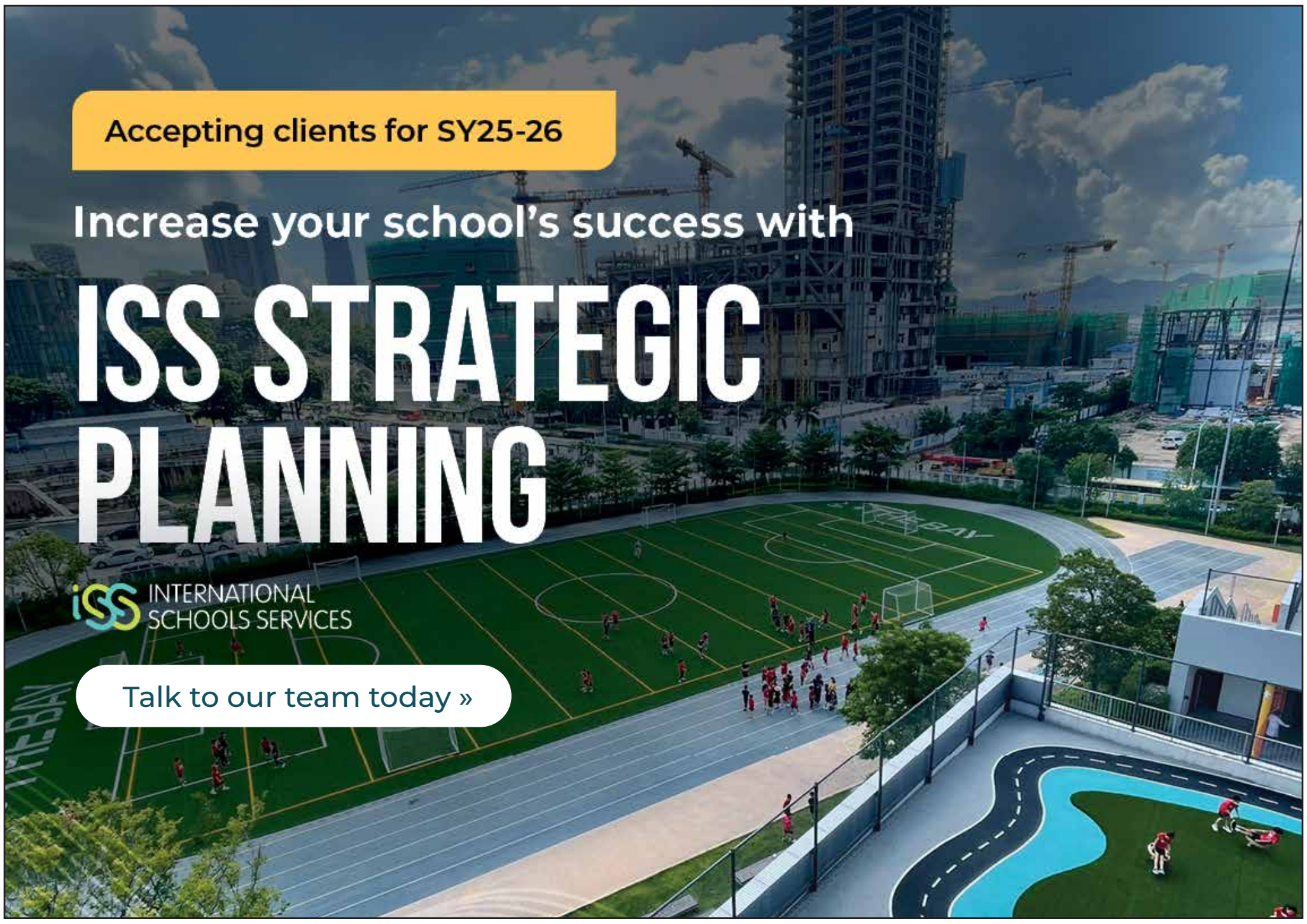
Need support but not sure where to begin? Consider reaching out to me and the ISS OPtimize team. We offer services designed to uncover underlying operational and educational challenges, plus provide timely assessments and proven solutions.

Our team has all previously served as international school heads, principals, curriculum directors, business managers, or board members — we know the world of international schools deeply, and we are here to support your success today and in whatever tomorrow's world may look like. Let me know how we can help.

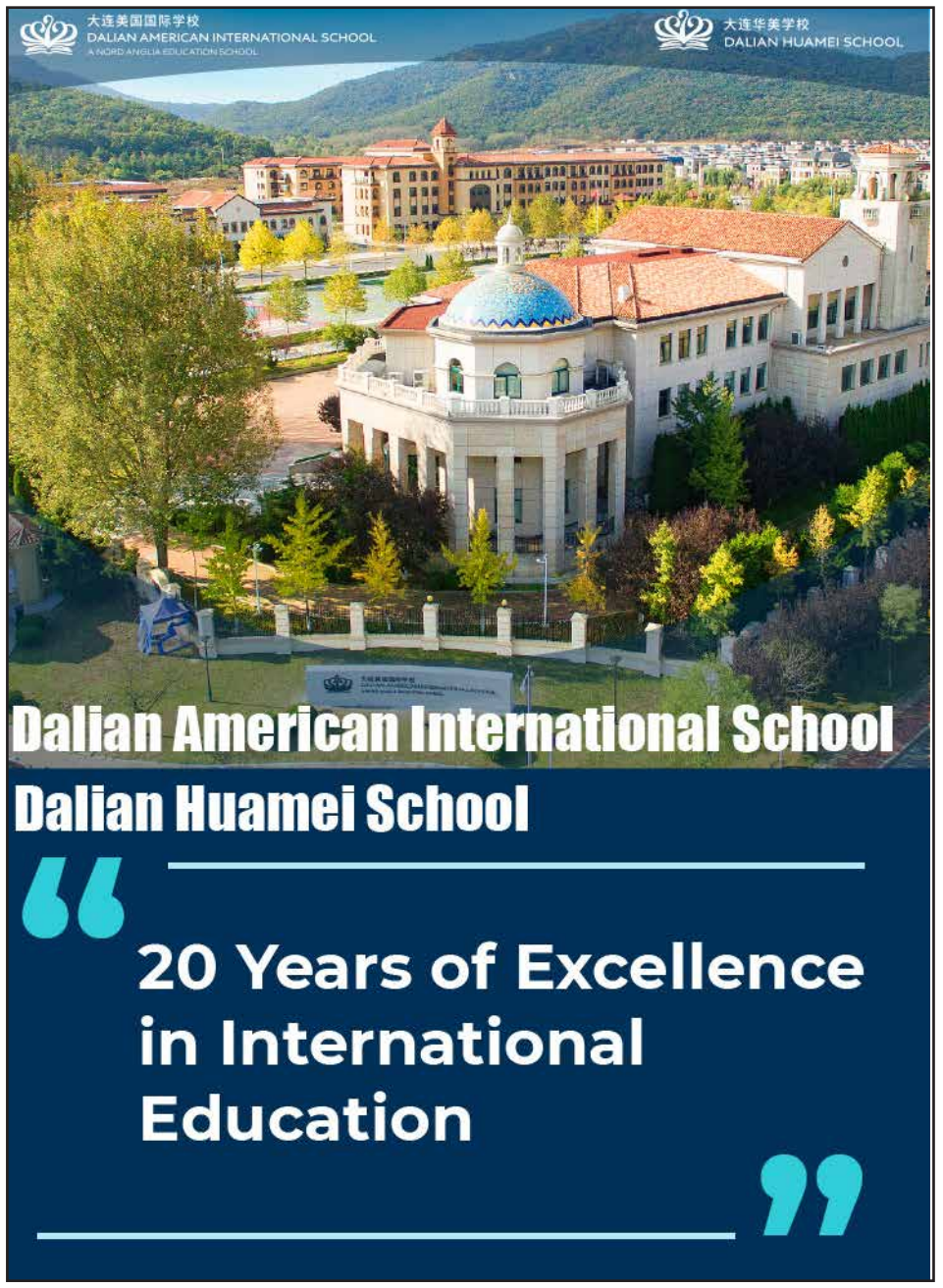
Learn more about how ISS OPtimize can support your school here. You can connect with Tom on Linkedin.

