SELF-STUDY VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT
WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES
FOR
TAIPEI AMERICAN SCHOOL
800 Chung Shan N. Road
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Opening Remarks by the WASC Visiting Committee Chair

Early in the report by the Visiting Committee in 2006 were several sentences that leap off the page, even now, years later:

“Despite a very fine teaching faculty, supportive parents who are actively involved in the school, and a hardworking and highly committed administration and Board of Directors, TAS is a school in crisis. In our meetings with constituent groups, the current school climate has been characterized as ‘toxic,’ ‘angry,’ ‘fearful’ and filled with ‘suspicion and mistrust.’”

“From our conversations with various groups of school stakeholders and from our observations with classrooms, the Visiting Committee does not believe that the conflict has, as yet, negatively impacted the education of TAS students. However, TAS is most definitely at a crossroads. Unless immediate steps are taken to manage and resolve this conflict, it will unquestionably come to detract from the quality of student learning and impair their achievement.”

It is not our purpose today to open old wounds or pick at scabs that have healed but the foregoing sentences do serve as a useful point of departure for this report because none of those words could have been written today, six years later.

Where that Visiting Committee saw a school in crisis, this Team has found a school in full bloom. Anger, fear, suspicion and mistrust have been replaced by delight, pride, openness and confidence – all of which serve to enhance student learning and encourage student achievement.

The conflict that the 2006 Report mentioned was, in fact and in keeping with the Team’s expressed hope, immediately managed and resolved. A mere 18 months later, a two-member Visiting Committee from WASC was able to write the following:

“…the two primary changes at the school since the last visit involve the appointment of a new Superintendent and a dramatic shift in both the make-up and tenor of the school’s governing body. These changes are deemed to be highly significant by the Visiting Committee as they relate to the school’s capacity for excellence.”

“The new Superintendent has helped resurrect order at the school through a transparent approach in communication. She has been particularly successful in creating a positive working relationship with the Board. Roles and responsibilities involving administrative responsibilities on the one hand, and fiscal and policy oversight on the other have been clarified.”

“The Board has been equally effective in their efforts to effectively address the gaps identified by the Visiting Committee two years ago. Those efforts include participation in several training
opportunities at EARCOS conferences as well as work with several individual consultants who have facilitated discussions that have helped achieve these new understandings.”

The Chair of the 2006 Visiting Committee had concluded his remarks by stressing that “the TAS community is facing danger, but you also have the opportunity of healing. And that opportunity, if it is realized, will come out of a delicate redirection and realignment of the passionate TAS loyalty that exists.”

The healing power of a school community can be truly remarkable. Most frequently this occurs following a tragedy – but healing can also occur in the face of something more nebulous and even more insidious than an instant tragedy. Here at TAS, you were all collectively on the brink of becoming dysfunctional six years ago. Now, though, look around you; look at yourselves, your colleagues, your workplace, your students, their families, this community -- look around you and feel good, very good, about what you see. There will be no resting on your laurels for there is always work to be done and improvement to be made in any school that strives to be as good as it can possibly be and we’ll get to that in a minute or two, but for now, take it from us as we cite the old Virginia Slims ad: “You’ve come a long way, Baby.” Indeed you have and this is a very fine school, believe us.

In every very fine school there lurks the danger of complacency. The TAS community came together six years ago in the time of troubles and rallied ‘round. Right now the threat to the school is invisible; it is called “stasis.” The capacity of the human mind to think when everything is fine that nothing could be better is infinite. A school that is suffering tuition fatigue may be tempted to relax, but what will be the long-term cost of such a short-term palliative? Parents who have just helped to build a new building ought not think that they won’t be asked again. And those who did not participate in funding that building should not think that others will always carry the burden. The way for a school to progress from Good to Great is never to rest, always goading itself to do better in everything it can, and to adopt as its mantra the age-old wisdom that “Good enough never is.”

In the present instance, flushed with success, the TAS community – all the stakeholders, great and small – must recognize and agree that stasis is the enemy of progress and work together to resist the temptation to rest on their laurels, no matter how richly deserved they are.
CHAPTER I: SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY PROFILE

“Founded in 1949, Taipei American School (TAS) is a non-profit, independent coeducational day school that offers an American-based educational program with an international perspective from Kindergarten A to Grade 12. The school is incorporated in Delaware as the Taipei American School Foundation and is governed by a nine-member board of directors elected for overlapping three-year terms by the Taipei American School Association comprised of the parents of children enrolled in the school.

TAS is an educational institution owned and operated by the Taipei American School Foundation for the education, in accordance with American educational concepts, of children of foreign business people, technicians, scholars, missionaries and other foreigners in Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China. The school currently enjoys a special relationship with the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT). It is because of this special relationship that TAS exists. Now in its 63rd year, TAS has been fully accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) since 1972.”

Located in a northern suburb of Taipei, the school occupies a campus of 6.5 hectares. The campus is wireless, with fiber optic cable that services its IT needs as a 1:1 laptop school in the middle and upper grades. The school has 180 classrooms, with 14 science classrooms and labs, two lower school computer labs, a four-story library/IT media complex, music and art studios and performance areas, and two theaters. Athletic facilities include a pool, two gyms, tennis courts, and two artificial surface play fields. The cafeteria, pizza bar, Village Snack Bar and Fitness Café serve nearly 3,000 customers per day and TAS is the only school that any of us has ever visited, or even heard about, that is open 24/7!

In September 2010, TAS commenced construction of three new buildings on campus. When finished, in the summer of 2012, they will provide state-of-the-art facilities in science and technology with laboratories for research and robotics, in addition to a performing arts building and a new gym with covered and outdoor tennis courts. A deliberate by-product of the new construction will be contiguous classroom spaces for other academic disciplines such as math, English and social studies. The new and renovated classrooms will include the latest technology while the school cafeteria will increase in size by some 60%, allowing more seating and space for greater variety in menu options. Commendably, the design plans qualify the new buildings to receive the Bronze Ecology, Energy Saving, Waste Reduction and Health Certifications.

The school describes itself as “an innovative 21st century learning community” and states that its Mission is “to inspire each student to be a confident, creative, caring, and moral individual prepared to adapt and succeed anywhere in a rapidly changing world. We provide an American-based education with a global perspective that results in a love of learning, academic excellence, a balanced life, and service to others.”
To fulfill this Mission, the school is divided into three divisions: Lower School (grades KA-5), Middle School (grades 6-8), and Upper School (grades 9-12). There is a stated “focus on preserving divisional autonomy while maintaining the important KA-12 aspects such as curriculum, expected schoolwide learning results (ESLRs) teacher standards and evaluation, and other schoolwide initiatives as identified in the [school’s] Strategic Plan.”

Since the last full accreditation visit six years ago, there have been subtle changes in the school’s demography while the overall enrollment has remained relatively static at right around 2200. The changes include increases in the numbers of Australians, Canadians and South Koreans with accompanying dips in the numbers of Indians and Japanese, and those classified as “Others.” By division, enrollment in the lower school has dropped slightly during the last six years, the middle school has remained relatively constant and the upper school has grown by roughly 4%.

Administratively, TAS is headed by a Superintendent, three assistant superintendents (one each for learning, business and operations, and advancement, and each of the three divisions has its own principal and associate principals. Additionally, there is a human resources director, a controller, and a technology director, for a total of 15 administrators – eight male, seven female – seven of whom are American, two British, two Australian, two Canadian, one British, one Irish and two Taiwanese. The work of the administrative team is supported by a largely female staff of 239.

There are currently 249 members of the teaching faculty, of whom 80% hold either the Doctorate degree (7%) or a Master’s (73%). The remaining 20% of teachers hold a Bachelor’s degree. In addition to the degrees they hold, the faculty reflect both the American basis for TAS’s educational program and also the international flavor of the world their students will enter: two-thirds are themselves American, with the balance of the faculty coming from Australia, Great Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of China and Singapore – nationalities not unlike those of the students entrusted to them.

The TAS curriculum is designed to satisfy the entrance requirements of American colleges and universities. 94% of the Class of 2011 entered such institutions and tertiary education in the United States is the aspiration of nearly all families with children in the school. Physical education and the fine and performing arts are important components of a TAS education. The Self-Study states that the school’s “curricular program is based on exemplary subject area standards and benchmarks from the United States. Much effort is placed on ensuring articulation of the curriculum from KA through grade 12.” To encourage such alignment, the school uses the Understanding by Design (UbD) model for curriculum development in addition to the online program, Atlas Rubicon, which helps document and map the curriculum. “The overarching goal of our written curriculum,” the Self-Study asserts, “is to achieve consistency without sacrificing teacher flexibility or creativity.”

Given the demography of the student body, not surprisingly TAS places a special emphasis on English language development. “At each division, special attention is given to developing communication skills; these include oral language skills through drama, public speaking, and other opportunities for students
to express themselves orally.” Again not surprisingly, there is a strong ESL program, most evident in the lower school and “achieved through a sheltered immersion program” in which SDL teachers work with students both within the homeroom and also in pull-out groups as necessary. Approximately 30% of lower school students require ESL support each year, a figure that has not changed significantly in recent years. The numbers diminish during the middle school years where there is a pull-out program designed to mirror the curriculum of the mainstream English class, and, since 2008, ESL, *per se*, has disappeared altogether from the upper school curriculum.

To provide the rich curricular opportunities one would expect in a first-rate high school in the United States, TAS offers Honors, Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses that enable students to “tailor the rigor and depth of their education.” Some students opt for an IB diploma in addition to their American one. Pursuit of AP and IB-level courses is nearly universal at TAS, as 200 out of last year’s graduating class of 202 took at least one IB class or sat an AP exam.

Reflecting the hi-tech, highly educated environment they live in, many TAS students are especially interested in science, technology and mathematics. “Curricular programs and offerings in these areas are designed to take advantage of these talents and interests.” One can literally see the school’s commitment to science and technology in the newly dedicated building that gets closer to completion by the day. The “new upper school science and technology center will further enable TAS to offer new and exciting opportunities for students both within the school setting and in the greater Taipei area.”

Supporting the school’s academic program are eight full-time personal and academic counselors, 11 specially trained ESL teachers, and 12 student support teachers including two psychologists. In addition, there are currently five college counselors knowledgeable in the ins-and-outs of the American college admission process.

As stated in the Self-Study, “TAS accepts students with mild learning differences into the regular academic program. The Student Support Services department provides a range of services to maximize each student’s social, emotional and academic growth. The resources offered by the Student Support Services department include language enrichment for early childhood, reading intervention, speech/language therapy, learning resource specialists support, academic support classes; personal, academic, and guidance counseling, and psychological services.” In the most recent school year, 113 lower school students availed themselves of these services, along with 61 in the middle and only 27 in the upper, figures that suggest a high degree of both alignment in mission and effectiveness in performance among the three divisions.

**School’s Analysis of Student Achievement Data**

With all the specialists, classroom teachers and support faculty available to them, TAS students might be expected to do well on standardized tests and, in fact, they do. All students in grades 3 through 8 take the ERB comprehensive tests common to leading American independent schools, thereby giving their
teachers a good feel for where they stand vis-à-vis peers in other strong schools. As the Self-Study avers and as the Visiting Committee concurs, “TAS students consistently perform at or above the independent private school norm group in all areas.” Indeed, when charted against American independent school norms, TAS students prove superior in verbal reasoning, vocabulary, reading comprehension, writing mechanics, writing concepts, quantitative reasoning and mathematics.

In the upper school, again like their counterparts in Stateside independent high schools, TAS students take the PSAT in both their 10th and 11th grade years and their performances are typically very strong. While the national averages for the three sections of the recently re-centered and expanded SAT hover around 1500, the TAS average is above 1900, as compared with an independent school average of 1784. The school notes that “Our students score highest in the math area and lowest in critical reading ...identical to general scoring patterns throughout the United States...” Similar results occur when the students take subject-specific Achievement Tests and AP and IB exams.

The school’s system of giving common assessments (though seemingly more widely observed in the lower and middle schools than in the upper) is sound preparation for the national and international standardized tests students are obliged to take. Item analyses of such assessments will often pinpoint common strengths or weaknesses in a given unit of instruction and thereby highlight areas for improvement. At TAS, every grade level and subject area has assessments to measure student mastery of the curriculum. “These common assessments are used by every teacher who teaches the grade level or course...to identify areas of strength and areas for growth. This information is used to identify potential programmatic changes as well as areas where professional development is needed.”

**Other Pertinent Data**

In its Mission Statement, TAS describes itself as, “an innovative 21st century learning community.” One would expect such a school to be up-to-the-minute in its use of instructional technology and TAS endeavors to be just that with a 1:1 laptop environment in its upper and middle divisions “where each faculty member and each student has access to computer technology that allows the utilization of a range of technological tools.” In the lower division, the aim is to have a 1:2 environment. In each division there are technology coordinators and becoming computer-comfortable technophiles has been a major focus of the school’s professional development efforts in recent years.

TAS provides a wide array of co-curricular and service activities for its students. In the lower school, the Taipei Youth Program Association (TYPA) sponsors after-school activities that are widely subscribed by TAS students. In middle school, the focus shifts to school-based clubs and intramural sports, with over 85% of the students participating in more than one activity. Upper school clubs and student organizations meet weekly or bi-weekly and have faculty sponsors. In the last school year, the number of such clubs and organizations approached nearly 70, affording every student the chance to affiliate with one or more interest groups.
As a member school of the IASAS organization, TAS students participate in a variety of sports, arts-related activities, forensics and Model UN activities at four different levels: varsity, JV, freshman and Middle School. Additionally, the Self-Study notes that “TAS has a rich history of service to Taiwan and other parts of the world. Each division has organizations and activities that provide valuable experiences for students to serve their community and the greater global community.”

A team of five college counselors sees to the post-secondary placement needs of the students, with nearly all graduates matriculating to high-quality, competitive American colleges and universities while the balance tend to pursue higher education in the UK, Canada or Japan, likely a reflection of their nationalities. The testing profile of college-bound students is strong, with noticeable recent increases in the numbers of AP Scholars with Honor and AP Scholars with Distinction. In nearly all, but not quite all content areas, TAS students outperform worldwide averages in their AP and IB test results. Not surprisingly, these results are continuations of the strong performance patterns laid down during the Lower and Middle School years.
CHAPTER II: PROGRESS REPORT

Major Changes Since the 2006 WASC Visit

Several significant changes have taken place at TAS since the 2006 WASC visit. The fundamental question surrounding that visit was, simply put, “Who’s in charge here?” The school’s response to that question was swift. In February 2007 a new Superintendent, Dr. Sharon Hennessey, was appointed and took charge. In the words of the Self-Study, “the effect on TAS was immediate and profound.”

At the same time, efforts to improve Board governance were underway. The transformation of the board into a cohesive body that understands its proper role has come about as the result of attendance at conferences, internal discussions, the retention of consultants, and “multiple board governance training” exercises that culminated in 2011 with the promulgation of a new board policy manual that “clearly delineates the roles and responsibilities of the Board and those of the Administration.”