Sources

ISC Research market updates and data (Jan 2024–Aug 2025); KHDA Dubai private-school landscape 2024–25; Hong Kong EDB international-places study; analyses on mid-market demand: (ISC Research, KHDA, The Times)









Achieve Xiamen International School (AXIS)

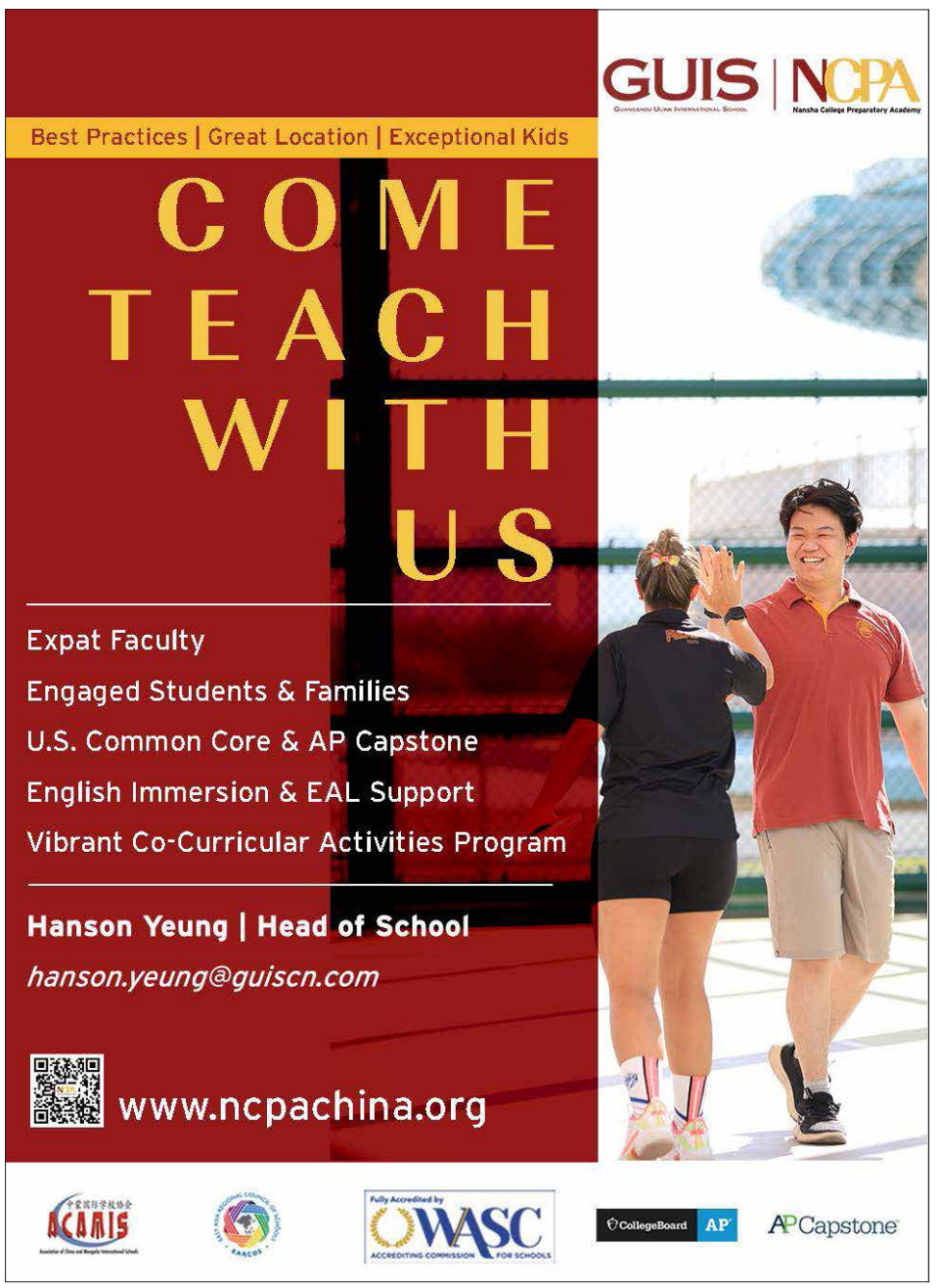
AXIS is a K-12 international school located in the vibrant city of Xiamen. We follow the IB PYP curriculum, the U.S. Common Core Standards and Advanced Placement (AP) in Upper Secondary School.

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WOMEN WHO LEAD, LEGACIES THAT LAST

By **Tiwana Merritt**, PreK-12 Service Learning/Community Engagement Coordinator and Instructional Coach, American International School of Johannesburg

The **23rd ISS Mary Ann Haas Women's Symposium** was truly an experience and a half! International Schools Services brought together a remarkable group of women educators, each with unique backgrounds and experiences in international education. Our weekend this June 2025 in Princeton, New Jersey, was rich with love, laughter, connection, vulnerability, and meaningful conversation.

The Symposium brought together a remarkable group of women educators, each with unique backgrounds and experiences

We began with a welcome reception at **Dana Specker Watts'** home — a warm and inviting space that set the tone for the days ahead. It was a lovely opportunity to meet, mingle, and begin forming the bonds that would deepen throughout the weekend.

The next day**, Dr. Fran Prolman** opened with a powerful talk on the loneliness of leadership, urging us to lean on the relationships that make up our personal "kitchen table" of friends and family. Her words deeply resonated with many of us and echoed throughout the symposium as a grounding theme.

Together, we explored our inner Wonder Woman and engaged in data-informed reflection on the barriers faced by historically marginalized individuals in education. **Dr. Nicole Furlonge** from the **Klingenstein Center** led us through her organization's powerful work at the intersection of education, equity, and change leadership. Her insights sparked important dialogue about what it means to lead equitably in complex educational landscapes.

To close out the day, fellow participant **Liz Cho** brought joy, creativity, and play into our learning with an interactive leadership session that included LEGO, sweets, laughter, and deeply meaningful engagement.

Symposium leaders **Liz Duffy** and **Dana Specker Watts** then guided us through a small-group storytelling exercise, where we traced our individual leadership journeys. This reflection — honest and emotional — was a cathartic experience for many. Sharing the highs and lows of how we arrived at this point in our lives allowed for deep connection and mutual affirmation.

Continued on page 22

"Women Who Lead, Legacies that Last," [*continued from page 21*]

And then came the moment I had both eagerly anticipated and quietly feared: the panel discussion. Titled *Living Your Legacy,* the panel featured four incredible women leaders, and I had the honor of serving as moderator. Even though I've led multiple panels over the past six years, I still approach each one with nerves, uncertainty, and prayerful hope that it will go well.

And it did — beautifully. The panelists were extraordinary. Their wisdom, openness, and grace created a space filled with vulnerability and strength. More than once, I had to steady myself as the emotional honesty in the room moved us all deeply.

We closed the symposium with expressions of gratitude, thoughtful feedback, and powerful public declarations. The communal meals, shared laughter, renewed friendships, and joyful new connections created a sense of belonging that linger long after Princeton. I left feeling buoyed and inspired — ready to step into what has lovingly been called my "incubation year" (thank you, **Katlyn Darling**!).

This experience will stay with me, continuing to nourish my soul and guide me toward spaces of growth and opportunity. Deepest thanks to the International Schools Services team and **Clearpath EPM** for making this possible through their sponsorship and care. I'm sitting in deep gratitude and appreciation.

Find other opportunities to get involved with ISS Women's Leadership at ISS.edu. You can follow Tiwana on LinkedIn.

-The ISS Mary Anne Haas-
WOMEN'S SYMPOSIUM





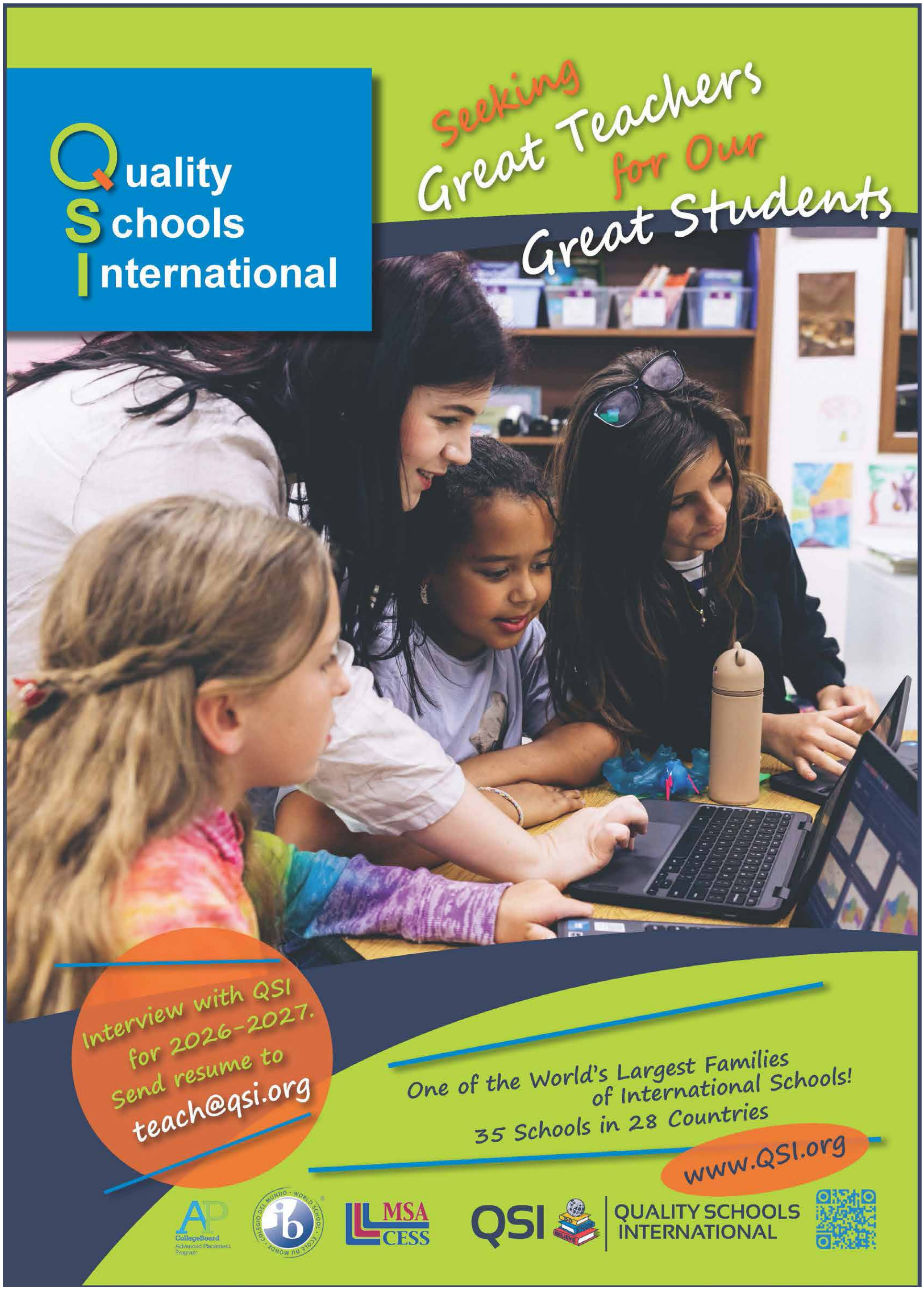











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"IT WAS THE BEST OF TIMES, IT WAS THE BLURST OF TIMES"

By **John Burns,** ISS Chief Innovation Officer

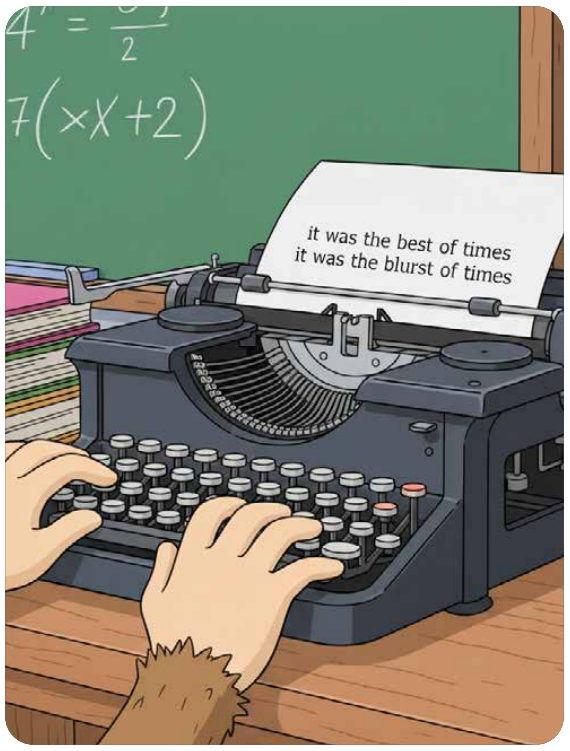


Image AI generated via Google's Nano Banana (fittingly)

*I**t was the best of times, it was the blurst of times.*

This joke always cracks me up. In a classic bit from *The Simpsons,* Mr. Burns reads a monkey's attempt at typing, and then proceeds to scold it. "It was the best of times, it was the blurst of times?!" It's an absurd scenario, but also strangely familiar to the way we experience AI in education today.

Sometimes, it feels like an amazing opportunity.

Sometimes, it feels like a mess.

Sometimes, it's even both at once.

Continued on page 25

"It was the best of times, it was the blurst of times," continued from page 24

The gag itself riffs on the old "infinite monkey theorem", the idea that if you gave a monkey a typewriter and enough time, eventually it could produce the complete works of Shakespeare. In other words, random chance can generate brilliance. But most of the time, what you get is gibberish.

Every day brings examples of genuine breakthroughs and right alongside them are the mistakes, the biases, the half-finished sentences, and the "blurst" moments

But of course, unlike a monkey at a typewriter, AI does actually work. That's what makes it both so compelling, and so unpredictable. Every day brings examples of genuine breakthroughs and right alongside them are the mistakes, the biases, the half-finished sentences, and the "blurst" moments that remind us this technology is still evolving.

Starting with Leadership

Earlier this year, we worked with school leaders from across the world in our **AI Leadership Accelerator.** Their challenge was clear but significant; how to make sense of AI's rapid evolution while protecting the mission, values, and long-term vision of their schools.

At the center of this work was our 3G AI Framework: **Governance, Guardrails,** and **Guidance**.

- **Governance** helps leaders align AI decisions with their institution's values and strategic goals, rather than focusing on emerging technologies
- **Guardrails** establish ethical and equitable boundaries to keep innovation from outpacing responsibility
- **Guidance** equips staff, students, and communities with the clarity and confidence to use AI purposefully

We received feedback that this framework helped leaders "see the forest from the trees." Instead of reacting to hype or headlines, they now had a structured way to ask the right questions and shape a proactive and integrated vision for AI.

The Best of Times

And there is plenty to be excited about. Educators are already applying AI to improve teaching and learning in tangible ways:

- **Inquiry:** Supporting students to explore their interests and questions more deeply, creating space for self-directed projects and authentic learning pathways
- **Productivity:** Streamlining learning design and daily communication, giving teachers more time to focus on students
- **Personalization:** Adapting learning to individual students' pace, strengths, and preferences
- **Inclusion:** Using accessibility and adaptive tools to ensure every student can participate fully and demonstrate what they know and can do

These applications free teachers to spend more time face to face with students, building relationships, fostering creativity and inspiring curiosity.

The Blurst of Times

But the blurst is never far away.

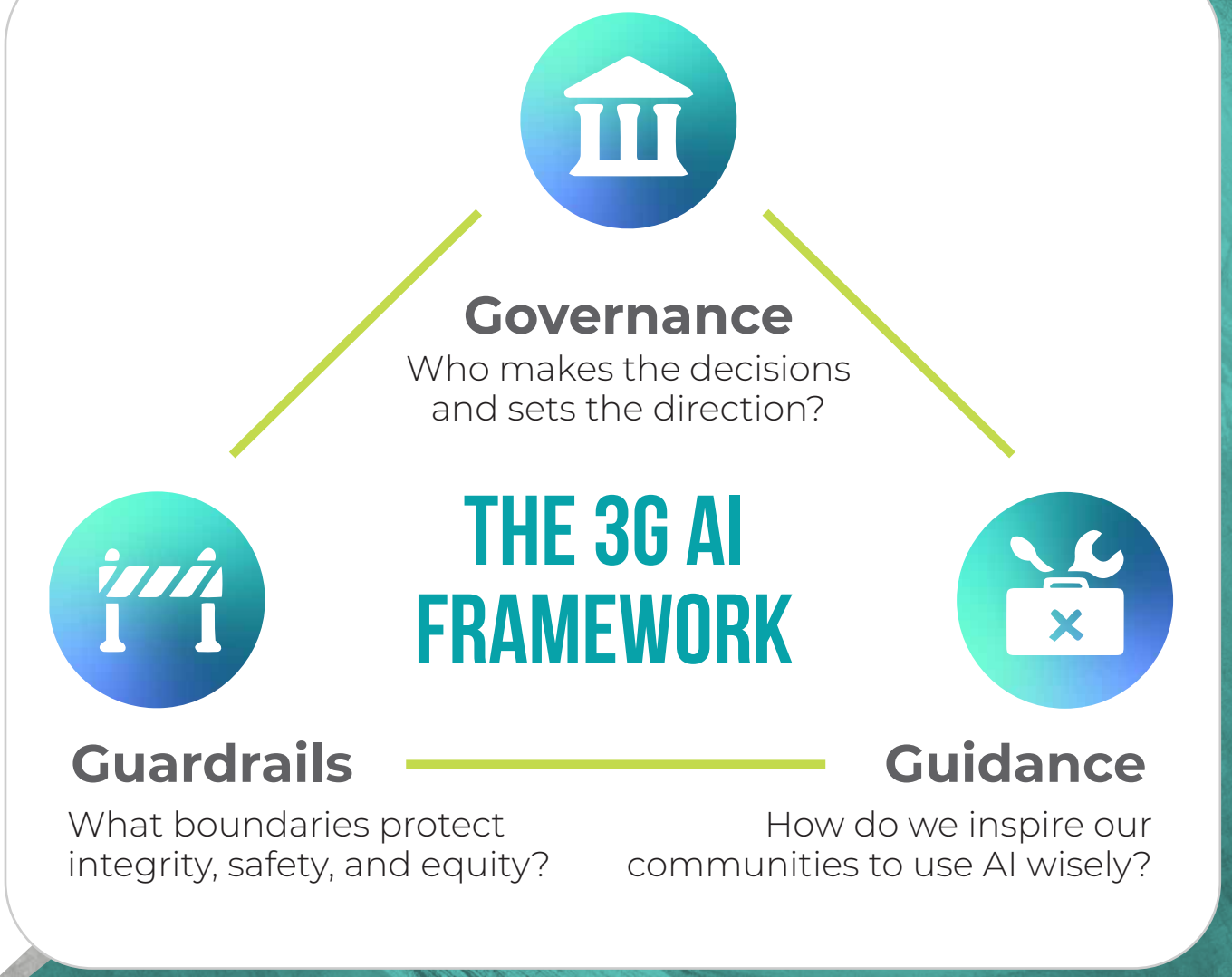
- **Bias and global-north** perspectives baked into training data risk narrowing worldviews and reinforcing inequities
- **Academic integrity** is an ongoing challenge, as schools re-examine how to assess knowledge and skills fairly
- **Over-reliance on AI** may support short-term efficiency but raise questions about deeper learning and long-term retention
- **AI-generated media** comes with concerns about authenticity, ownership, and misrepresentation