Each of these changes is significant in itself and could serve to revitalize a school but TAS has gone a step farther as a result and undertaken to construct a new science and technology building that is nearing completion at the time of the current WASC visit.

Less evident, but of significant impact, are an administration-driven school improvement plan and a three-year strategic plan that was highly collaborative in its origin, using input from all stakeholders: teachers, parents, students, alumni, administration and the Board. That plan is now in its third and final year and the Schoolwide Action Plan resulting from the current Self-Study will form the basis of the new strategic plan.

Finally, another change since the last WASC visit has been a “clarification of the student population” the school serves that has resulted in greater attention being paid to learning styles and special needs, leading to deployment of specialists to deal with those students.

The Critical Areas for Follow-up Identified in the 2006 Action Plan

There were 11 critical areas stemming from the 2006 Self-Study and Visiting Committee report whose current status are described in detail in the Self-Study. Briefly:

1. Resolve the conflict between Board and administration so that professional staff “share a sense of ownership in [strategic planning goals] and are energized and empowered toward their implementation.” With a new Superintendent in place, a new strategic plan made operative through a widely collaborative process, changes in the administrative team, faculty buy-in, and a transparent process, this area has been well addressed.

2. Use data analysis to increase achievement of ESLRs, track student assessment and promote professional development. This critical area has garnered a lot of attention. “Increasing student
achievement, for all students, is a high priority at TAS. Improving curriculum and course offerings in all core areas, assessing and analyzing student learning results has focused much of [the school’s] attention since 2006.” Program improvement efforts are currently focused on Mandarin, English, math, science and technology, and character education. Use of internal and external assessments together with tracking of longitudinal data helps monitor progress and identify trends. Contributing to this is the wider use of common assessments than before. At the same time, professional development funding clearly aligned with strategic initiatives and program improvements has been greatly increased.

3. The Board and administration clarify and communicate their respective roles in the governance of TAS. Through the employment of outside consultants, participation in EARCOS-sponsored workshops, the use of National Association of Independent Schools’ “Markers of Success,” and collaboration with the Superintendent, the governance issues that clouded the horizon six years ago have been effectively eliminated. Progress in this area is monitored and is transparent through stakeholder surveys and regularly scheduled meetings.

4. Development of new ESLRs. New Expected Schoolwide Learning Results were developed through the work of a committee of parents, students, board members, administration and faculty in 2007. The posted ESLRs now are visible throughout the school. Administrators at all levels have used parent coffees, faculty meetings and parent gathering and communications to stress the importance of the ESLRs as they are integrated into the formal curriculum. As part of the Self-Study process, a student survey on the ESLRs indicated a commendably high degree of buy-in.

5. The Board and administration engage in governance training. Yearly retreats, the retention of consultants, participation in regional conferences, and greater communication of schoolwide goals culminated in the 2011 publication of a new board policy manual that details the school’s governance very clearly.

6. Build a school culture that is characterized by trust, respect, empowerment, cooperation, collaboration and celebration. A somewhat nebulous goal like this is best measured by the unmeasurable, namely “feelings.” If people feel that there is a new environment; if they feel supported, listened to and valued; if they feel they have a stake in what’s going on – if they feel these things, then they’re probably right. At the same time, formal assessments can help undergird such feelings and surveys of the teaching staff are clear in showing the improvement since 2006.

7. “Seek to understand before being understood.” TAS addressed this need by removing the veil of cynicism and suspicion that had previously surrounded Board-Administration activities. The Superintendent who arrived in 2007 established practices of communication, both formal and informal, professional and social, that have broken down most of the historic barriers to trust and understanding.

8. Professional development as a key to student learning. Taking the lead from their division and departmental leadership, teachers now find their professional development activities more clearly focused and specific to student needs than was the case previously. There are ten days per year set aside as teachers’ development days. The use of common assessments has promoted collaboration among faculty and lower and middle school teachers have time within the school day to hold collaborative meetings that focus on curriculum alignment.
9. Develop a budget that will enable the school to fulfill its Action Plan. Tuition increases and fund-raising efforts have resulted in there being “significantly more resources available to support student programs and faculty professional development” than had previously been the case. The Board’s role in the budgeting process has been clarified and it now approves both the annual operating budget and a capital budget, thereby “assuring that there are sufficient resources to fund the agreed upon strategic plan and the annual school improvement plan that emanates from it.”

10. Communicate the need for potential facility expansion projects. Obviously this need was pretty well explained for one need only look up to see the result! Ground was broken for the new gym, science and technology buildings in August 2010 and their completion is imminent.

11. Commitment to long-range planning. “The 2009-2012 strategic plan clearly identifies focus areas for the next few years. The Board requested that the administration project budget and staffing needs in order to fully realize the strategic plan. Careful monitoring of enrollment needs and actual enrollment figures have allowed for carefully planned resource management that will enable the Board to fulfill its commitment to fully fund the strategic plan.”

As a result of the attention paid since 2006 to these critical areas for improvement, the school now can assert the following: “TAS has clearly resolved many of the outstanding issues. New relationships have been forged between faculty and administration and administration and Board of Directors. The mission has been clarified and the roles and responsibilities of all constituents have been defined. Clear areas of focus have been identified through the strategic planning process. All of this progress has cleared the path for teachers to focus on their classrooms, their students and their practice. Student achievement has become the highest priority at TAS and all systems – budget, curriculum, faculty, Board and facilities – have been aligned to focus on our students and enable each and every one of them to achieve to their highest potential. The community has shown its respect for the many significant changes through ratings on the annual parent climate survey, tuition increases, significant increases for annual giving, and overall support for the direction of the school.”

The 2012 Visiting Committee finds nothing to disagree with in that statement.
CHAPTER III: SELF-STUDY PROCESS

Taipei American School values the self-study process as an opportunity for continued growth. The school community invested in a comprehensive and collaborative self-study process. As they worked through the self-study tasks, they maintained a focus on student learning. The report reveals an honest self-reflection on the current state of the school. Specific comments on the fulfillment of the five Focus on Learning parameters are below.

1. Involvement and collaboration of stakeholders in the self-study.

The TAS WASC Leadership Team purposefully developed a plan to include the school community’s key stakeholders in the self-study process. They began in October 2010 by identifying the Self-Study Coordinator, focus co-chairs and members. The Leadership Team delineated roles and responsibilities for the coordinator and focus groups to keep the work oriented to the WASC guidelines. TAS is to be commended on the composition of the focus groups because administrators, teachers, parents and board members participated in each group. With a large school community and a limited number of membership spaces for the focus groups, it is important to have a diverse set of perspectives. The focus groups included faculty with a variety of subject area expertise, experience and length of stay at TAS. In addition, the focus groups represented a balance of cultural and gender-based perspectives. However, it is noted that student participation only occurred through the WASC student surveys, annual student-to-teacher feedback surveys, and student conference groups during the WASC visit.

To maintain open lines of communication, Google docs were used as a collaborative space for gathering information and identifying areas of strength and growth. The Google docs were shared with all constituents through their home groups. The self-study included survey data developed specifically for WASC, along with annual survey data. In addition, draft reports were shared with both the school leadership and faculty. All stakeholders had an opportunity to contribute to the report before it was completed.

2. Clarification of the school’s purpose and expected schoolwide learning results.

Over the last five years, TAS has taken the time to clarify the school’s purpose, mission and ESLRs. “Mission Clarity” was a primary theme for the Strategic Plan after the last WASC self-study and the school community has realigned under the leadership of the Superintendent. While the mission has not changed, TAS recommitted to the mission by increasing the schoolwide community’s understanding of its meaning. In addition, the school leadership has defined and communicated the school purpose: TAS is a college-preparatory school that emulates the best independent and public schools in the United States and is shaped by its international setting and diverse population. The college-preparatory focus implies an emphasis on academics.

In 2006, a task force of students, parents, board members, faculty and administration drafted a new set of Expected Schoolwide Learning Results. The ESLRs were developed under the umbrella of 21st century learning skills. Once the new ESLRs were confirmed, they were publicized widely within the school community. The self-study report asserts that the ESLRs are ‘infused into the fabric of TAS’.
With the ESLRs clearly visible throughout the school, students are better able to articulate the school’s Core Values.

In total, TAS uses six methods to communicate the school identity. These include the school mission, the school college-preparatory purpose, the vision, “The Bridge from an Island to the World” branding, the ESLRs and the Core Values. It is important to note that the TAS school community holds the mission, purpose, ESLRs and Core Values in high regard. Throughout the WASC self-study process, it has been clear that a college-preparatory and academic excellence focus are central to TAS’ school identity.

3. **Assessment of the actual student program and its impact on student learning with respect to the criteria.**

To truly assess the student program at TAS, the WASC Leadership Team found multiple ways to show evidence of student learning. Since the last WASC Self-Study, TAS has implemented curriculum reviews and common assessments. Through the curriculum review process, a team of K-12 teachers and administrators assessed the effectiveness of the subject area’s curriculum, and evaluated current research and best practices. Schoolwide changes to curriculum occurred through the review in order to improve student learning. Common assessments are also in place to regularly assess student learning. As detailed in the Self-Study, this is a first step and the administration expects to assist teachers in using common assessments to inform instruction. In addition, TAS uses external standardized assessment results to monitor student success. These include ERB CTP-4, WrAP, SAT, AP, and IB assessments. The results are strong for all TAS students and, in particular, for the cohort of students who have attended TAS from third to eighth grade.

The TAS Self-Study acknowledges the challenge in assessing student learning with the ESLRs. At this time, they do not have a systematic process for evaluating the ESLRs. For the WASC Self-Study, they developed a student survey that includes a multiple-part question on growth within the ESLRs. These data provide a snapshot into students’ perception of growth as creative thinker, healthy individual, ethical person, versatile learner, enthusiastic collaborator, information savvy learner, skillful communicator, and conscientious citizen. To develop a robust ESLR program, the TAS Administration and faculty plan to find systematic and authentic ways to measure this growth.

4. **Development of a schoolwide action plan that integrates subject area/program and support plans to address identified growth needs.**

TAS develops their strategic plan concurrently with the WASC Self-Study, so that they may fold the WASC schoolwide action plan into the larger strategic planning process. In consultation with Dr. Ralph Davison, TAS began work on the new Strategic Plan in August 2011. Upon reflection on their areas of strength and growth, TAS proposes a schoolwide action plan that moves the school forward on initiatives already in place. Work within the ESLRs is a primary theme and can be seen in TAS’ aspirations to implement a K-12 character development program, improve upon the ESL program, and assess the ESLRs. In addition, the faculty seeks to refine the K-12 curriculum by ensuring that courses are fully developed with the UbD model, common assessment data is used to improve curriculum and instruction and guarantee that the curriculum is articulated between divisions. These are essential areas of growth, which were addressed in the 2006 WASC report. In addition, TAS
wishes to increase its revenues through non-tuition fundraising and marketing, although they have not yet fleshed out a solid plan to accomplish this.

A Strategic Plan will be developed in the coming months that combines the findings of the WASC Visiting Committee recommendations and the results of strategic planning surveys sent to parents, alumni and faculty. TAS plans to use the resulting Strategic Plan to guide future programming decisions, resource allocations and budgeting decisions.

5. Development and implementation of an accountability system for monitoring the accomplishment of the action plan.

The schoolwide action plan has a built-in accountability system through the three-year Strategic Plan. Each item has a designated group or individual responsible for overseeing the task. The school leadership team revisits the action plan annually to determine progress and make adjustments as needed. The annual operational plan is created following an annual review of progress towards the Strategic Plan goals. Within the Strategic Plan, TAS clearly assigns operational tasks to the school leadership team and allocates board responsibilities appropriately. This follows the new board policy manual that defines the roles and responsibilities of the board and administration.
CHAPTER IV A: ORGANIZATION FOR STUDENT LEARNING

A1 School Purpose Criterion

Focus Questions:

- To what extent has the school established a clear statement of purpose that reflects the beliefs and philosophy of the institution?
- To what extent is the purpose defined further by adopted expected schoolwide learning results that form the basis of the educational program for every student?

Beliefs and Philosophy

TAS asserts its beliefs and philosophy in its Mission Statement, its ESLRs, and in its stated approach to student-centered education. Specifically, TAS declares itself to be “an innovative 21st century learning community. Our mission is to inspire each student to be a confident, creative, caring, and moral individual prepared to adapt and succeed anywhere in a rapidly changing world.” Its eight ESLRs are buttressed by four core values that TAS considers fundamental to character education and to the culture of the school: Honesty, Respect, Responsibility, and Kindness. Moreover, in the summary statement of the Self-Study’s Chapter III, one finds the cornerstone assertion of the learning environment the school seeks to create: “Student achievement has become the highest priority at TAS and all systems - budget, curriculum, faculty, Board and facilities - have been aligned to focus on our students and enable each and every one of them to achieve to their highest potential.”

Purpose, Expected Schoolwide Learning Results and Profile Data

The ESLRs at TAS were developed through a collaborative process in 2006-7 that involved parents, administrators, students, faculty and board members that resulted, in large measure, from the 2006 WASC Visiting Committee’s report and subsequent Action Plan. Synopsized, the ESLRs state the school’s aim of educating students to become creative thinkers, healthy individuals, ethical people, versatile learners, enthusiastic collaborators, information savvy learners, skillful communicators and conscientious citizens. The ESLRs themselves are posted throughout the school. Assessing the impact of the ESLRs is done informally through meetings and discussions involving the entire school community and also more pointedly through surveys and formal assessments. Through analysis of these data collected from faculty surveys, academic test results and Student/Community Profile data, TAS has identified one ESLR as needing further improvement: skillful communication. As a result, new emphases in pedagogy and curriculum across the divisions have been adopted to help students develop greater competence in oral communication.

Involvement of All

As noted above, the ESLRs were the product of group effort and are widely promulgated and subscribed. Similarly and significantly, TAS employs data collected from many stakeholders to help drive curricular change, as in the case of the emphasis on oral communication, an instance, the Self-Study notes, where feedback on “an ESLR did drive a specific programmatic change.”

Consistency of Purpose, ESLRs and Program
The same published ESLRs are visible to the first grader as they are to the high school senior and permeate the learning environment in a healthy way. Reflecting this continuity, the academic, co- and extra-curricular offerings at the school are appropriately sequential and aligned.

While the TAS ESLRS are well published and useful, it is the values which are the focus of the character education programs and are the words that live on the lips of students.

Bearing in mind that the school puts student achievement as its highest priority, extensive surveying of students helps determine that the program is meeting its objectives. To the extent that college matriculation data constitute a useful measuring stick, the school is clearly achieving its purpose of pursuing academic excellence.

**Communication of Purpose, ESLRs and Program**

The school has worked hard to improve its communication skills in recent years. Through meetings, newsletters, coffees and progress reports, parents have many opportunities to be *au courant* of both the programs going on at school and their rationale. The Self-Study notes that “it is essential that all community members share a sense of purpose and understand the goals and direction of the school.” With this in mind, the current Action Plan outlines the steps, timeline, measurements, responsible individuals, Board actions and potential costs necessary to achieve this.

**Regular Review/Revision**

TAS definitely subscribes to the idea that a good school constantly “reviews and renews.” The terms laid down by the 2006 Visiting Committee were so strict, in fact, that the school was obliged to be in a near-constant state of review and revision for the next five years. In 2006 and 2007 much of the attention was focused on school leadership at the Superintendent and Board levels. Once those issues had been sorted out, focus turned to the generation of a strategic plan, which was officially adopted at a public meeting on August 25, 2009, and work on the next strategic plan began in August of 2011. As the Self-Study states, “the administrative team regularly reviews the plans of action that devolve from the Strategic Plan, which is displayed year-round in the board meeting room. The Board is regularly updated on the action items. Each year, lower and middle schools create a divisional goal based on the strategic plan. Some aspects of the strategic plan are tied to the school’s markers of success, and the plan and markers of success are reported to the community. This is consistently integrated into the AGM presentation, where the board of directors and superintendent formally report to the TAS parent community.”

**A2. Governance Criterion**

**Focus questions:**

- To what extent does the governing authority adopt policies which are consistent with the school purpose and support achievement of the ESLRs for the school?
- To what extent does the governing authority delegate implementation of these policies to the professional staff?
- To what extent does the governing authority monitor results?

**Clear Policies and Procedures**
The Board of Directors has written, adopted and published a *Board Policy Manual* following lengthy consultation with consultants, the Superintendent and within the Board itself. This manual is aligned with best practices to assure that all Board policies are strategic and not operational. The manual addresses not only the appropriate areas for Board action but also the methods for selecting and training new board members, who are elected by the TAS parent body.

**Pretraining of Potential Board Members**

There is a codified process for election and orientation to the Board. Board membership is restricted to school parents who currently have at least one child enrolled in TAS. There are nine members elected for three-year terms, thus assuring three new members of the Board each year. Newly elected members of the board follow a prescribed orientation procedure that brings them current on all policy matters as well as on EARCOS issues, professional development opportunities, conferences and consultants who are working with TAS.

**Relationship of Policies**

Policies adopted by the Board “serve as guiding principles for the courses of action for implementation by the Superintendent.” There is no evidence that the Board’s policies and actions are not directly connected to the school’s ESLRs. Indeed, there is great evidence that the Board and the school’s educational leadership are in harmony on matters pertaining to the School’s mission and purpose. Board involvement in school-wide committees and discussion groups promotes a sense of involvement and also of knowing what’s going on in the life of the school.

**Involvement of Governing Authority and Community Understanding**

Since 2006, the Board of Directors has been visibly and appropriately involved in reviewing and refining the school’s mission and purpose. The Board has gone to great lengths to assure its openness, transparency and availability. Board meeting minutes are published; highlights of Board meetings are posted on the day the meetings are held; Board meetings are open and can be attended by all members of the community; reports of the Board are published in the school magazine that comes out three times per year; the Annual Report highlights what the Board has been doing and there are periodic letters from the Board to the community. There is no question that the broader community of the school understands and accepts and endorses the role of the Board in the life of the school and appreciates the Board’s availability and responsiveness. Annual parent surveys have indicated growing awareness of, and confidence in, Board activities -- a positive trend indeed.

**Relationship to Professional Staff**

Where there once existed resentment and an antipathy toward the Board among the professional staff, such enmity has disappeared since the last WASC team visited the school six years ago. Faculty and support staff understand and accept that the Board’s role is to make their success possible by providing the resources, budgets, financial support and strategies for achieving the school’s goals. By providing the resources, the Board is offering tangible evidence of its support; by not meddling in the academic life of the school, the Board is demonstrating its respect for the professionalism and competence of the faculty and staff; by staying out of the administration’s way, the Board is allowing the educational
professionals to plot the school’s educational course in keeping with the Board’s strategic interests and objectives.

Evaluation Procedures and Evaluation of Governing Authority

The TAS Board currently has two evaluative criteria that it employs, one internal the other external. The internal comes in the form of an annual self-evaluation tool that each Board member fills out and the results are then discussed by the full Board. Additionally, because the school subscribes to the NAIS “Markers of Success” initiative, the following areas of school effectiveness can all be assessed by the Board: student outcomes; satisfied families; strong market demand; participation in annual giving; capacity to attract and retain high quality faculty; market appropriate tuition; efficient faculty/student structures that parallel best practices, and effective professional development and technology programs. Each of these areas is quantifiable and suitable for comparative studies with other, similar schools as the Board assesses institutional effectiveness on a broad front.

Perhaps no other area of life and work at TAS has undergone such a transformation in the last six years as the role of the Board of Directors. Because it now functions as a Board should, acceptance flows to it from the school community. Mistrust has been replaced by faith; antipathy by respect; animosity by friendship; enervation by enthusiasm; defiance by commitment; disagreement by support. If there ever were a significant Major Commendation, this would be it.

A3. School Leadership Criterion

Focus questions:

- To what extent does the school leadership make decisions to facilitate actions that focus the energies of the school on student achievement of the ESLRs?
- To what extent does the school leadership empower the staff?
- To what extent does the school leadership encourage commitment, participation and shared accountability for student learning?

Defined Responsibilities, Practices, etc.

Paralleling the creation of a new Board Policy Manual, the current academic year has also witnessed the ongoing production of a new faculty handbook to define clearly the responsibilities of administrators and faculty. The school has an organizational chart and the functional divisions of responsibility by grade level and area of expertise are clearly visible. In addition to the divisions of responsibility by administrative function and grade, the faculty is also divided into teaching teams by grade level and discipline.

Existing Structures

The organizational structure of TAS is clear: Superintendent, Assistant Superintendents, Division Principals, Associate Principals, academic department heads, grade level teams and the like. There should be no doubt in any faculty or staff member’s mind about the chain-of-command or who is responsible for what. “Every school year is started by three professional days when the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendents, division principals, and other members of the school administration speak to
the faculty and staff about school goals and strategies.” During the year there are faculty and staff meetings that routinely highlight specific goals and plans and help focus the community on the school’s ESLRs. Each division head provides his/her faculty with a weekly email or blog to keep everyone in the division abreast of upcoming events. These postings are also used to highlight faculty and staff who were responsible for recently-held successful events, serving as a public pat-on-the-back. Each academic division has teams that meet regularly and that circulate minutes of those meetings. All administrators observe teachers, attend meetings, and meet with faculty and staff on a regular basis. Various forms of internal communication facilitate the flow of information: in addition to email, TAS makes use of blogs, shared folders, Online Classroom and Google Docs, among others. When differences arise, there are clear strategies for addressing them. In addition to low-level resolutions, the school also has a Faculty Advisory Committee “which provides a non-confrontational method of having schoolwide issues raised with the Superintendent.” It is the responsibility of the Assistant Superintendent for Learning to assure that the academic divisions are aligned in their ESLRs, curriculum and pedagogy.

Involvement of Staff

TAS strikes the Visiting Committee as a very participatory school where teams and committees abound. All faculty members are encouraged to meet with team and department leaders regularly and in many instances team structures work very well. There is a conscientious effort to align the academic program and practices with the school’s strategic plan. Indeed, the Self-Study asserts that “the strategic plan drives the entire school” and the plan itself is the product of input from all manner of stakeholders, including faculty and staff. Long-term curricular planning involves steering committees from each of the three divisions that are “made up of representatives of the teams and departments that are at the core of teaching and student learning.” There is a deliberate focus on achieving the school’s ESLRs and the three divisions work both independently and interdependently to achieve them. The Assistant Superintendent for Learning is responsible for the curriculum and the aforementioned teams and committees, through their appropriate channels, ultimately report to her. What occurs in one division obviously affects the learning experiences and environments of the other two divisions, so curricular changes are proposed, discussed and adopted through a highly transparent and collaborative process.

Review of Existing Processes

Because the organization of TAS is so tight and because there is such a high degree of buy-in to the collaborative scheme of schoolwide improvement, it seems as though decision-making processes are under near-constant review and refinement. As the Self-Study notes, “Review of student achievement, ESLRs, teacher performance, sports participation, club participation, standardized test results, external exam scores, and student, parent, faculty and alumni surveys are just some examples of the objective and subjective data that are continually reviewed at TAS to ensure that [the school is] providing a safe yet challenging environment for [its] students.” While writing such a statement is easy, putting into action is more difficult and, based on the Visiting Committee’s research and observations, there is every reason to believe that TAS has accomplished this.
A4. Staff Criterion

Focus Questions:

- To what extent are the school leadership and staff qualified for their assigned responsibilities?
- To what extent are the school leadership and staff committed to the school’s purpose?
- To what extent does [sic] the school leadership and staff engage in ongoing professional development that promotes student learning?

Employment Policies/Practices and Qualifications

Faculty hiring is the shared responsibility of the Superintendent and the division principals. TAS goes to great lengths (literally) to seek out the best teachers it can, including trips to international hiring fairs, attendance at conferences and interviewing sessions in the United States, announcements on its website and also through internal messaging. For local hires, the school uses the China Post and Taipei Times to make available positions known in the community. All faculty hires meet the requirements of the ROC Employment Services Act, which entitles employees to a work visa in Taiwan. 100% of the teaching faculty hold bachelor’s degrees; 73% have Master’s degrees and 7% possess doctorates. Support staff are ROC nationals and they are hired and managed by the Assistant Superintendent of Business and Operations. The recruitment process for support staff includes a written application, reference, health check and criminal background checks depending on the position.

Maximum Use of Staff Expertise

All TAS teaching faculty hold degrees in the content area to which they are assigned or in a closely-related field. By working in teams, faculty members are able to support, supplement and augment one another’s expertise in the content areas in an efficient and effective manner. Subject matter mastery does not appear to be an issue among the teachers of TAS. The same holds true for the deployment of the support staff.

Support of Professional Development

“Professional development for new faculty at TAS begins on arrival in Taipei,” according to the Self-Study and the opportunities for improvement and development seem never to end. There are ten days per teacher per year set aside for professional development. The annual aims of the school’s professional development program are aligned with the current strategic plan. Prioritization of funding is based on the goals of the plan and falls in the domain of the Assistant Superintendent for Learning and the division principals. Money available for professional development has increased steadily over the past three years as there has been a major push for faculty to be up-to-the-minute in their fields. TAS teachers regularly attend (and present at) EARCOS conferences and other meetings around the world. Since the last WASC report, TAS has made progress in achieving its mission to become an, “innovative 21st century learning community.” Further support for teaching and learning initiatives such as 1:1 laptops and technology will continue to enhance teachers’ ability to transform instruction and lesson delivery to reflect an increasingly progressive, facilitative approach.
Supervision and Evaluation

TAS has identified 15 teaching standards that form the basis of both a teacher’s job description and a teacher’s evaluation. These standards are derived from research and current best practices. There is a standard rubric for Supervision and Evaluation throughout the school but it is approached somewhat differently by division. For example, in addition to that process in the lower and middle schools, each member of those faculties completes a Professional Growth Plan each year. This plan establishes professional goals and the linking of these goals to the teaching standards and school-wide priorities set by the strategic plan and the ESLRs. Every third year, lower and middle school teachers complete a self-assessment plan which provides an opportunity to reflect more deeply on their individual professional development. Similarly, staff evaluation has been redesigned to align with those of the faculty. Staff receive job-specific training and hold goal-setting meetings with their supervisors against which their performance can be judged.

Measurable Effects of Professional Development

TAS is able to measure the effects of professional development in the following ways:

1. Improved attainment of ESLRs, as determined by stakeholder surveys.
2. Steadily improving standardized test scores, as reflected in the school’s profile.
3. Increasing tenure of teaching faculty, by HR records.
4. Number of faculty availing themselves of conferences and workshops both on campus, in Taiwan and overseas, by administrative count.

A5: School Environment Criterion

Focus Area: The school has a safe, healthy, nurturing environment that reflects the school’s purpose and is characterized by respect for differences, trust, caring, and professionalism.

TAS has established a meaningful mission that is further articulated by four key values: honesty, respect, responsibility, and kindness.

Three full-time nurses, as well as a part-time activities nurse, two psychologists and eight counselors support TAS students. Students are involved in a health and counseling program and the Community Service Center (a local organization supported by TAS) also provides consultation and counseling services to TAS students and families. Students also receive care and support from their homeroom or advisor teacher, speech and language specialists, a reading intervention teacher, resource teachers and the ESL support team.

TAS staff and students participate regularly in fire and earthquake drills, have established food, chemical, and waste disposal procedures, and the school has developed a crisis management manual and team. At the student level, health and safety is addressed in classrooms, science labs, sports activities, and shared facilities.

TAS has put in place a number of programs to encourage a healthy lifestyle. Physical Education courses are part of the lower and middle school programs as well as part of the TAS graduation requirements. TAS is to be commended for the variety of opportunities it offers with regard to co-curricular sports programs in each division.
Students have a variety of opportunities to participate in activities including music, art, drama, community service, after-school clubs, dances, and community events. TAS celebrates international diversity during calendared school events such as the International Food Fair. In recognition of the host nation, official school communications are provided in both English and Chinese, and interpreters are provided for special school events, such as student-teacher conferences. Students also have the opportunity to learn the Chinese language at school.

TAS offers transition programs to help families adjust to their new home and learning environment. The PTA and TAS Ambassadors provide support to newly arrived families while new teaching staff are provided with an orientation program and with transition information via returning personnel.

The four school values form the foundation of the school’s character expectations and are the basis on which the lower school’s behavior expectations, the middle school’s character code, and the upper school’s honor codes were built. The values are reinforced through publications, assemblies and community service opportunities and through the school’s discipline strategy (the Values Learning Plan.)

Students and teachers are held to high expectations of conduct and achievement at TAS. TAS faculty and staff are expected to exemplify the four core values. Students are similarly held to high expectations in their schoolwork, conduct, and communications.

With regard to the achievement of the school’s purpose, the TAS mission talks of both “academic excellence” and a “balanced life”. Academic excellence is in evidence in the outstanding results students achieve and in the rigorous and various courses students pursue. The framework for a balanced life has been provided with a variety of activities and opportunities for students; however, greater oversight by the school may be needed to assure that students have balanced course loads and realistic expectations as well the appropriate depth and breadth of experiences.

TAS has provided resources and structures to support a safe, healthy and nurturing environment for students.

A6: Reporting Student Progress Criterion

Focus Area: The school leadership and staff regularly assess student progress toward accomplishing the expected schoolwide learning results and report student progress to the rest of the school community.

TAS has a variety of internal and external assessment data that it regularly reviews and shares with the school community. Common assessments K-12 are administered in all subject areas and are reported to the Assistant Superintendent for Learning, who analyzes the data to identify trends in achievement of the adopted curriculum.