These challenges don't mean AI should be avoided. But they remind us that critical thinking, clear strategy, and ethical oversight must remain at the heart of any school's approach.

New Models Emerging

It's not just about tools. Entirely new models of schooling are taking shape, with groups like Alpha School positioning themselves as "AI-first" institutions. At Alpha, students complete their core academics in just two hours each morning using adaptive, AI-driven apps like 2-Hour Learning, then spend the rest of the day immersed in life-skills workshops focused on creativity, entrepreneurship, and real-world challenges. Whether they succeed or not, Alpha Schools signal that disruption is real and happening now. For educational professionals, the risk is not that AI will pass them by, but that it will reshape education in ways they haven't helped define.

Continued on page 26



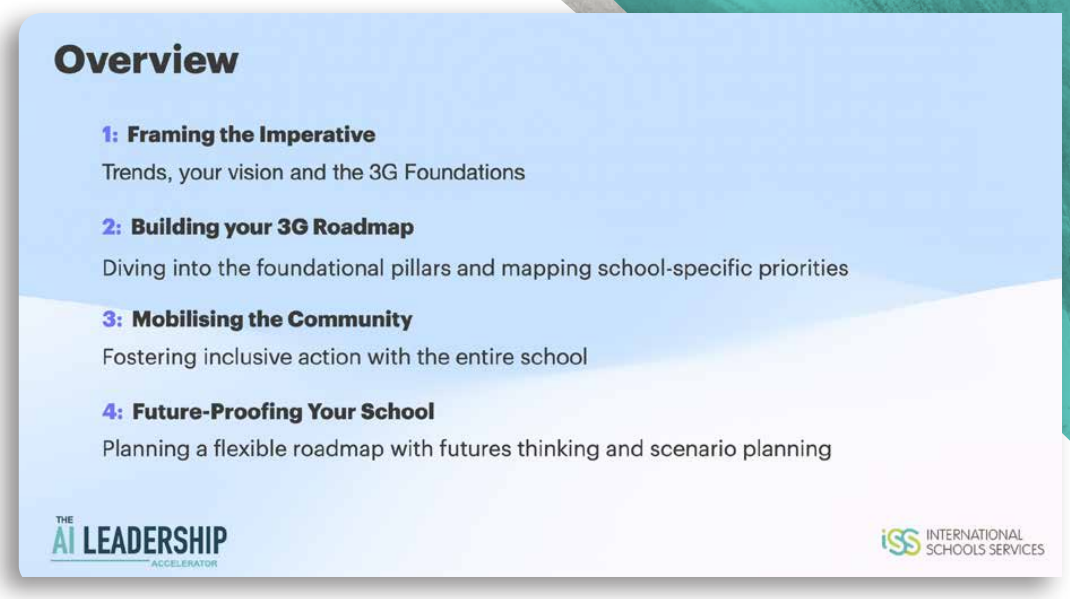
"It was the best of times, it was the blurst of times," continued from page 25

From Leadership to Learning

Our work has to go beyond the leadership level. After running the Leadership Accelerator, the next step is supporting teachers directly. We're now preparing to launch the **Pedagogy-First AI Accelerator for Educators** starting in March 2026, a program designed to support the thoughtful and practical application of AI across K12 contexts.

Where the Leadership Accelerator gave schools a compass, this new program dives into practice: how AI can be used for pedagogy in ways that are ethical, inclusive, and transformative for students. It's about empowering educators to experiment, reflect, and design new possibilities, not simply suggesting another swath of AI tools.

Together, these two accelerator programs form a continuum, from leadership vision to actual learning. Both are essential. Strong governance without pedagogy risks staying too conceptual; classroom exploration without leadership risks fragmentation. Schools need both if they are to navigate AI's contradictions.



Slide from the AI Leadership Accelerator

Staying Engaged

AI in education will continue to feel like both the best of times and the blurst. There will be breakthroughs and setbacks, optimism and skepticism, moments of brilliance and moments of absurdity. But schools that anchor themselves in frameworks, professional learning, and collective exploration will be best positioned to thrive.

The Simpsons may be famous for "predicting" the future, but in education, we don't need predictions — we need preparation. By investing in leadership and pedagogy together, schools can make the most of the best times, and avoid getting stuck with the blurst.

You can connect with John on LInkedIn. Check out the Pedagogy-First AI Accelerator for Educators and register here.

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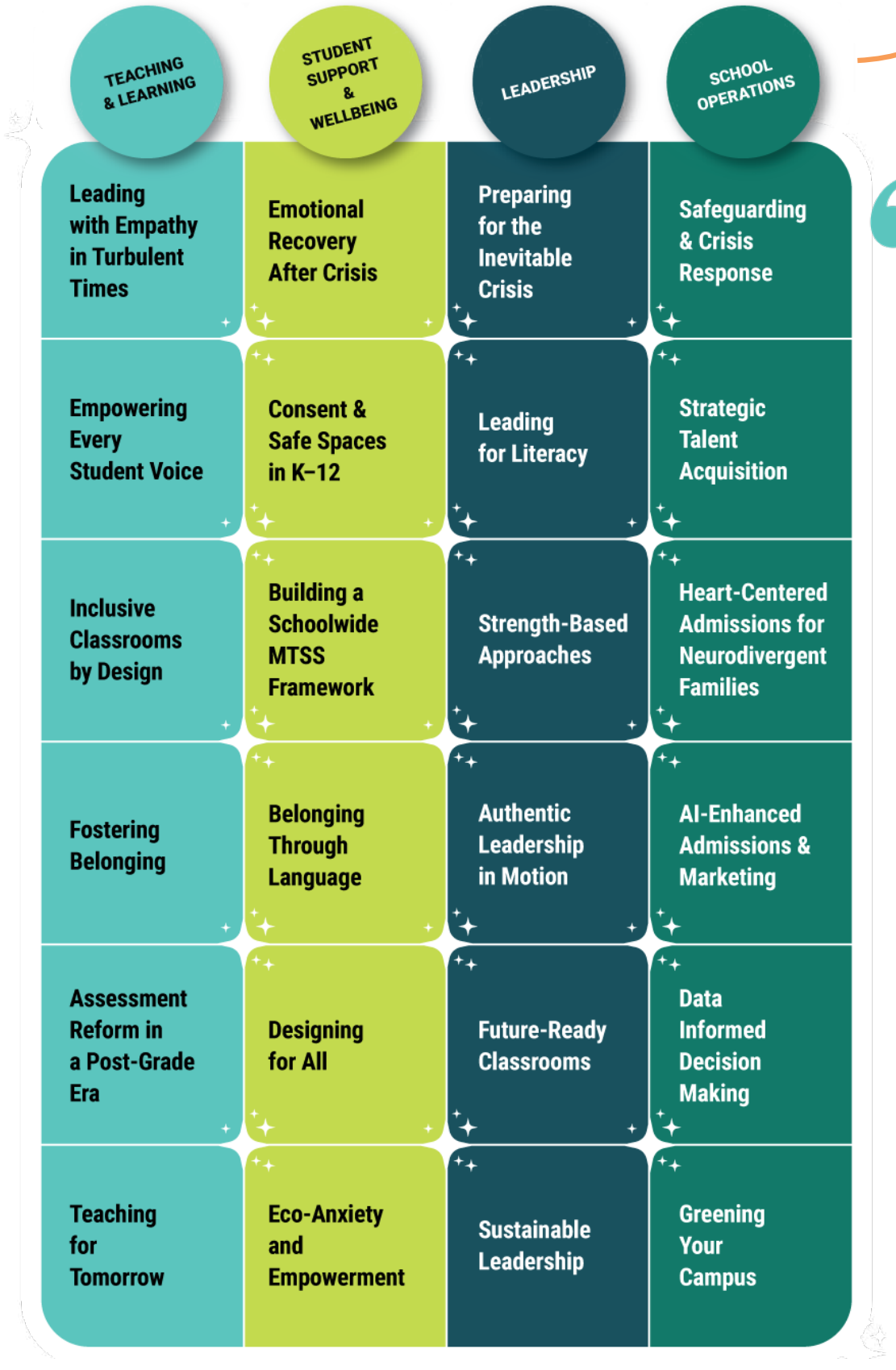