Students in the Lower School and the Middle School receive ESL support, either in the form of push in or pull out. Students in the Upper School do not receive ESOL support as such, although expository writing classes and academic support are available to those who would benefit from them.
Across the school emphasis has been placed on oral communication skills via the drama program and the Accountable Talk initiative in the Lower School. In the Middle School MUN, public speaking classes and a recently introduced drama program enhance communication skills. In the Upper School forensics, theatre arts and the faculty speaker series provide opportunities for development. Whilst data in the CPT4 is strong for mathematics and quantitative reasoning, vocabulary and writing mechanics show the least actual growth. The self study focus group identifies the Skillful Communicator ESLR as an area for continued growth.

TAS reports student progress in a variety of ways, including narratives, progress and report cards, parent conferences, blogs, web pages and newsletters. The school is beginning to use PowerSchool (school year 2011-2012) and plans to use this as a medium to communicate all formal report documents to parents in future.

Different routines and practices exist in each division to communicate student progress to parents, for example, in the lower school standards based report cards are used as well as student led conferences featuring portfolios. In other divisions, more traditional report documents and arena style conferences are in effect.

TAS creates a comprehensive document to indicate progress on external assessments to the Board, as a key indicator of the school success. TAS has identified objective analysis of the ESLRs as “a challenging task.” The school has gathered anecdotal evidence of the ESLRs but has not yet established a way to quantify outcomes such as creative thinking, ethical people, enthusiasm, and conscientious citizens.

The school has produced a document entitled, “Key Indicators of ESLR Achievement” which illustrates how the ESLRs are integrated into and assessed at TAS. The school has made a strong commitment to character education, which has been translated at each division into initiatives to foster the school values of honesty, respect, responsibility, and kindness.

**A7: School Improvement Process Criterion**

**Focus Area:** The school leadership facilitates school improvement which (a) is driven by plans of action that will enhance quality learning for all students, (b) has school community support and involvement, (c) effectively guides the work of the school, and (d) provides for accountability through monitoring of the schoolwide action plan.

TAS has been proactive in enhancing communication with stakeholders and utilizing professional expertise to support strategic planning for the school. These steps have been well received by the community who see the school as continually improving. Wide involvement in the formation of the Strategic Plan has been achieved and this document has become integral to school improvement and to guiding change. The plan is well funded and supported by the Board, and contains key input from TAS education professionals. Development of student programs has been based on student needs, identified by the relevant learning data.

The administrative team regularly reviews the plans of action that evolve from the Strategic Plan. Each year, lower school and middle school create a divisional goals based on the Strategic Plan.
TAS is showing measurable growth in community satisfaction as evidenced by survey results. The school places great importance on communication, transparency and planning. Effort is made to involve the professional staff in division and team based decisions, linked to the Strategic Plan.

The WASC self-study process featured focus groups that included administrators, teachers, and parents. Students also participated in this process by providing feedback on a specific WASC student survey.

TAS is to be commended for the formation of a sound, transparent and consultative Facilities Plan. This plan enjoys strong community support and the resulting buildings are likely to be a symbol of celebration and unity for the school.

**Areas of Strength: Organization for Student Learning**

- The Board has developed and adhered to a newly constructed board policy manual. The Directors exercise sound governance of the school and are an asset to TAS and its community.
- Parents are increasingly satisfied with TAS and have entered into a supportive partnership with the school.
- The collaboratively constructed strategic plan harnesses the energy of the school and provides a framework for ongoing improvement focused on student learning.
- A focused approach to planning, funding, and implementation of major school improvements establishes a road map for the entire school community.

**Areas for Growth: Organization for Student Learning**

- Faculty and leadership realize the vision for character education by implementing programs schoolwide and measuring the success of such programs in the next Strategic Plan.
- Counselors, faculty and Leadership educate the K- 12 school community about the importance of a healthy, balanced life.
- Faculty and leadership prioritize program development to strengthen the Skillful Communicator ESLR.
CHAPTER IV B: CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENT

B1. What Students Learn Criterion

Focus Question: To what extent does the school provide a challenging, coherent and relevant curriculum for each student that fulfills the school’s purpose and results in student achievement of the expected schoolwide learning results through successful completion of any course of study offered?

What Has Happened Since the Last WASC Visit?

Clearly, TAS used the 2006 WASC recommendations for growth as a guide in strengthening curriculum, assessment and instruction. There is a greater sense of purpose, with the K-12 written curriculum fully documented on Atlas Rubicon and the reconfirmed ESLRs displayed prominently in the school. Moreover, common assessments are now an integral part of the instructional program and serve as a means to ensure teacher accountability for delivering the written curriculum. As reported during a Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment focus group conference with the WASC team, the development of a curricular review cycle and the movement of 7 subject areas through that cycle allows for greater articulation and thus cohesion of the curriculum.

Perhaps one of the greatest areas of strength can be found in the math and science focus at TAS. The establishment of academic electives such as robotics and public speaking in both the Middle School and the High School complement the school wide college preparatory focus. The new course offerings such as Robotics, 3D Art, honors history and English courses, as well as additional Upper School English electives and physics courses, are a few among many which require increased challenge in particular subject areas as well as choice based on student interests. The Lower School has implemented the Reader’s and Writer’s Workshop which has resulted in a remarkable increase in students’ competencies in speaking, reading and writing. TAS students reach consistently high standards of achievement as the result of high expectations and support by faculty, administration, and the hard work and diligence of students.

Above all, the faculty’s commitment, heart, and evident love and appreciation of their students were repeatedly witnessed throughout the school as evidenced in their genuine pride in student success and the selfless giving of time to lend help when needed.

Current Educational Research and Thinking

The school has adopted United States standards as a curricular framework to prepare TAS students for eventual successful entry into competitive American colleges and universities. Almost all of the KA-12 units are mapped in Atlas Rubicon using an Understanding By Design format that incorporates essential questions, enduring understandings, standards and benchmarks, content knowledge and skills, ESLRs, The Big 6 Research Skills, assessments and learning activities. TAS teachers have designed curricular units using Backwards by Design to focus on developing deeper conceptual understanding beyond skills and knowledge. A regular curriculum review process that incorporates the latest educational research and thinking guarantees the TAS curriculum in all subject areas is following current best practice. The latest reviews have been in the areas of math, science, Mandarin, English, history and social studies.
TAS provides the valuable resources of ample time and funding for teachers to stay current in their field. Ten non-student PD days are built into the TAS calendar used for schoolwide, divisional, team and departmental planning as well as faculty-led workshops and work with consultants who support strategic learning improvement areas. Teachers are encouraged and supported in taking part in internal and external professional learning linked to the learning needs of their students. This is a significant change since the 2006 WASC report with funding for professional development doubling since that time. As well, professional development funds are linked to strategic improvement plan initiative program areas. In teacher interviews, it was reported that the professional learning opportunities offered in the past few years have been extremely valuable. For example, Lower School teachers cited the tremendous impact that the Columbia Teacher College readers and writers workshop training has had on professional practice and students’ literacy learning.

Accolades are given to TAS for the broadened and enriched course offerings, particularly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The extensive mapping of units of study throughout TAS is no mean feat in a school of this complexity. It underlines the expectation that all TAS teachers offer their students an “even playing field” no matter who the teacher is.

Learning Results Complementing Standards

TAS has made a concerted effort to embed the ESLRs in units of study so they become woven into the fabric of everyday teaching and learning. Since the last self-study, the ESLRs have received more prominence throughout the school as evidenced by student work samples, the addition of a Upper School mandatory public speaking course, Middle and Lower School drama integration, Middle School speaking class, and the use of accountable talk strategies in the Lower School. Model United Nations has been extended to the Middle School, and work had been done to integrate character education into all divisions. Students in grades 3-12 were surveyed to discover to what extent they felt they had grown in the attributes related to the ESLRs with all students reporting agreement between the 90-99th percentiles for the seven attributes, with results indicating that between 84-99% of TAS students in grades 3-12 feel they have improved. In particular, the Visiting Committee recognizes the prominent and thoughtful attention that has been given to the character values throughout the school, even guiding our steps as we traveled up the MS stairway (!).

When reviewing the ESLRs, teachers have indicated are embedded into their units of study, the Committee questions the validity of this. It seems that some teams may have treated it more like a “laundry list” of things to check into their unit without intentionally considering when and how the ESLRs are actually being addressed within their units. Other than the creative thinker and skillful communicator ESLRs, there is very little, if no, evidence in the assessments and learning activities of this being a reality. Although this will be addressed further under the curriculum standards section below, TAS would benefit from a unit review process that focuses on revision of curricular units to reflect the reality of actual practice concerning embedded ESLRs. As well, mapping the vital character education program/units of study may help to gain clarity as to what extent it is aligned with the ESLRs.

Additionally, TAS may benefit from taking a broader look at how ESLRs are measured/tracked by gathering student self-assessment measures when appropriate throughout the plethora of school activities in which students may be exhibiting these attributes (e.g. community service, internships, clubs and activities, cultural convention, school trips, mentor program, research and summer internship program, etc.)
Curricular Standards

TAS has adopted curricular standards and benchmarks from the United States to frame K-12 units of study with the end result being students adequately prepared for successful entry into US colleges and Universities since 94% of TAS graduates follow this path. Teaching teams, and in some cases individual teachers, have developed units of study for almost every K-12 course including all AP and IB courses. The Committee recognizes that with the addition of so many new courses at TAS a few areas are still “under construction.”

Now that the herculean task of mapping units has been completed at TAS, unit quality and UbD alignment are necessary next steps to ensure that the units of study are developing student conceptual understanding beyond skills and knowledge; that students are given the opportunity to wrestle with and construct their understanding; and that this understanding is assessed through open-ended high level assessments. The following queries may help to guide this process:

- Do the enduring understandings capture the most important concepts and big ideas for the unit?
- Do the essential questions require deep thinking and connections posed to students throughout the units of study?
- Are the assessments accurately assessing the skills, knowledge and understandings in stage 1?
- Does the unit address and assess the ESLRs?

Student Work — Engagement in Learning

TAS systematically and deliberately uses internal and external student learning evidence to guide school improvement both at the school-wide and classroom level, to report to parents, and to be accountable to the school community. External assessments include SAT, AP and IB exam results for grades 11/12, ERB CTP4 standardized test, and the ERB WrAP writing assessment for grades 3-8, and DRA2 for grades K-5. With few exceptions, student results on all external assessments show that TAS students are achieving well above their world-wide peer groups.

TAS reports that through reviewing team meeting agendas and data analysis summaries, it is evident that teacher teams in the Middle School and Lower School are looking at student learning evidence to inform teaching. As well, the Visiting Committee notes that TAS has not mentioned in its report the use of formative assessment data to inform teaching. However, we did indeed see ample evidence of formative assessment practices being followed in the Lower School, particularly within the reader’s and writer’s workshop, and with some lessons in the Middle School and Upper School. The flex time in the Middle School and Upper School affirms the dedication of the teaching staff in addressing student learning needs based on evidence gathered from formative and summative learning data. A next step for TAS to consider may be to spend professional development time with the teaching faculty focusing on using formative assessment to improve learning.

Common assessments are a part of teachers’ professional practice at TAS, another area which deserves recognition by the Visiting Committee. Collecting, collating, and analyzing 27,000 pieces of common assessment data from throughout TAS stands as evidence of the school’s commitment to using internal assessment data in tracking student learning. Since TAS is committed to developing and measuring students’ growth in creative thinking and problem-solving and in being versatile learners and skillful communicators, then it would benefit TAS to analyze what is being measured in common assessments using the following criteria:
• What do the statistics showing the percentage of TAS students achieving above the 75% achievement level reflect and are they in alignment with what the school values in learning?
• In the K-12 subjects areas in which 98-100% of students are achieving above the 75%, are benchmark performance levels and standards being consistently adhered to?

Curricular Review, Revision, and Evaluation

Over the last six years, TAS has made significant strides with their curricular review process. The curricular review process involves a K-12 committee and includes grade level representatives and all department chairs. The curriculum review team’s purpose is to evaluate and revise curricular areas based on research and current best practice. Since 2006, K-12 curricular changes reflect the work of reviews in all of the core subject areas. In addition, the ESL, Mandarin, and physical education programs participated in curricular reviews led by the Associate Superintendent of Learning. The Mandarin, ELA/ESL, and music programs also underwent a program review through an external audit process. These areas greatly benefited from additional outside expertise as they examined their curriculum. As subject areas cycled through for the first time, they experienced a deep, year-long collaborative process. The second set of reviews will begin next year and the goal is to focus on alignment of teaching and assessing with the standards.

The influence of the curricular review committee can be seen in departmental and team meeting work, expanded course offerings and within the classroom. Adopting curriculum such as Physics First, the Readers’ and Writers’ Workshop model in the Lower School, fostering a Middle School MUN after school activity and providing courses in public speaking, robotics and mathematics are a few of the changes resulting from the review committee work. While the members of the curriculum review committee enhance K-12 articulation during the process, the work is ongoing. In an effort to uphold the essential agreements made during the curriculum process, teachers work with their divisional teams, may invite the Assistant Superintendent for Learning to provide additional K-12 support, and curriculum groups meet on an ad hoc basis for cross-divisional articulation conversations. Curriculum is dynamic and in a large school cross-divisional collaborative work plays a substantial role in ensuring an articulated learning experience for students. It is important for curriculum groups to routinely collaborate in cross-divisional groups to maintain alignment with the standards and benchmarks.

TAS is committed to teaching the ESLRs to all students as trans-disciplinary skills. It is apparent that TAS holds the ESLRs in high regard because they are referenced throughout the Self-Study Report and are visible throughout the school. In addition, most units in Atlas Rubicon include multiple ESLRs. Admittedly, the ESLRs are important. Yet, TAS finds it challenging to authentically assess whether the ESLRs are met through the curriculum. A next step is for TAS to develop an ESLR scope and sequence that folds into the UbD curriculum development for each subject area. In addition, TAS will benefit from ongoing cross-divisional curricular discussions. This will be particularly helpful between transitional grades as students move from the Lower School to Middle School and then to the Upper School.

Collaborative Work

Collaborative work is an expectation at TAS and it drives much of the curriculum and the common assessments. Development and calibration of common assessments, holding data-focused conversations, and updating units in Atlas Rubicon take significant time. Both the Lower School and Middle School build in common planning time to allow for regular core subject area teams for both
curriculum and student needs. This collaborative time is essential to the strength of the curriculum. Although the Upper School does not consistently provide common planning time within the timetable, teachers meet monthly with their departments and spend some of their professional development time working with their teams. Upper School teaching partners also find time to work on curriculum and assessments. However, this is dependent on the teachers and their availability. The Lower and Middle School appear to be aligned with the TAS expectation that teams create, calibrate and refine curriculum units of study and common assessments. As the Upper School teachers continue to build upon their assessment work, the administration should explore ways in which to secure common planning time for teachers within the schedule.