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"For Khartoum American School, the ISS EDUlearn Passport experience has been a lifeline to high quality professional development, particularly and absolutely essential during this "exile" from our home in Sudan. [...] The Passport program allowed our staff members to continue their learning despite the unusual transitory nature of place and time.

Here is a comment from one of our teachers: 'I have taken more than 17 different professional development courses through the ISS EDUlearn Passport, and each one has been an invaluable resource. Some of the courses on well-being were especially helpful as I supported students in a new environment during a difficult time of displacement. The combination of accessible, flexible learning and the wide range of topics provided not only high-quality professional growth, but also encouragement and support when it was most needed.'

Thanks to the Passport, we have continued to deliver on our mission and our students and teachers are thriving."

LEARN MORE HERE

PEOPLE I'VE KNOWN

This feature, inspired by skateboarding magazine *Thrasher* 'People I've Known,' features a guest contributor's snapshots of individuals from across their career journey. Think of all those people you've met over the years, who you may not regularly speak with but who still left their mark in your life. Those are the ones we love to hear about!

Last edition, we had the joy of featuring **Tiwana Merritt** (PreK-12 Service Learning/ Community Engagement Coordinator and Instructional Coach at the American International School of Johannesburg). In this edition, Tiwana passes the spotlight on to **Maipelo N'Guessan**.



MAIPELO N'GUESSAN

Maipelo is a dedicated and passionate educator with over fifteen years of experience in international education. She currently serves as the Whole School Vice Principal at the **International Community School of Abidjan (ICSA)** in Côte d'Ivoire, where she leads the school's strategic initiatives in child protection, community engagement, community & belonging, and place-based education. Driven by a deep commitment to equity, inclusion, and transformative education, Maipelo is passionate about creating collaborative and supportive environments where students, staff, and communities thrive together.

Enjoy highlights of the groups and people who have impacted Maipelo's journey in international education!

Association of International Educators of Leaders of Color

Through AIELOC, I found my voice as an educator and leader of color in the international school ecosystem and found a safe, supportive community where I continue to grow as a community and belonging advocate.

AIELOC AfricanISE

Through AfricanISE, an AIELOC affinity space for international educators of African descent, I find community, support, and collaboration, drawing strength from indigenous African wisdom and ways of being to navigate and thrive in the international education ecosystem.

Association of International Schools in Africa

Much of my professional growth comes from the AISA network, where, as a member of the Wellbeing for All and Community Engagement & Learning Design teams, I collaborate on projects and other PD initiatives with outstanding colleagues.



Daphne Neal

Daphne Neal opened the door to international education by offering me a science teaching position at ICSA after my career in research science. She mentored me in those early years and remains my trusted leadership role model.



Dr. Jim O'Malley

As Secondary Principal at ICSA, Dr. Jim O'Malley supported me in stepping into my first leadership role as Science Department Chair, a pivotal moment in my journey in educational leadership.



Dr. Juan Saavedra

Dr. Juan Saavedra, as Principal at ICSA, was a true champion of my leadership journey, entrusting me to cover for him in his absence hence giving me invaluable senior leadership experience that continues to guide and inspire my path.



Estelle Hughes

Estelle Hughes, another trusted leadership role model and mentor, inspired me to fully embrace my identity as an African woman in international school leadership, helping me recognize it as a valuable asset in shaping my impact as an educator.



Cheryl-Ann Weekes

Working with Cheryl-Ann Weekes as secondary counselor at ICSA inspired me to center wellbeing in my leadership. Her mantra, " 'No' a complete sentence," continues to resonate, guiding me to set healthy boundaries and lead with balance.



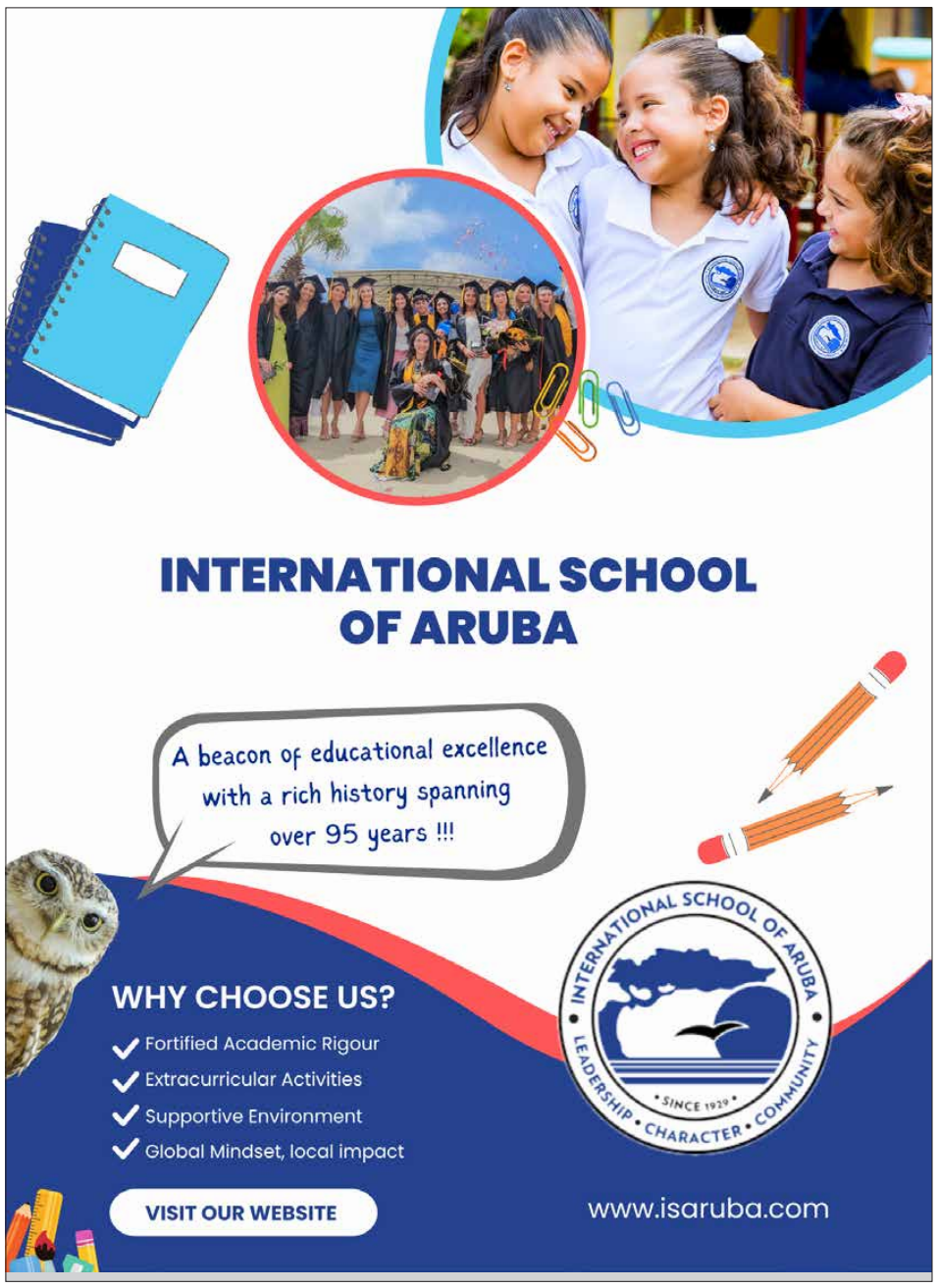
Sientania McNeil

Sientania McNeil is a fierce advocate for inclusion, equity, justice, community and belonging. Together, we launched ICSA's community and belonging steering committee to ensure all members of our community feel seen, heard, respected, valued and empowered to thrive.



Michael Breece

Michael Breece, my current director at ICSA, has trusted and supported me as I stepped into vice principalship, giving me the space to shape the school's approach to strategic priorities in my portfolio and grow as a confident leader.


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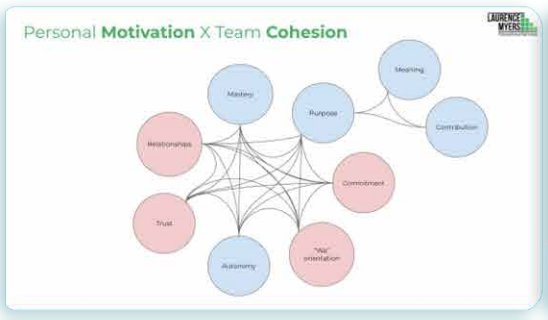
By **Dana Specker Watts, Ph.D.,** ISS Director of Learning, Research, & Outreach

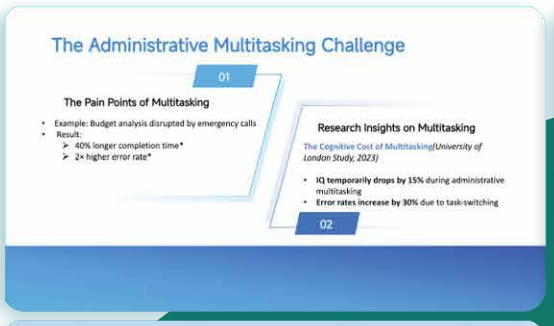
From June 24-27, 2025 ISS EDUlearn® and PeerSphere proudly co-hosted the 3rd annual virtual **School Administrators Conference (SAC)** titled "Forge Ahead Together: Building Professional Relationships", a professional learning experience designed specifically for non-teaching school operations professionals.

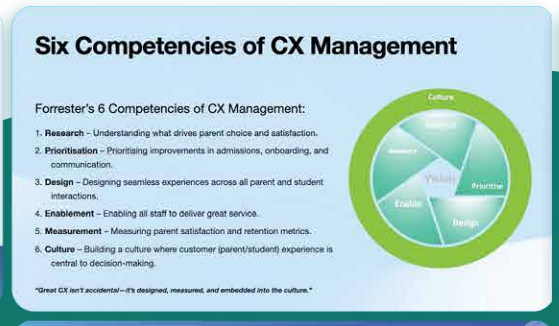
From admissions and marketing to facilities, finance, HR, food services, and transportation—our operational colleagues play a critical role in the success of international schools. Yet, too often, professional development has focused exclusively on academic staff.

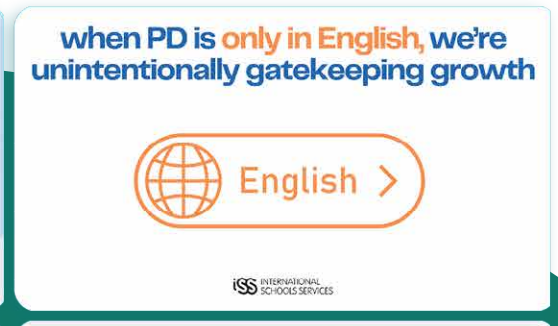
This conference aimed to shift that paradigm. With a multilingual format that offered participants a choice between English and Chinese in every time slot, the conference prioritized accessibility and inclusion. This not only allowed attendees to engage in their preferred language but also honored the linguistic diversity present in many of our international school communities.

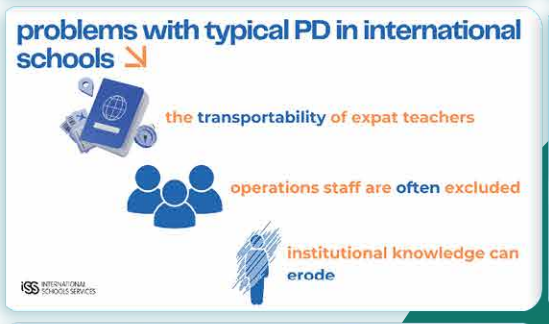
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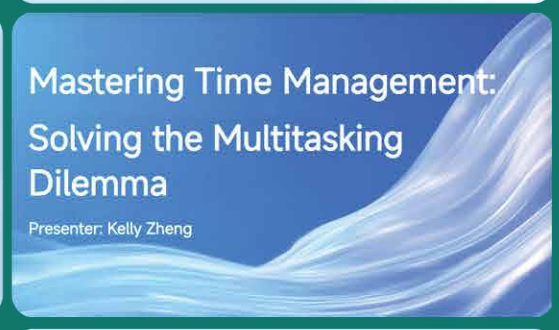