The use of common assessments is a strong indicator of collaborative work at TAS. Across the school, 93% of the faculty report using common assessments regularly. This is a tremendous first step. The Visiting Committee also notes that teaching groups such as the Lower School grade level teams, Middle School Art, and Upper School Math are collaboratively developing common assessments and analyzing student assessment results to inform instruction. It would be beneficial for TAS to expand upon this work as teams collaboratively align their common assessments with standards and ensure opportunities for students to demonstrate their ability to apply and transfer learning.

TAS is applauded for providing the Middle School English teachers with a release day in order to analyze WRAP and CTP4 data, calibrate their assessment of students and look for trends in the data to guide their instruction. While the Assistant Superintendent for Learning leads the Middle School English teachers through a day of data analysis, protocols for using data to guide instruction would be useful for teaching teams across the school. This should include both core subject areas and electives. In addition, it appears that teachers refine their units and courses for the benefit of next year’s classes. Teaching teams also need to ensure that the results of their data analysis affect the learning of their current students. Finally, calibration of common assessments will enrich team discussions regarding learning outcomes and essential understandings.

**Accessibility of all Students to Curriculum**

The students’ strong academic achievement in external standardized assessments as well as in the internal common assessments are a testament to the rigor of their curriculum. To continually challenge highly capable students, TAS provides multiple levels for music, Mandarin, math, and most courses offered in the high school. The Lower School’s 3rd – 5th grade Music Activity course also provides an opportunity for students to exert choice in learning an instrument or participating in choir. Moreover, the Middle and Upper Schools augment educational challenge through academic elective offerings where students can deepen their learning. For example, Middle School students can choose literary, public speaking or robotic electives in addition to standard elective options. In the Upper School, students are provided with opportunities to take higher level courses such as multivariate mathematics, which is beyond calculus. Without question, highly able students have opportunities to participate in a rigorous curriculum at TAS. A next step would be to formalize a process to identify areas in which students are highly able so that their needs are consistently met year-on-year through differentiated instruction and course offerings.

In addition, the ESL program has a multi-faceted approach to support student learning, as they work towards ensuring student success with English as the primary language of instruction. The number of
students receiving ESL services comprises around 20% of the total student population in the Lower School and around 17% in the Middle School. ESL students in the Lower School and Middle School are supported through push-in and pull-out services. A small number of ESL students receive pull-out services in grade 8. Within the pull-out class, scaffolding in English and History helps students build their English language ability and have access to the mainstream content. Students who need to continue working on their English proficiency are enrolled in expository writing in the Upper School and may receive learning support services and can take advantage of flex time to work with teachers. However, there are no formalized ESL services in the Upper School. The Upper School is encouraged to examine whether the ESL population who received grade 8 pull-out services continues to have equitable access to the Upper School curriculum.

TAS serves students with mild to moderate learning disabilities through the Student Support Service team. The Support Service team is well staffed to address the needs of students within the regular academic program. Learning specialists, psychologists and counselors know the students on their case load well. They provide individualized support through pull-out and push-in models. In addition, each divisional team works with the mainstream teachers to provide in-class accommodations.

The approach to meeting differentiated learning needs for highly able students has been through leveled courses and homogeneous grouping of students through placement procedures. The placement procedures are maintained by the subject area teacher(s) and are based on assessment information as well as classroom performance. Additional course offerings in mathematics appear to be a response to a high level of achievement. A flexible schedule in both the Middle School and Upper School allow students to pursue courses in which they have a high-level of interest and/or ability. The guideline for all higher level courses is to go deeper and faster. To further develop teachers’ abilities to meet the needs of all students in heterogeneous classrooms, further attention should also be spent on differentiating instruction and assessments.

Policies — Rigorous, Relevant, Coherent Curriculum

TAS policies and practices support a rigorous and coherent curriculum through reporting, the student conference structure and academic expectations outlined in both the divisional handbooks. To further focus student learning on standards, the Lower School introduced a standards-based report card this year. Over the last six years, clear communication from the administration has positively reinforced school policies and practices.

In addition, the Middle School incorporated the use of the homeworknow.com website. Both students and parents have access to this website. The purpose is to clarify the amount of homework required on a particular night and whether technology is a part of the assignment. The expected daily homework load is high, considering students’ involvement in after school activities and that 60% of TAS students receive additional private tutoring. Throughout the visit, students spoke about the difficulty in achieving a “balanced life” and the impact of academic stress. As TAS clarifies the community definition of a “balanced life,” the administration and faculty are encouraged to look into additional support for students to manage academic stress. In addition to clear homework policies, it is recommended that teachers evaluate homework to ensure that it affords meaningful learning experiences for students.

TAS is congratulated for its comprehensive speaker series and visiting authors and musicians to both motivate students and bring relevancy to the curriculum. While a robust speaker series and visiting
Articulation and Follow-up Studies

TAS regularly surveys recent graduates to evaluate students’ preparedness for college. This Alumni Survey reveals the strength of the TAS program because students feel moderately to well prepared for college level writing, reading and writing across college courses, first year college math, and scientific lab work. As a school with a college-preparatory focus, TAS serves its students well for success at the university level.

There are various opportunities for students to pursue the arts and computer science at TAS. Yet alumni report feeling slightly less prepared for college level courses in performing and visual arts, computer science, and conducting and writing research papers outside of a literature course. The TAS administration should consider examining why this is the case and how they may support students in feeling better prepared for a wide range of university level courses.

B2. How Students Learn Criterion

Focus Question: To what extent does the professional staff use research-based knowledge about teaching and learning? Does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students at a high level of learning consistent with the school’s purpose and expected schoolwide learning results?

Research-based Knowledge

The TAS teaching standards provide both accountability and direction for teachers as they implement research-based instructional strategies in their classroom practice. Regular observation of, and feedback to, teachers is part of the teacher evaluation process. Teachers are provided a variety of means to stay abreast of content knowledge in their subject areas, as well as with current pedagogy, through both internal and external professional development opportunities. Curriculum focus areas have included English Language Arts, Social Studies, ESL, Mandarin, Science, Performing Arts, and Math. Key school-wide focus areas have included integrating technology, and character education.

Planning Process

TAS responds to the learning needs of its students. Collation and analysis of common assessment results have been systematized. Teachers work collaboratively in grade level and department teams to define common course goals, select texts, and design, implement and review assessments. Lower School grade level and Middle School teams meet regularly, in common planning time allocated for monitoring student achievement, coordinating assessments, and liaising with counselors and learning support/ESL teachers. Currently Upper School teaching teams do not have common collaborative time scheduled. Despite this, the Visiting Committee notes that Upper School teachers take professional pride in, and show a high level of commitment to, meeting and working collaboratively with colleagues to ensure common courses kept pace, and assessments were truly common.
As mentioned above under the collaborative learning subheading, the lack of systematic embedded collaborative team planning time in the Upper School does not provide the “just in time” opportunity to look at student work, and to review and refine assessments and units of study. The Visiting Committee recommends that the Upper School administration consider what opportunities might be created in the schedule for some, if not all, teaching teams to meet.

Professional Collaboration

There is a strong focus on collecting common assessment data at TAS. The Lower School and Middle School have established regular intervals throughout the year when this work is done. The next phase of this process might include supporting teachers with professional develop to extend their expertise in using formative assessment data to drive improvements in teaching and learning. The use of professional protocols and data dialogues may help teachers analyze the quality of common assessments in regard to Bloom’s Taxonomy, Enduring Understandings outlined in the written curriculum on Atlas Rubicon, etc.

Professional Development

Teachers stay up-to-date with best practices through affiliation with professional associations, by attending conferences and other external professional development opportunities, by working on-site with visiting consultants who are experts in their fields, and by reflecting on practice with colleagues. Peer coaching and observation (lab-sites) are strategies used to identify and integrate best practice within the organization. In Lower School, a Literacy Coordinator serves as instructional coach for individuals and teams to further literacy objectives. Other embedded models of professional development include ‘Teachers Teaching Teachers’ in Middle School and Upper School to support the 1:1 laptop initiative. There has been a significant investment by the School in funding consultants and professional developers in revision and development of courses. Social studies, visual arts, English Language Arts, ESL, music and Mandarin have received external support from content area experts and auditors. The ‘Excellence in Teaching and Professional Development Award’ is another new initiative intended to strengthen the knowledge base of teachers at TAS.

Challenging and Varied Instructional Strategies

Students are given opportunities to demonstrate what they know and what they can do using a wide range of instructional strategies and assessments. The perception surveys from teachers and students report that students engage in both group and individual tasks, and in oral and written assignments. Students regularly use technology, listen to teachers lecture, participate in whole group discussions, work in small groups, do research and work on projects. Teachers report using a variety of assessment methods including self and peer assessment, written assessments including essays, short responses, and multiple-choice testing, as well as a range of performance assessments. Exemplars and rubrics are used by teachers to provide students with clear expectations and goals. The Upper School encourages students to assume responsibility for a significant proportion of their own learning.

As mentioned earlier, using strategies to allow frequent on-going formative assessment (i.e., small group work, pair-share, open ended questions, exit ticket, conferencing, etc.) during learning time would allow immediate individual feedback to be given. The frequency of use of these strategies varied greatly throughout the 220 classrooms that the Visiting Committee visited. In addition, it is
recommended that faculty and administration take a deep look at the levels of differentiation within the delivered curriculum. As well as providing challenges through leveled courses, students will benefit from differentiated instruction within heterogeneous class settings.

Technology Integration

TAS provides ongoing support for teachers and students to make the best use of technology for learning. This is reflected in the Middle School and Upper School 1:1 program, as well as the Lower School 2:1 initiatives, the development of K-8 technology expectations, and the provision of professional development opportunities like the SUNY certificate program in instructional technology. Divisions and departments may consider how they can further utilize the experience and skill base of the certificate program cohort as they extend the integration of instructional technology across the curriculum.

TAS teachers are committed to integrating technology to support students in developing technological skills across all divisions. Teacher feedback indicates that half the teaching faculty currently use technology on a daily basis as part of the learning process. Students use technology for a range of purposes including communication and collaboration (email and google docs), presentation (portfolios), and reflection (blogs and journals.) Particularly in the Upper School, the visiting committee observed that technology use is mainly focused on increasing productivity for students and teacher. While this is a positive move forward, the Visiting Committee also recommends that teachers and administrators begin to define new ways of using technology to leverage learning experiences for students. One approach to further embedding technology use in assessment and instruction might be to include technology integration in the curriculum review cycle. This would provide structure and support in inviting teachers to investigate and embed current best practice use of technology for instruction in a given subject area.

Evidence of Results based upon Challenging Learning Experiences

The Visiting Committee observed examples of students working and student work that demonstrated critical and creative thinking, problem solving, knowledge attainment and application of skills. In grades K-5 the Readers’ and Writers’ Workshop provides ample and varied opportunities for creative and critical thinking. The core of the Robotics program in Middle School and Upper School demands creative thinking, problem solving and application of skills in technology, science and mathematics. In particular, the Visiting Committee noticed many examples of creative and versatile thinking when visiting IB classes. School-wide, the Visiting Committee noted the rich performing and visual arts program in which students create, problem-solve and apply their understanding, skills and knowledge through every product and performance.

Perceptions of Students

Student survey results report that students have a high awareness of the ESLRs. In the student focus group and in ad hoc conversations with the Visiting Committee, students reported high satisfaction with their learning experience at TAS. Upper School students said that “TAS helps you get where you want to go,” and that students are encouraged to pursue their passions. TAS is described as a welcoming and
friendly place for students. Students reported that teachers, counselors and administrators “really get to know you.” New students are eagerly adopted into the full and busy life that learning at TAS offers.

The Visiting Committee recognizes the many positives aspects of school life; however, committee members also heard from Upper School students concerns regarding the pressure they feel due to taking on “too much work.” While students feel a huge sense of responsibility to manage and achieve in the many offerings available to them through the diverse curricular and co-curricular programs, the Committee suggests that the administration help students ensure balance by clarifying for students what is meant by “a balanced life.”

Throughout the School the Visiting Committee noted how service to the community is valued by students, teachers and administrators as evidenced by Upper School students creating a PhotoBooth activity to “relieve stress and remind us of our friends,” the rice bowl sale, and the competitive money collection for World Hunger.

Students in the Middle and Lower School focus group discussion reported enthusiastically about how much their teachers care for them and their learning. Words students use to describe TAS are “safe, dynamic, complex, encouraging, kind, diverse, fun, fair, honest, diverse and exciting.”

**Student Needs**

English language learning is a significant focus for many TAS students. While there has been an increase in the number of ESL students in the Lower and Middle Schools, TAS has worked purposefully to keep classes with no more than 30% per ESL students in a given classroom. The majority of students receiving ESL support are in the Lower School, and their needs are supported with a sheltered immersion program model. Lower school ESL students in grades 3, 4, and 5 receive additional English support in lieu of Mandarin instruction. In the Middle School emphasis is placed on supporting English and other core subject areas. Many Middle School ESL students are supported in the ‘pull out’ program which mirrors the curriculum of the mainstream English class. The goal is for ESL students to participate in the mainstream curriculum within push-in support in the Lower and Middle Schools.

The use of formative assessment results to inform and guide differentiation of instruction is not apparent. There may be benefits for students in developing teachers’ capacity to address the various learning styles and individual student needs within the classroom rather than relying on a streaming model.

**Student Use of Resources**

Students benefit from a variety of resources and activities beyond the limits of the textbook such as field trips and camps which engage students in activities designed to address both curricula and community goals. The ‘OnLine Classroom’ in Middle and Upper School also provides a vehicle for teachers to augment course content and customize learning materials. TAS library services provide extended hours access including Saturdays and an online service to students. Student survey results report that over half of TAS students make regular use of the library outside of class time.
Community connections such as that with the National Taiwan University have benefited Upper School Robotics and Computer Science students who now have weekly access to their facilities, and a perspective on college level work. The development of the internship programs is another example of TAS’s commitment to forging community connections to create learning opportunities for students beyond the classroom.

B3. How Assessment is Used Criterion

Focus questions: To what extent a) is teacher and student use of assessment frequent and integrated into the teaching/learning process; b) are the assessment results the basis for measurement of each student’s progress toward the expected schoolwide learning results (schoolwide learner outcomes); c) are the assessment results the basis for regular evaluation and improvement of curriculum and instruction; and d) are the assessment results the basis for the allocation of resources?

What Has Happened Since the Last WASC Visit?

The 2006 WASC report identified the need for TAS to develop and analyze assessment of student learning results as a critical area. The May 2011 reports states that TAS has made progress in this area using both external and internal common assessments to determine student strengths and weaknesses as well as long term trends and patterns. The use of classroom assessment by teachers has also strengthened through the use of on-site consultants and a greater focus on formative assessments in the lower school. ESLRs were developed and efforts were made to promote their common understanding and integration into curriculum.

Appropriate Assessment Strategies

Professional collaboration is both valued and required at TAS. Teachers in all divisions meet regularly in both formal and informal meetings, prepare lesson plans, and establish common assessments. In the Upper School, teachers form teams around courses and prepares units plans and assessments. Other common assessments include semester exams along with AP and IB exams. At all divisions there is an expectation that Atlas Rubicon be continually updated and refined to reflect classroom activities. Documentation on Atlas Rubicon indicates common summative assessments, but it is less developed in terms of formative assessments and of a variety of strategies for assessment. ESLRs have been integrated into learning activities, but they are not assessed directly.

TAS has made great efforts to collect common assessment data. The next step would be to look at the quality of the assessments to ensure that understanding, creativity and problem solving ability are being addressed. Teachers should consider how they integrate problems designed to be solved in multiple and differentiated ways that give students opportunities to demonstrate meaningful understanding as indicated by the Enduring Understandings as shown in Atlas and guided by UbD.

Correlation of Assessment to Expected Schoolwide Learning Results

Over past five years, TAS has been making efforts to strengthen curriculum. There has been a development of Key Performance Indicators for both internal and external data. Each subject area that has gone through curricular review has adjusted common assessments to meet the Standards and Benchmarks for each program. Relevant ESLRs reflecting best practice have been developed and are represented in teaching units on Rubicon Atlas. The ESLRS map well over the IB learner profile and 21st Century Skills. Common assessments are linked to unit plans and Standards & Benchmarks on Atlas.
Rubicon. However, there is a lack of consistency in what constitutes a common assessment. Documentation that links ESLRs and formative assessments more directly to learning results, particularly in the Upper School, is not well-developed on Atlas Rubicon.

Teachers have developed common assessments to the point that 93% of faculty report using common assessments regularly. The faculty reporting less frequent use of common assessment indicate that there is still need to focus on institutionalizing common assessment. The development of units using the UbD model implies that students are assessed for understanding. In order to ensure that teachers teach for understanding, it is important that the mapped Enduring Understandings guide the big ideas and concepts for each unit.

**Changes/Decisions Based on Assessment Data**

TAS is to be commended on efforts to gather and use student achievement data to drive school improvement, including group specific data. The Self-Study notes a commitment to the collection and analysis of assessment data, and how assessment is currently used to inform curriculum and identify growth. Internal common assessment date is reported and discussed at the team level to guide instructional planning.

Common assessments are used to monitor students' achievement of curriculum. All students in grades 3-8 take the ERB comprehensive and writing assessments. The ERB data show greater than expected student growth. All students in the Upper School take PSAT, and most take SAT. Results are used to identify strengths and weaknesses in curriculum, which may lead to curriculum revision. AP and IB results are also used as a measure of achievement.

The emphasis on common assessments drives more dialogue around student achievement. The Lower School and Middle School have frequent opportunities to plan and discuss lessons and assessment. In the Upper School, the PSAT and SAT data are discussed at the department level, but there is less time for frequent dialogue about instruction and assessment, although specialists meet more often. Upper School teachers are committed to finding time to collaborate, and while departments make an effort to schedule common planning time during the day, it is important that all areas have common planning time during the day for all teachers of the same subject/grade.

It is noted in the Action Plan that team leaders and department chairs will be held responsible for facilitating discussion about student results on common assessments. Although teachers do spend time on professional development days analyzing common assessment data, there is no protocol for data-focused conversations among teachers that impact the current students’ learning. Questions to consider include how does the faculty plan and respond when students do not meet learning targets and how are the teachers’ skills and effectiveness at analyzing assessment data developed?

**Student Work and Other Assessments**

Many examples of student work show how students have been asked to demonstrate one or more ESLRs. Examples of student work and assessments provided show student achievement of Standards and Benchmarks, although ESLRs are not comprehensively and systematically assessed. A number of courses in Atlas Rubicon reflect a reliance on textbooks in preparing, organizing learning, and in assessing progress. As well, if Atlas Rubicon is indeed a reflection of learning at TAS, it is unclear as to what degree students are actually assessed for understanding. The few attached assessments in Atlas
Rubicon seem to focus on skills and knowledge but do not address the enduring understandings stated for that unit of study.

**Student Feedback**

Formal student feedback is gathered annually though surveys in Upper School and through student-led parent-teacher conferences twice a year for all Lower School students. Middle School students are encouraged to attend conferences in order to participate in teacher feedback about student learning. The new report card in Upper School, along with the new implementation of PowerSchool, is designed to better monitor and report Standards and Benchmarks and to help teachers adjust instruction. The introduction of PowerSchool allows for continuous monitoring of assessment results by students and teachers. Given that this is a recent implementation, questions arise as to how these areas are supported in terms of time and professional development for implementation.

**Teachers Monitor Student Progress**

Departments and teams at all levels are expected to meet regularly to discuss the effectiveness and validity of their internal assessments and make changes as needed. At the Lower and Middle School, time is provided within school day for these meetings. In the Upper School departments, teachers make use of flex-time, lunch time, common free periods, and time during professional development days. The Lower School has a standards-based report card to articulate, monitor and provide feedback on student progress on benchmarks. The Middle School and Upper School use teacher narratives on report cards each quarter, with mid-quarter progress reports for lower-achieving students.

The implementation of PowerSchool is intended to allow for greater analysis of student achievement and to adjust instruction and identify common issues for individual students. It will present a challenge to develop PowerSchool protocols to meet desired data management goals. More time provided for Upper School teachers to meet to discuss internal assessments and the effectiveness of individual units would aid in this goal. As well, more frequent student feedback to teachers would provide opportunities to respond during a course of study.
Areas of Strength: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

- TAS teachers and administrators have created a culture of learning and well-being for all students.
- The administration and divisional leadership have broadened and enriched course offerings based upon students’ varied interests, goals and levels of achievement.
- The TAS administration is strongly committed to the continual professional growth of teachers through generous support for strategic and targeted internal and external professional development to improve the learning of students at TAS.
- The Assistant Superintendent for Learning and curriculum review committees have revised and redesigned many curricular areas resulting in a K-12 aligned and coherent vertical curriculum to support student learning at TAS.
- As part of their embedded assessment practice, TAS teachers across all divisions use internal common assessments to measure student learning at the end of a unit of study.
- The TAS teachers and administration provide ample curricular and co-curricular opportunities throughout the school for students to demonstrate the ESLRs.
- The teachers and administrators have given prominent and thoughtful attention to the development of character values in students throughout TAS.
- The TAS teachers and administration provide authentic learning experiences for students beyond the walls of TAS.

Areas of Growth: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

- Faculty and administration articulate a K-12 assessment policy outlining the school’s beliefs and practices regarding assessment, grading, and reporting of student learning.
- Faculty and administration analyze and revise common assessments to ensure the inclusion of important concepts and big ideas, which provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate application and transfer of their learning.
- Teachers collaboratively analyze student learning results to guide the improvement of common assessments, and to inform teaching practices.
- TAS administration provide opportunities for professional learning for KA-12 faculty focusing on high-quality formative and summative assessment practices to guide teaching and learning.
- Faculty and administration measure student progress toward the ESLRs by assessing the participation in the varied and diverse student curricular and co-curricular experiences both inside and outside of TAS.
- Administration and divisional leadership expand the cross-divisional articulation of programs and opportunities for K-12 collaboration.
CHAPTER IV C: SUPPORT FOR STUDENT PERSONAL AND ACADEMIC GROWTH

C1. Student Connectedness Criterion

Focus Question: To what extent are students connected to a system of support services, activities, and opportunities at the school and within the community to meet the challenges of the curricular/co-curricular program in order to achieve the expected schoolwide learning results (schoolwide learner outcomes)?

Personalized Student Support

Focus question: How do the school leadership and staff provide personalized student support correlated to student achievement of the curricular goals and the expected schoolwide learning results for all students, including those admitted with special needs and learning English as an additional language?

In keeping with the school’s mission, students enrolled at TAS receive personalized support for their learning. This support is visible through one-on-one conferring, small group instruction and instructional scaffolding. Due to an increase in the collection of data from assessments, faculty and support staff are poised to provide differentiated instruction for all students. In the self study report, the TAS faculty and administration identify the need for further differentiation to better support the learning needs of the school’s highly able students. The Visiting Committee recommends that the faculty and administration explore differentiation strategies to meet the needs of all students, not just the highly able students. The Visiting Committee further recommends that this exploration focuses on differentiating in the mainstream classroom, rather than an expansion of the tracking model that is currently in place.

In the wider school setting, counselors and administrators meet regularly to review student progress and identify those who may be needing support. Services are available to support students’ academic, social and emotional needs.

Overall, parents at TAS feel that teachers maintain high learning standards in each division and are focused on supporting individual students. The majority of students at TAS feel challenged and that individual support is available when they need it.

The school has developed an extensive support program for English language learners in grades 1 to 8. Currently in the Lower School, ESL learners receive the majority of their instruction in a mainstream class with native English speaking teachers. In these situations classroom teachers and ESL teachers plan together to address curricular goals and implement appropriate classroom strategies. In addition to sheltered immersion, pull-out support is available as need in the Lower School. In Middle School, students receiving ESL support may be supported within the mainstream class by the ESL or subject area teacher or within a separate pull out program. Grade 7 is the last grade-level that incoming TAS students can be accepted for admission into the pull-out program. The grade 8 pull-out program is only for students that were enrolled in TAS in grade 7 or earlier.

A formalized ESL program does not exist in the Upper School; however, 8th grade pull-out ESL students are supported in Grade 9 through an expository writing course. Many eighth grade push in ESL students
are also recommended for this course. In tenth grade and beyond ESL students often find support under the umbrella of Academic Support.

In recent months, the Lower School administration and ESL faculty have been considering adoption of the English Language Development Standards. Such an adoption will allow the division to better support language acquisition of the school’s growing ESL population. This is especially important as the rigor of the reading and writing program at TAS has increased with the adoption of Teachers College workshop model. Anecdotal comments from teachers and division leadership note that as a result of the workshop model, ESL students are becoming stronger in both areas yet still require more targeted and consistent support to meet grade level benchmarks.

Student social, emotional and academic needs are addressed through the Student Support Services program. Individual and small group instruction is available for students with mild to moderate learning differences. In class support is also provided as deemed appropriate by the Student Support Services team. Support is available for students from a range of specialists in the following areas: reading, writing, learning support, speech and language, counseling and educational assessment. While the focus may vary depending on the age and needs of the students, each specialist provides support so that students are moving towards proficiency at grade level benchmarks.

Within the Lower School, and specifically in fifth grade, a math extension class is available to a limited number of highly able students. The intention of the Math X program is to serve as enrichment rather than acceleration. In Mandarin, students are ability grouped as a means of addressing proficiency levels. Middle school students are ability grouped for math, language and music classes. High school students have a variety of options in all academic areas and music. Honors, AP and IB classes are offered so that students can achieve a level of rigor as deemed appropriate to their learning profile.

**School Support Systems**

**Focus question:** Is the level of school coordination of the system of support services allowing for maximum effectiveness? Are the processes for intervention or referral effective?

A referral process exists at TAS. Classroom teachers, counselors or administrators initiate the referral process by sharing their concerns with the Student Support Services Team. Time is given to gather data and observe the child as possible interventions take place. After approximately six weeks, the Student Review Team meet to determine and develop appropriate actions.

The Student Services Support team has developed some systems to transition students from one division to the next. Classroom teachers and the Student Services Support team from appropriate divisions meet to share information as students move between schools. A number teachers from the Student Services Support team work across divisions; this adds another layer of support as students transition through the grade levels. Members of the Student Support Services team note this as an area for growth in the coming years. Additionally, the Visiting Committee recommends reviewing the alignment and coordination of Student Support Services, K-12.
As noted previously, individual student needs are addressed at meetings held regularly and attended by appropriate classroom teachers, counselors and psychologists. While there is collaboration among counselors, learning specialists, and ESL teachers in regards to admission and class placement, there is a need for more systematic communication about students once they are admitted to the program, particularly when these students are supported by more than one service.

**Strategies Used for Student Growth/Development**

**Focus:** *Evaluate the types of strategies used by the school leadership and staff to develop students’ self-esteem, personalized approaches to learning, and connections to the learning environment.*

Developing students’ self-esteem is an ongoing focus at TAS. The Student Support Services team provides the necessary support so that they grow as learners. Survey data indicate that parents in all three divisions are satisfied with the support available for students. In the Lower School the TAS Values are a focus each quarter. In the Middle School each grade level has a Character Council made up of two students from each homeroom. This Character Council identifies current issues within their grade level and plan lessons, campaigns and assemblies around these big ideas. Additionally, each Middle School homeroom teacher facilitates one character lesson each week. In the Middle School and Upper School a flex period provides broad opportunity for students to explore their interests and get the support they need. It should be noted that students in the Middle School and Upper School have a range of opportunities to perform for their community. The students revel in this opportunity and use the time to develop a variety of performance objectives and skills.

**Support Services and Learning**

**Focus question:** *To what extent does the school leadership and staff ensure that the support services and related activities have a direct relationship to student involvement in learning, e.g. within and outside the classroom?*

TAS is a school focused on student learning. IEPs are developed with clear goals and methods for evaluating progress. Regular meetings are conducted with parents, students, teachers, and specialists to discuss progress. Students with IEPs are re-evaluated by the school psychologist every three years.

ESL students in the Lower School are immersed in mainstream classes and therefore take part in common grade level assessments. Additional reading and writing assessments are given to monitor language acquisition.

For all students, a rich menu of options is also available outside of the classroom to add variety to the learning program. These options include fine and performing arts, sports teams, forensics and debate, clubs and activities, student government and internships/research projects.
Co-Curricular Activities

Focus: The school ensures that the co-curricular activities are linked to the expected schoolwide learning results (schoolwide learner outcomes).

TAS is to be commended for providing a breadth of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities that allow all students opportunities to achieve the schools ESLRs: creative thinkers, healthy individuals, ethical people, versatile learners, enthusiastic collaborators, information savvy learners, skillful communicators, and conscientious citizens.

In the Lower School, students can participate in clubs and activities to explore sports, the arts and a variety of special-interest topics. Some of these activities are sponsored by the student leaders of upper school clubs, such as the Chinese Honor Society, Lit Bites, and Interact. Additionally, a majority of students participate in the comprehensive program of after-school and weekend activities facilitated through the Taipei Youth Program Association (TYPA). Lower School students from KA onward also have the opportunity to participate in grade-level service projects, which tie in with the character education program at TAS.

In the Middle School, there are more than twenty clubs in which students can participate. Students are given the opportunity to try many different clubs throughout a given school year. Some examples of these clubs include a middle school drama production, MUN, guitar club, and the easy cooking club. Additionally, all Grade 8 students complete a community service requirement of five hours and report back to their peers on their service experience.

The Middle School intramural athletics program offers nine sports throughout the school year. For most, a season-ending tournament is held, involving up to nine other international schools on the island. In Grade 6 and 7, the intramural athletics program is open to any and all students. In grade 8, one top team is selected and the remaining students are placed on equal teams. This provides a good transition to the upper school athletic program that is more competitive in nature. It is important to note that all middle school sports and clubs are sponsored by TAS faculty.