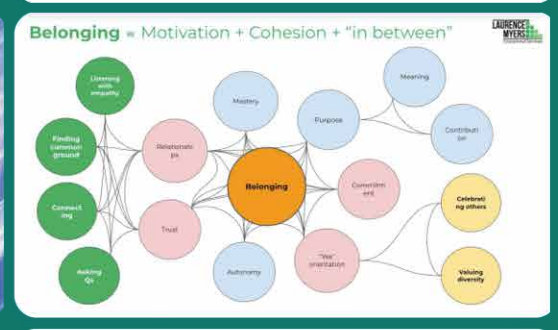


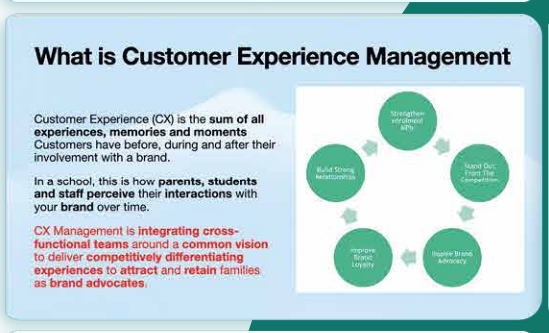


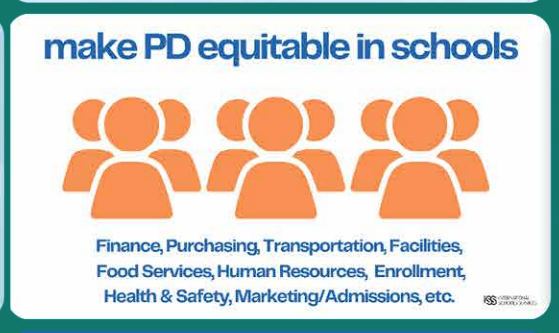


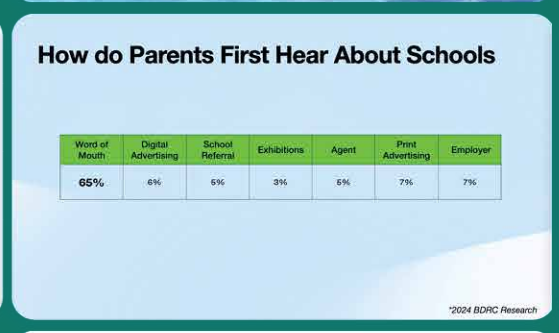


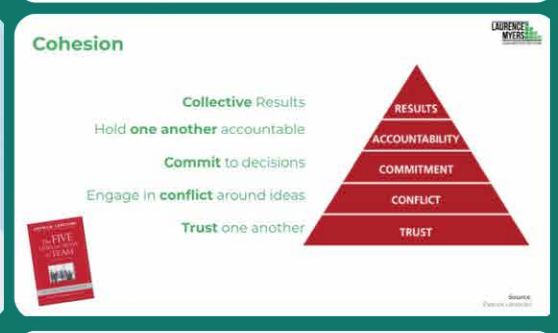


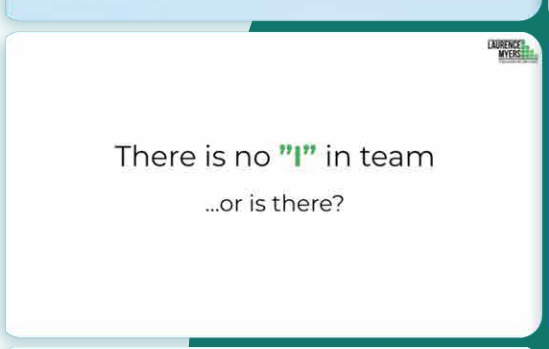




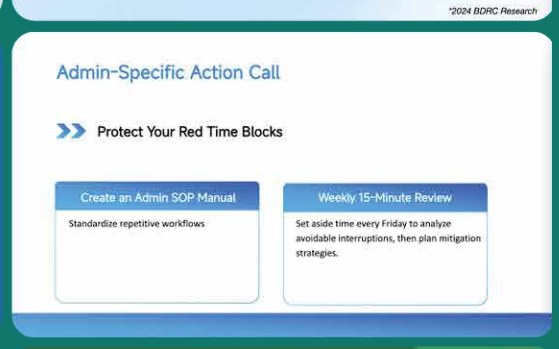




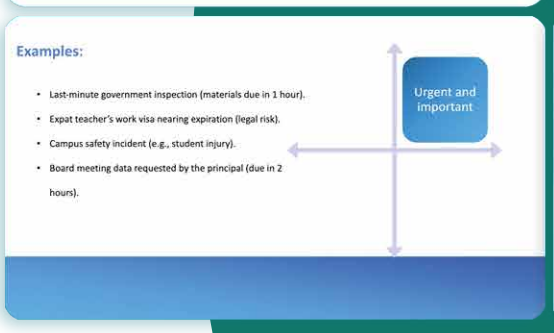


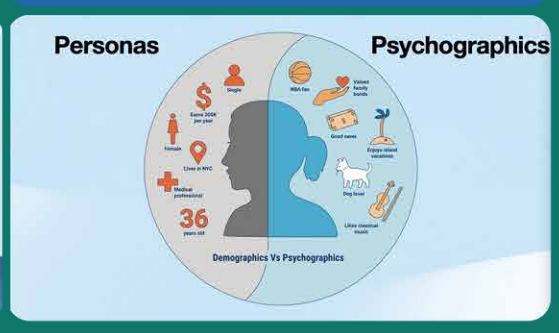




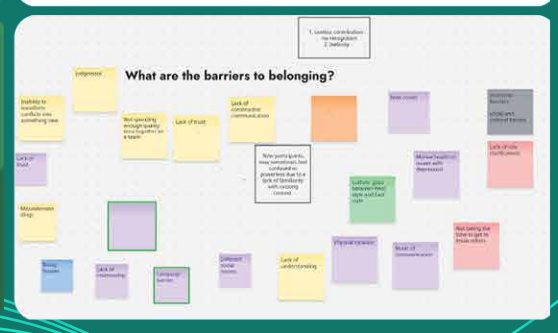












Sample slides from School Administrators Conference presenters Dana Watts, Kelly Zheng, Laurence Myers, and Jason Hoppner

"Elevating School Operations," continued from page 31

Key Conference Themes

The conference sessions reflected the wide-ranging responsibilities and deep expertise required across school operations roles. These themes now form the foundation of the newly launched School Operations Bundle on the ISS EDUlearn® platform.

Growing Capacity in School Operations | Link

- The Leadership Journey: Navigating the Stages of Growth for Non-Teaching Staff and Leaders
- Stronger Every Day: Empowering Yourself in International School Administration
- Elevating Customer Experience in International Schools: The Key to Enrollment Growth and Parent Loyalty
- Making Professional Development Right for You
- Navigating the Waves of Change: Opportunities and Challenges
- Professional Qualities for Admissions & Marketing Personnel
- Admissions Breakthrough Strategies

Operational Practices for School Wellbeing | Link

- Regenerative School: What Can We Learn from Nature to Make School a Regenerative Place for Human & Planetary Flourishing?
- Leading with Safety: Strengthening Leadership in School Admin
- The Campus as a Classroom: The Role of Support Staff in Promoting Sustainability
- Operational Excellence: Creating Added Value by Non-Teaching Support Team
- Bridging the Gap: Enhancing Collaboration Between Operations and Academic Leadership
- Beyond Lunch: How We Built a Top-Rated School Cafeteria Experience

Tech Skills for Operational Teams | Link

- Empowering Non-Teaching Staff: Building Tech Self-Efficacy
- Technology Empowering Campuses: A Holistic Approach to Sustainable Development from Design to Operations
- AI in Admin: Boosting Efficiency Without Losing the Human Touch
- AI as a Thinking Partner: Enhancing Creativity & Collaboration
- Mastering Time Management: Solving the Multitasking Dilema

Building Cohesion Across Campus Teams | Link

- The Glue That Holds Us Together: Empowering the People Who Sustain Our Schools
- Socialize the Learning
- Using System Thinking for Team Building & Belonging (Part 1)
- Using System Thinking for Team Building & Belonging (Part 2)
- Building Trust: The Key to Unlocking Success in International Schools
- Navigating Multicultural Workplace Challenges with Humility and Empathy
- Building Strong School Relationships Through ASA and Athletics

"Elevating School Operations," continued from page 32

Ongoing Learning: The School Operations Bundle

To sustain the momentum and extend the impact of the SAC conference, ISS EDUlearn® has launched the new School Operations Bundle: a curated collection of professional learning sessions designed specifically for non-teaching school staff.

All sessions are:

- Available on-demand with subtitles in 230+ languages
- Included in the ISS EDUlearn Passport for unlimited school-wide access
- Also available for individual or institutional purchase a la carte

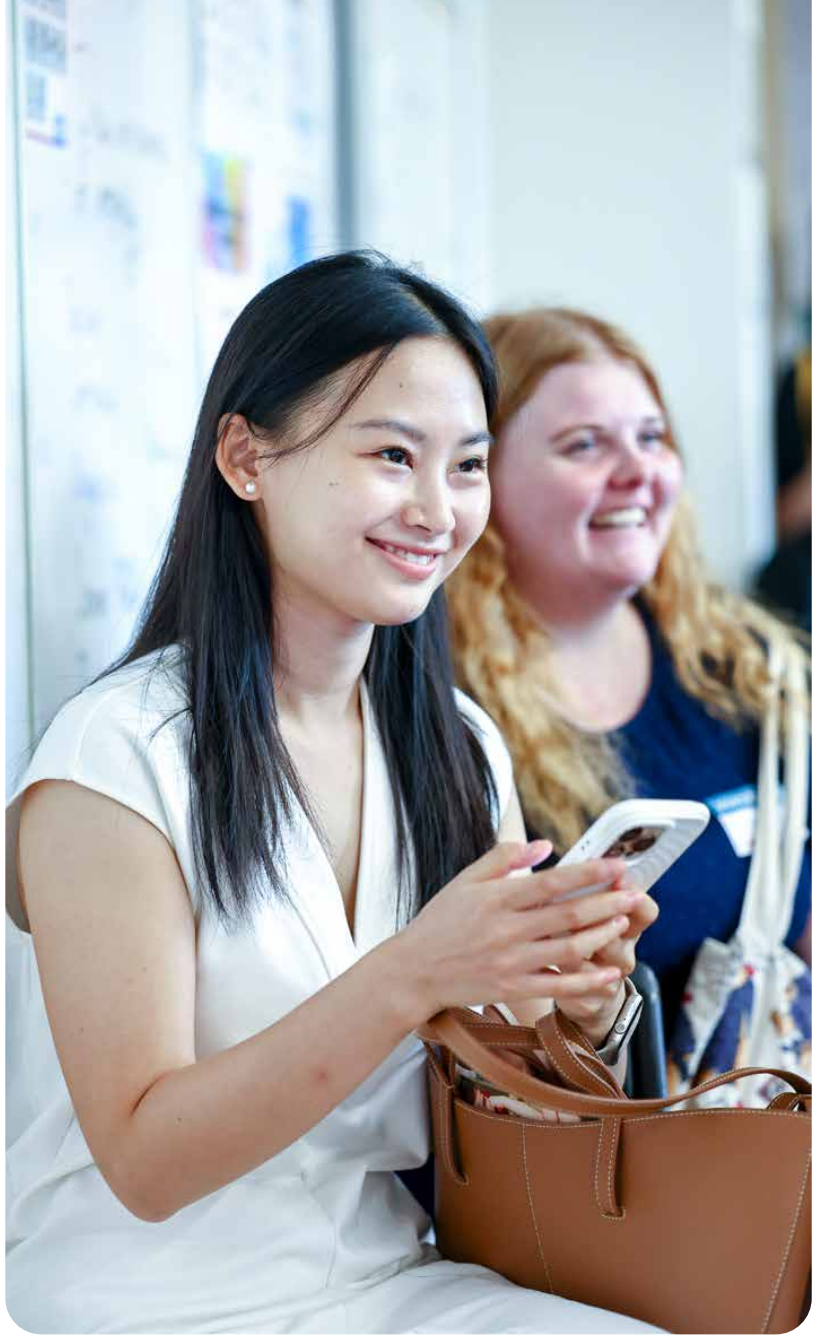
Whether you work in finance, food services, security, HR, admissions, or facilities, this bundle was created to honor your contribution and invest in your continued growth.