In the Upper School, students at TAS participate in a variety of clubs that include community service, school service, or specific interest clubs. The Upper School schedule allows for student clubs to sometimes meet during the school day during Flex period. In addition to participating in clubs, students can also apply to honor societies and government organizations. Leadership opportunities are provided for students as most leadership positions in clubs, honor societies, and government are elected positions.

Adequate Available Services

Focus: The school has available adequate services, including referral services, to support students in such areas as English language support, special needs, academic assistance, and, career and personal counseling.

TAS has services in place for referring and supporting students in English language support, special needs, academic assistance, career and personal counseling, and health.

That 11% of the total faculty of TAS serve in a student support role is strong evidence of the school’s commitment in this area. TAS employs two school psychologists, four speech and language specialists,
one reading intervention specialist, 5.5 resource teachers, eight personal and academic counselors, and five college counselors. As noted in the Self-Study, with so many different avenues of support in the school, careful attention must be given to balancing these support systems to best serve the specific child.

At TAS, ESL support is provided for students in grades 1-8. The last year that new students can be accepted into the pull-out ESL program is Grade 7. The School has assessed that the average ESL student remains in the ESL program for 2.45 years, which means some of the ESL pull-out students in Grade 7 may not be prepared to exit the ESL program by the end of Grade 8. With no formal ESL support program in the Upper School, other than the Expository Writing class, the Visiting Committee recommends the Upper School Administration and Academic Support Services personnel reassess if this current level of support in the Upper School is adequate.

With two full-time counselors in both the lower and middle schools, along with four personal and academic counselors, and five college counselors in the upper school, TAS is able to adequately support students social-emotional, behavior, academic and college counseling needs.

Middle School students have an association with a homeroom teacher, and Upper School students are provided a faculty advisor who mentors them for their entire time in the Upper School. In the self study report, both divisions identify this to be an area that needs continued development.

TAS students in all three divisions have access to a fully equipped, exemplary library learning space. Additionally there is an Information Technology Center to support students’ access to learning technology. With extended hours in the evening and on weekends, these library facilities provide students with comprehensive access to support their learning.

TAS ensures that students’ health and medical needs are supported through the employment of 4 full-time registered nurses (one of the nurses works after school and on weekends).

**Student Involvement in Curricular/Co-Curricular Activities**

**Focus:** The school regularly evaluates the level of student involvement in curricular/co-curricular activities and student use of support services.

Each division at TAS uses a different system for tracking student involvement in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. The numbers of students participating in all activities and sports are included in the annual report.

**Athletics/Activities Department and TYPA**

The athletics department at TAS keeps track of the number of student try-outs for various sports via Google forms. The school reports that a review of these forms indicates that student involvement in this area has remained fairly steady or shown signs of slight increase. The school benefits from its relationship with TYPA, an independent non-profit organization that has been providing a wide variety of co-curricular and recreational programs to the international/expatriate communities in Taipei for over 30 years. A large number of TAS students, especially in the lower school, participate in at least one program sponsored by TYPA.
Counseling Office

TAS has multiple ways of tracking the number of students receiving support services and these numbers are reported in the annual report. A Student Resource Team (SRT) log is kept in all three divisions to track referrals. Counselors and psychologists keep personal logs of students and families receiving counseling and crisis counseling services and those referred to outside agencies. The Visiting Committee recommends that TAS explore the potential use of PowerSchool as a one-stop home for recording Student Support Services data.

Parent Reviews

Parent survey results at TAS indicate that parents are satisfied with both the balance between co-curricular activities and academics, and their children’s interest in getting involved in after-school activities. On a scale of 1-5, with 4 being agree and 5 being strongly agree, parents rated the balance between co-curricular activities and academics at TAS as 4.15. Similarly, parents’ belief that their children show high interest in getting involved in after school activities, which include sports, clubs, and community service was reported on the survey as a score of 4.1. As there has been a gradual increase in the ratings of these areas over the past five years, the visiting committee concludes that parents believe the programs at the school have improved and are meeting the needs of their children.

Nursing Office

Nurses at TAS use an electronic charting system called SNAP to track daily nursing services provided to students. SNAP allows the registered nurse to keep an accurate log of each student’s visit, including his or her chief complaint, nursing assessment, treatment plan, and outcome. SNAP also records and maintains immunization documentation, screening letters, medical updates, and accident reports. As mentioned above, the Visiting Committee recommends that TAS explore the potential use of PowerSchool as a one-stop home for recording student support services data, including nursing services.

Student Perceptions: Interviews and dialogues with students assist the school in evaluating the effectiveness of the academic and personalized student support.

Each year, students at TAS are provided the opportunity to give feedback to their teachers through a survey. Additionally, in preparation for the WASC self-study, students completed a survey focusing on their view of their learning experience, support services and the connection of their learning to the ESLRs. In this survey, 89% of the students from Lower to Upper School report that they agree or strongly agree with the statement that teachers help, care, respect and expect me to do my best.

Similarly, 79% of Middle and Upper School students feel they have an adult to talk with when they have a problem, and 79% feel that talking to adults was effective or somewhat effective in solving the problem. While this is a strong indication that the majority of TAS students feel connected to a system of support, the visiting committee does recommend that the Middle and Upper School Faculty and Administration do some investigating to ensure that the other 21% of their student population are in fact accessing this support in other ways.
While the visiting committee recognizes that the Upper School at TAS has made great strides with its advisory program, students report that it does not always provide the one-to-one connection it intends. As such, the faculty and administration will need to continue their search for ways to make the program stronger and more effective, as mentioned above. Specifically, the Upper School can look for ways to improve the advisory program, by referencing the continuing development of the character education program at TAS.

The Self-Study reports, “In general, the students show strong interest and high satisfaction in co-curricular involvement. According to the student survey, the rating of the overall quality of the co-curricular programs at the school is very positive. Furthermore, students are very satisfied with the balance between co-curricular activities and academics at TAS.”

C2. Parent/Community Involvement Criterion

Focus Question: To what extent does the school leadership employ a wide range of strategies to ensure that parental and community involvement is integral to the school’s established support system for students?

TAS has established a variety of structures and systems to ensure parent involvement is an integral component to the life of the school. Most significant, the Board of Directors is comprised of nine elected parents of current TAS students. Additionally, two designated parent connection members meet regularly with the divisional administrators in each division and provide valuable input about programs and perceptions at each level.

TAS has a well-established Parent Teacher Association (PTA) that meets regularly. All parents are automatically members of the PTA. The PTA at TAS is responsible for a range of activities that provide support for students throughout the year, such as: sponsoring guest speakers, artists, visiting authors and consultants in a variety of areas; book fairs; PTA parent coffees for each division; Food Fair; Spring Fair; Chinese New Year faculty and staff appreciation luncheons; booster club support for IASAS hospitality needs; scholarships; and a yearly calendar. The PTA also funds special purchases each year, such as digital cameras and audio systems, as needed by the school.

The Chinese Parent Connection provides an opportunity for Chinese speaking members of our community to come together to discuss school matters in Chinese.

Regular Parent Involvement

Focus Area: The school has regular processes for the involvement of parents and community.

Parents at TAS report that they have many opportunities to be involved in the school. According to the parent satisfaction survey, the average of parent responses to the statement, “the school encourages and supports parent involvement,” was 4.20 (average scores on a scale of 1-5, with 4 being agree and 5 being strongly agree).

In the lower school parents volunteer in individual classrooms and/or attend field trips. Additionally, each classroom seeks a “homeroom parent,” which provides further opportunities for parents to be
involved. TAS reports that there are naturally fewer opportunities for parents to get involved in the classrooms of middle and upper schools.

TAS holds bi-annual parent-teacher conferences in the lower and middle schools, and annual parent-teacher conferences in the upper school. Parents are encouraged to contact their child’s teacher directly to resolve any specific issue. For those parents who lack confidence in using English, the school provides Chinese (and sometimes Japanese and Korean) translations in most of its announcements and publications. Additionally, counselors in all divisions offer parent outreach sessions on a variety of topics, which help to keep parents connected to the learning and school experiences of their children.

Use of Community Resources:

Focus Area: The school uses community resources to support students such as professional services, business partnerships, speakers, etc.

This is an area of strength for TAS, and the school’s leadership and faculty are to be commended for their development of programs and systems that truly connect the school to the community. The school’s commitment to this goal is evidenced in the Strategic Plan of 2009-2012, that identifies “Capitalize on excellent experiences available locally” as an area for focus. As a result of this area for focus, the school has formed numerous relationships with learning institutions and developed authentic connections within the local Taiwanese community.

Upper School

One excellent example of accomplishment in this criterion is the upper school’s Summer Academy which has an internship component that helps place 40 – 55 rising seniors into various businesses and institutions in Taipei for a six week period over the summer. This internship experience provides students with an opportunity to complete research in topics of science and technology, and the chance to learn basic skills in a professional field they may be considering. The two types of internships offered are a six-week summer internship or a research internship that comprises a six-week summer internship plus continuing work with the institution throughout the following school year. Through these internship programs, students conduct experiments and reviews for local research and education institutions such as Academica Sinica, National Taiwan University of Medicine, Veterans Hospital, and Siemens. This program has provided a wonderful experience for students who are interested in scientific research and careers in areas such as research and medicine. TAS reports that they hope to expand this research program in the future.

Another excellent example is the upper school’s Robotics and Computer Science course that involves students attending class at the National Taiwan University, Science and Technology center on a weekly basis. In this course, students have the opportunity to study these topics with a leading world expert and his team. A graduate student from NTUST (Teaching Fellowship) also teaches a course in artificial intelligence at TAS. Additionally, one of the annual summer internships is at the Intelligent Robot Research Center.

Upper school students at TAS also have opportunities to compete in a variety of local and regional competitions. The MACRONIX competition is sponsored by the Macronix Education Foundation and encourages high school talent in scientific research, innovation, and invention. In November 2011, TAS hosted the first Asia VEX Gateway Challenge robotics competition with teams from Japan, Manila, Thailand, and Taiwan.
Middle School

Connections to the community happen in a variety of ways in the Middle School at TAS. Middle School sport, at TAS, is a member of the Taiwan Expatriate Athletics for Middle Schools (TEAMS). Through membership with TEAMS, TAS students have the opportunity to compete with local teams in a variety of sports. The Grade 8 teachers at TAS liaison with community leaders to facilitate a grade 8 clean up day. As well, the Middle School has also developed a strong relationship with Siemens Taiwan which collaborates with students on solar power projects.

Lower School

Over the past few years, Siemens Taiwan has also worked with the students in the Lower School (grade 3) on a solar powered car project. The objective of the activity is to educate the next generation about the importance of saving energy, environmental care, and the value of renewable energy. Also in the Lower School, Mandarin teachers have hosted two separate groups of education students from National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU).

While it seems clear that all three divisions have formed relationships with Taiwanese businesses and organizations that enhance and support the school program, the visiting committee recommends further exploration into how the learning of Lower and Middle School students could be further linked to local community resources.

The four TAS libraries have also established connections with the local community that serve to support students and teachers. The Corel Software Company provides technical support to Media Services and also sponsors the Formosa Film Festival. And, the National Central Library & National Taiwan Library, and the Archival Department provide tours and special visits to librarians and upper school students who have a special interest in professional archiving of books.

TAS has endeavored to bring in a variety of consultants to support the programs and learning in all three divisions. Recent presenters have included Alan November, a leader in educational technology; Loung Ung, a Cambodian--American author, human rights activist and Pol Pot regime survivor; Minfong Ho, an award--winning Chinese--American writer; and Noemi Ban, concentration camp survivor and author.

TAS maintains an informal relationship with the Community Services Center (CSC) in Taiwan. The CSC provides counseling services to support families that are having adjustment difficulties, or for students who need ongoing counseling because of significant social, emotional, or family difficulties. The CSC also provides families with information about programs and services. TAS provides a space for the CSC to carry out counseling services for students in the school, and CSC provides all TAS families with four free counseling sessions at no charge. At all divisions, the Student Support Services departments work closely with a variety of community organizations, mental health resources, therapists, and physicians to support TAS students.

In addition to developing relationships with business and organizations in the local community that will benefit TAS students and community, TAS also carries out actions that provide opportunities to give back to the local community. One such example is the partnership with the local Ministry of Education, to co-sponsor the Taipei Teacher Training Program. For the past five years, this program has offered a one-week intensive workshop and monthly Saturday sessions to local teachers. TAS teachers present
sessions, and TAS supports the program both financially and through the provision of space. To date, this program has trained over 100 English teachers in Taiwan in best practices related to English language learning. Another way the School contributes to the local community is through service learning activities that take place in almost all grade levels from K-12.

**Parents/Community and Student Achievement:**

**Focus Area:** The school ensures that the parents and school community understand student achievement of the expected schoolwide learning results (schoolwide learner outcomes) through the school’s program.

Since the development of the ESLRs in 2007, the school has endeavored to make the ESLRs more visible and understood throughout the school and community. The Superintendent and divisional administration use parent coffees, faculty meetings, and other parent gatherings and communications to stress the importance of these attributes to the school community. Teachers include the ESLRs in their curriculum unit plans, and students have opportunities to achieve the ESLRs through a variety of curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.

In a student survey completed for the WASC self-study, students in grades 3-12 were asked if they feel that, as a student at TAS, they have grown in the attributes related to the ESLRs. Across all divisions, for all ESLRs, a strong majority of students report that they agree or strongly agree.

Beyond the above survey, there is no evidence that TAS assesses or reports on student achievement of the ESLRs. As such, the Visiting Committee recommends that the leadership team and faculty begin to explore means for authentically measuring these important attributes that form the basis of the educational program for all students at TAS, both within the curricular program and through the use of student reflection.

**Areas of Strength: Support for Student Personal and Academic Growth Category**

- The highly qualified support services team ensures that the needs of ESL and students receiving learning support are met.
- Faculty provide students with individual assistance outside the regular classroom contact time.
- The libraries are a source of excellence within the school, as they provide a dynamic site and source for learning at all levels.
- TAS takes advantage of appropriate community resources, such as experts in various fields, to enhance the student experience.
- TAS provides students with myriad opportunities to advance their talents and explore new interests through the curricular and co-curricular programs, at all levels of the school.
- The support and involvement of the parent community enhance the student experience.

**Areas for Growth: Support for Student Personal and Academic Growth**

- To better support the learning needs of all students in all divisions, faculty and administration examine and consider more ways of differentiating instruction within the mainstream classroom.
● Administration, Student Support Services personnel, and ESL faculty explore options for improved coordination of all student support programs and processes within each division, as well as across the three divisions.
● The Upper School administration and Academic Support personnel revisit whether the current approach to support the specific learning needs of Upper School ESL students is adequate and effective.
CHAPTER IV D: RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Allocation Decisions

Focus Question: How developed is the relationship between the decisions about resource allocations, the school’s purpose and student achievement of schoolwide learning results and curricular standards? To what extent are the leadership and staff involved in the resource allocation decisions?