When we invest in every member of our school team, we create a thriving, equitable, and empowered school culture. Thank you to our incredible presenters, thoughtful participants, and dedicated partners for making this event — and this new resource — a success.

When we invest in every member of our school team, we create a thriving, equitable, and empowered school culture.

Ready for the School Operations bundle? Visit here to purchase the full course bundle for $400, or included with an ISS EDUlearn® Passport subscription.

You can follow Dana on Linkedin.





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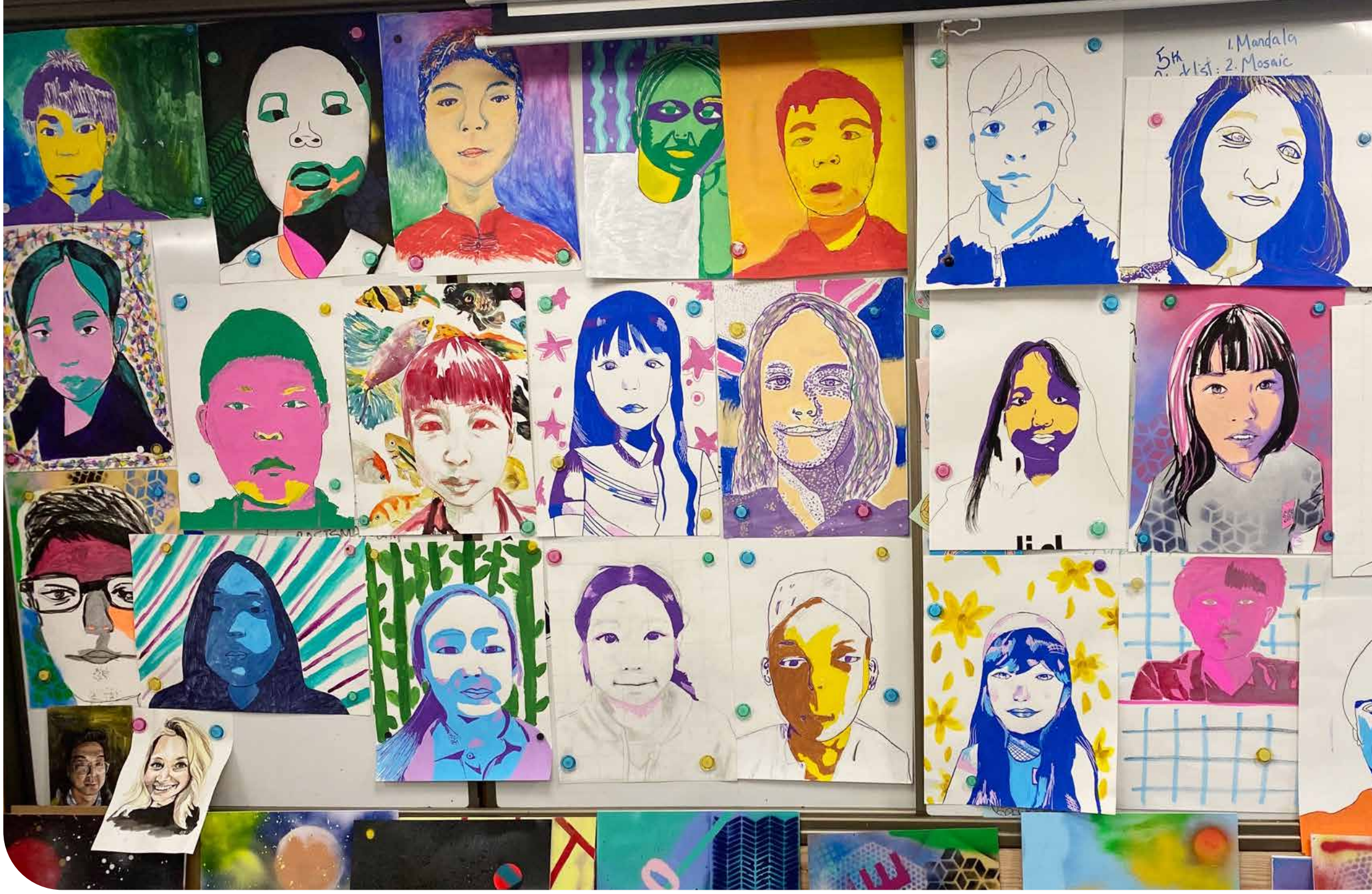
Ambatovy International School provides PreK to Grade 12 students a rich multicultural learning environment in a small school setting. The school's supportive and inspiring community empowers students to maximize their potential as learners and citizens of the world.



AIS teachers are passionate educators who will Act to support others, Insist on their best and have a desire to Stretch their boundaries.

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Learning to Action 2025-26

COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP FOR INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE SCHOOLS

By **Joel Jr Llaban**, ISS Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice

Over the past three years, more than 500 educators and leaders from 200+ schools have joined **Learning to Action** (L2A) — a global learning community committed to advancing equity-driven transformation in international education. This year, Learning to Action 2025–26 builds on that foundation with a renewed focus: sustaining equity as both a pedagogical practice and a strategic leadership imperative.

At ISS, we believe the values and practices of diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and belonging (DEIJB) are not optional; they are essential to student learning, safety, and thriving. When equity is intentionally embedded into teaching and leadership, students experience affirmation, deeper belonging, and the psychological safety they need to take risks and flourish.

What makes Learning to Action unique is its fusion of classroom practice and systemic leadership. L2A integrates both: recognizing that true transformation in international schools must simultaneously reshape teaching and learning and strategic, systemic leadership.

Continued on page 36

We believe the values and practices of DEIJB are not optional; they are essential to student learning, safety, and thriving

"Learning to Action 2025-26," continued from page 35





Learning Strand 1: Nov 2025

Designing for Inclusive, Equitable, and Just Teaching & Learning

- **Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Learning as a System: Dr. Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz**
- **Identity-Centered Learning and Pedagogy: Sagda Khalil & Amin Hussain**
- **Addressing Identity-Based Harm and Restorative Practices: Dr. Teneshia Taylor**
- **Inclusive, Equitable, and Affirming Curriculum, Assessment, and Pedagogy: Dr. Ying Chu**

Learning Strand 2: Jan-Feb 2026

Strategic, Systemic, and Culture Leadership

- **Equity as Strategy – Leading for Long-Term, Systemic Impact: Angeline Aow**
- **Equity-Minded Culture Leadership – Shaping Belonging and Psychological Safety: Dr. Darnell Fine**
- **Leading Through Resistance – Adaptive and Courageous Leadership: Jessica Wei Huang**
- **Data, Evidence, and Accountability in Equity Leadership: Ruth Herrin & Jessica Jones**

Core Stances

The program is anchored in six Core Stances that guide leaders toward just and inclusive school cultures. These stances remind us that belonging and equity are not left to goodwill or chance — they are designed through conscious leadership, courageous reflection, and systemic action.

1. Belonging is Intentional, Not Accidental
2. Inclusion is Everyone's Responsibility
3. Equity is Foundational, Not Optional
4. Every Space is a Site of Possibility
5. Stories and Relationships Drive Systemic Change
6. Reflection and Reimagination are Leadership Practices

Expectations and Outcomes

Through the Learning to Action 2025–26 program, you will:

- Engage with renowned facilitators, thought leaders, and international school practitioners in their own leadership and school contexts
- Be part of a supportive, creative global community that models belonging and collective learning
- Develop practical leadership skills to lead through complexity, address identity-based harm, redesign curriculum, and embed equity into every space of school life
- Equip yourself and your team with the clarity, courage, and capacity to sustain equity work as a foundation for student thriving

Next Steps

We encourage school-based teams to attend to deepen the impact at their schools, but individuals may participate as well. For teams, please complete this form and someone from ISS will get back to you for invoice and payment details. This registration form is exclusively for those who are registering a team of 3 or more members. When registering as a team of 3 or more, you'll enjoy a discounted rate of $400 per person.

If you wish to register individually at the regular rate of $500, please visit the registration form through ISS EDUplatform

The option of earning SUNY graduate credit is available for this course for an additional $130 per participant. Please email us at edulearn@iss.edu for more information.

We look forward to learning with you!

You can connect with Joel on LinkedIn.