Taipei American School’s resource and budget procedures support the mission and vision of the school. The Strategic Plan is linked to the budget and the number of departmental requests approved by the Board from all three divisions is high.

Requests for funding are aligned with learning goals and the Board is supportive of the decisions made by the faculty and administration related to student learning. It is evident in discussion with TAS staff and students that this is a community that values learning. The formation of the three year Strategic Plan involved all stakeholders and overlays onto the WASC Critical Areas for Follow up.

The budget is well organized with systematic and logical planning. TAS has established a budget calendar cycle, beginning every August in preparation for the following year. The school utilizes a budget workbook which demonstrates the involvement of the curricular stakeholders, including the budget managers, department heads, and other school leaders. Data is gathered and used effectively in order to make projections.

Communication and articulation of budgetary systems is effective. Information flows from budget managers (department-chair/ team-leader positions) to the administration using the budget workbook. This ensures that any teaching resources that are needed for high quality instruction are sourced. Whilst the budgetary systems are effective, they are considered by those in the department to be somewhat antiquated and in need of upgrading to provide a more efficient digitized system.

TAS uses the standards established by NAIS as its best practice base and it is apparent that the community sees a clear correlation between the school fees and the educational program. The school has an Association General Meeting (AGM) twice each year where it communicates financial results with the community, including disclosure of surplus and major operational information.

Practices

Focus Question: How effective is the school’s process for developing an annual budget, conducting an annual audit, and at all times conducting quality business and accounting practices, including protections against mishandling of the school’s funds

TAS effectively develops annual budgets, conducts audits and quality business and accounting practices. The school has systems and routines in place to protect school funds from mismanagement.

The budget process is documented in the annual budget workbook and in the policy manual, along with the goals, timeline, procedure, staff involvement, and process for controls. TAS complies with U.S. GAAP (Generally Accepted Accounting Principles) and uses fund accounting to track financial activities. The school references the four NAIS-recommended best practices for sound fiscal management for the
school’s financial health. TAS prepares and approves an annual balanced operating budget which is monitored by the Board via the Management and Resources Committee and regular administrative reports.

TAS continues to experience growth in the operating budget, the unexpended plant fund (provision for facility replacement), school assets, and the endowment fund. The school has a growing endowment fund which is providing NT$400 million for the new facility project.

TAS is audited by independent firm KPMG, and is to be commended for its sixteen year track record with no audit exceptions. Now may be the time to consider rotating the auditor every five year period. TAS ensures protection against the mismanagement of funds with clearly documented purchasing procedures which are adhered to by all school stakeholders.

Adequacy of Facilities

Focus Question: Are the school’s facilities adequate to meet the school’s purpose? Are the school’s facilities safe, functional, and well maintained?

TAS facilities are 21 years old, secured by a wall or a fence surrounding its perimeter with security cameras and scheduled guard patrols. There are also 75 security cameras and 17 guards who provide security 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The campus has controlled access for pedestrian traffic, vehicle drop off/pick up, and for deliveries.

TAS has taken steps to ensure facilities are safe functioning and well maintained by performing maintenance on a scheduled basis and has trained and employed qualified maintenance technicians. The school has regular fire inspections and differential settlement tests done for earthquakes by an independent consulting firm to ensure there are no structural defects. With a 21 year-old campus, TAS has a challenging renewal and replacement schedule. Whilst there are clear plans in place to renew the Upper School building and to refresh the Middle School as a result, attention needs to be paid to the ageing Lower School facilities.

TAS has developed a comprehensive building plan which took nearly five years of study and planning. This development plan includes both the construction of three new buildings and renovation work which is scheduled for Summer 2012. Student safety has been a major part of every aspect of this planning process and careful review of designs and materials were undertaken to ensure codes were met. All aspects of the new buildings meet or exceed required codes for fire, physical safety, and circulation.

TAS is to be commended for the system of checks and balances established to monitor the design, budget, tender process, construction, and safety of the new buildings and renovations, in particular, for involving skilled members of the TAS community in the process. The construction and pre-construction committee, working alongside the construction manager, community, Board and school representatives, effectively ensures student safety, financial prudence and skilled oversight.
Instructional Materials

**Focus Question:** How effective are the procedures for acquiring and maintaining adequate instructional materials, such as textbooks, other printed materials, audio-visual, support technology, manipulatives, laboratory materials, and library/media resources?

TAS has systems in place to acquire resources from abroad via three or four consolidated containers from the U.S. Teachers are involved in creating orders in November which arrive over the summer. These orders are based on the budget, which is approved in November of each year by the Board. A procedure is in place to ensure budget managers’ and divisional approval is obtained prior to review by administration.

Meeting minutes keep a record of purchasing decisions related to instructional materials and are a good illustration that instructional materials purchases are based on curricular needs.

TAS has a well-resourced library and is enriching student learning with online databases, e-books and e-readers that provide the most current information. The 1:1 initiative is well funded and it allows for immediate acquisition of current learning materials for TAS students. Software licensing is coordinated by the IT department and funding is reviewed through the annual operating budget. The TAS libraries are an enormous asset to the school. This has been money well spent to create a distinctive heart within each division. These are well designed spaces that students and staff can be proud of, they are well utilized and demonstrate a true commitment to student learning.

Well-Qualified Staff

**Focus Question:** Do the resources available enable the hiring and nurturing of well-qualified staff, including ongoing PD?

TAS actively recruits highly qualified teachers using a variety of resources. The recruiting budget is robust. The TAS salary and benefits package is sufficient to retain a stable staff and recent increases have improved competitiveness and faculty satisfaction.

TAS has a Professional Development (PD) program that includes on site and international growth opportunities for the faculty. Funding is secured through the school budget and grants. In the 2011-2012 school year the budget for PD was 1.1% of the operations budget.

TAS reviews the salary scale for support staff on an annual basis. Local staff have a relatively new salary scale, implemented in 2009-2010. The Taiwan Consumer Price Index (CPI) and the Towers Watson Taiwan database are used to ensure salaries are fair and competitive for local staff.

D2: Resource Planning

**Focus area:** The governing authority and the school leadership execute responsible resource planning for the future.

Master Resource Plan
Focus Question: Does the school have a master resource or long-range plan to ensure responsible planning for the future? Evaluate the process for regular examination of the master resource plan to ensure the continual availability of appropriate resources that support the school’s purpose and expected schoolwide learning results.

At TAS, divisions and teams establish annual divisional and team goals for school improvement based on the Strategic Plan. The long-range plan takes into account tuition and registration projections, current fund budget summaries, and fund balance projections. The long-range financial planning at TAS provides an informed and education based platform for resource allocation and renewal. In addition, TAS has a well-established annual budget process in place that fully funds the school’s operational and capital expenses.

The allocation and procurement processes for the budget are clear, documented, comprehensive, and effective. Careful decision-making maximizes efficient use of resources and ensures adequate funding for future priorities and requests to the extent that such funding can become regularized in the budget and not result exclusively from ad hoc requests.

Based on board policy, an unrestricted endowment fund, which was accumulated over the past decade (NT$952 million at June 30, 2010), ensures there are resources for future financial needs. This endowment fund is used as part of the emergency reserve calculation. The uninvested plant fund, invested plant fund, and a balanced current fund (operating budget) ensure a strong and stable financial future for TAS.

Use of Research and Information

Focus Question: To what extent does the school’s leadership and staff use research and information to form the master resource plan?

A range of data form the basis for the Strategic Plan and other long-range plans. Data drawn from stakeholder surveys, student results, salary survey results and cost-of-living indices are gathered from EARCOS, NAIS, and the U.S. Department of State to inform the strategic plan. Local data are also considered, such as the Taiwan CPI. A number of consultants and experts aid the Board and administrative team to effectively use research and information to form the master resource plan.

TAS uses research to guide their work and is supported by informed professionals.

Shareholders

Focus Question: Is there effective involvement of shareholders in the school’s future planning?

Stakeholders were informed via focus groups during the development of the current Strategic Plan. Parents are able to run for election to the school board and all school association members may vote in the school’s annual board election.

Provision exists for communication between faculty, administration, the board and parents. The Management and Resource Committee of the Board, oversees the school’s annual budget and budget managers liaise with divisional/department chairs to ensure sufficient funding for their respective curricular programs. The annual operating and capital budgets are approved by the Board.
Communication and involvement is provided for in TAS committees and divisions to ensure checks and balances for the spending of the instructional budget and to ensure it is linked to the strategic plan.

Informing

**Focus Question:** *Is there evidence that the governing authority and school leaders are involved in informing appropriate groups about the financial needs of the organization?*

Financial information is provided to the community twice each year at the AGM, through messages to parents, and through the Annual Report. Board meetings, at which financial updates are provided, are open to all school association members. The Superintendent shares financial information with parents pertaining to tuition, the allocation of funds, funding for facilities, and the annual giving program. Communication regarding the school’s financial status also occurs with faculty via KA-12 faculty meetings.

The parents and community are informed about the financial status of the school in appropriate ways.

Marketing Strategies

**Focus Question:** *How effective are the marketing strategies to support the implementation of the developmental program?*

The school has an office dedicated to advancement which includes admissions, communications, marketing, alumni, community outreach, and development personnel who work to achieve advancement goals. This office is making progress and is to be commended for its foresight and energy in these areas.

The school has strong enrollment and there are waiting lists in some areas, indicating a demand for admission to the school. Outreach activities generate interest in and applications to TAS. The communications and marketing office promotes programs and activities in a multitude of ways within TAS, to the local Taiwan audience, and worldwide. Alumni are informed about and involved with the TAS community. In order to promote the quality of a TAS education, college counselors perform outreach activities at top universities around the world.

The Strategic Plan specifically includes an objective for the generation of annual ‘giving funds’. Funds raised support the “building, professional, and program excellence” initiatives identified in the Strategic Plan.

The positive reputation of the school is spread throughout the world by alumni, faculty, and friends. Communication with and about TAS is positive and the resources dedicated to marketing and to support the implementation of the developmental program are strong.

Areas of Strength: Resource Management and Development

- Overall parent satisfaction for TAS and its programs is high.
- TAS has a competitive salary and benefits package and is able to hire and retain well qualified faculty and staff.
- There is commitment by the community to the facilities development project and renovation of the current plant.
• The allocation and procurement processes for the budget are clear, documented, comprehensive, and effective. Systems are in place to ensure careful decision-making that maximizes efficient use of resources.
• The TAS Board is responsive to funding requests that support student learning priorities.
• The positive relationship between the parent community, Board, faculty, support staff, and administration provides a cooperative environment for resource planning.

Areas for Growth: Resource Management and Development

• The finance department investigate the implementation of a digitized accounting system to provide a more efficient and streamlined service to the School.
• The Board, the business office, and the development office, together with the superintendent, pursue tuition and giving initiatives in order to maintain the School’s posture as a 21st century learning community.
CHAPTER V: SCHOOLWIDE ACTION PLAN

The Schoolwide Action Plan is going to form the basis, together with the Visiting Team’s Recommendations, for the new 3-year Strategic Plan currently being drawn up by TAS working with an outside consultant. The new Plan will form the basis for resource allocation and funding decisions for the next three years and the Board will hold the Administration responsible for the Plan’s completion and implementation.

With respect to the Action Plan that completes the school’s Self-Study, the Visiting Committee finds as follows:

Character Education – This is an oft-stated major priority for TAS. It is the Self-Study’s Number One area for improvement. Already there has been commendable progress on this area as it is referred to in all the school’s foundational documents one way or another – Mission Statement, Vision Statement, Core Values and ESLRs. With such widespread attention being paid to Character Education, the Visiting Committee has no doubt about the stakeholders’ resolve to follow through. The Action Steps and Timeline are equally clear.

English Language Arts/ESL – Recent additions to the curriculum in the areas of public speaking, debate and forensics highlight the school’s commitment to this area for improvement. Since English is the language of instruction throughout the school, mastery is critical and in the Lower and Middle divisions, the ESL program is excellent. There is currently some vagueness or lack of clarity in the Upper School about the extent of help to be given to ESL students but this is an area of ongoing concern and attention for the divisional principles to work on.

Curriculum Documentation - The K-12 curriculum has been thoroughly documented in Atlas Rubicon, and common assessments created for all subject area units of study. The exception in the new courses added to the TAS program of studies. The Assistant Superintendent for Learning is leading continued work in this area with a focus on increasing the challenge of assessments.

Use of Data/ESLR Assessment – Common assessment data and external assessment data have been collected and analyzed by the Deputy Superintendent for Learning and Faculty Committees. At the school-wide administrative level, learning evidence is used for accountability to stakeholders and to inform programmatic and curricular changes. Some teaching teams, counselors, and support personnel make use of student learning data to inform instruction and learning accommodations. Although there has been an attempt to track and assess ESLRs in units of study in Atlas Rubicon, it has not been a successful effort. There are plentiful opportunities to access the ESLRs in a qualitative manner, by using evidence of student participation in the plethora of activities inside and outside of TAS in which students are exhibiting growth in the ESLRs.

K-12 Articulation – In the past four years, all areas of the curriculum, with the exception of the Arts, have been reviewed with K-12 coherence and alignment in mind. As well, the addition of new courses in the Middle and Upper School has resulted in a backwards look at the building and coherence of curriculum in mathematics, science and technology from grade 3 to grade 12.

Highly Able Students in Lower School – Since the introduction of a higher-level math class into Grade Five, there has been interest in accelerating other aspects of the Lower and Middle School curricula to accommodate the needs of gifted students. The Visiting Committee is of mixed minds about the
efficacy of such a venture but it may be inevitable that an enriched curriculum becomes available to parallel the sectioning that exists in the Upper School. It remains to be seen just how extensive the school’s commitment to expanding opportunities to gifted students will be and this should be an area of focus in the school’s interim report.

**Use of Technological Resources** – The Visiting Committee concurs with the school’s own thinking on the need to digitize budgeting and purchasing systems and the need for inline and digitized texts. As faculty turnover occurs, it is highly likely that new teachers will be more in tune with the use of classroom technology than many of the current faculty. The proper people in the administration have been tasked with these matters and the Board will unquestionably supply the necessary resources for the growth of technology in all areas of school life.

**Green Initiatives** – This was an area virtually unnoticed by the Visiting Committee. The school is doubtlessly sincere in its efforts to become Green, but such efforts can only be considered nascent at the present time. Student activities and interests are clearly propelling the adults in this direction and this likely will be an area of school life where the children will take the lead and adults will follow.

**Marketing/Fundraising** – This is an area of major interest to the school leadership both on the Board and in the Administration. Pressure on tuition increases will be greatly reduced if there is growth in giving but progress has proved elusive. *Ad hoc* funding of initiatives by individuals in the school community when solicited by the Superintendent has been very effective, but there is general agreement that this cannot, or should not, proceed indefinitely. A more systematized and broad-based approach to fundraising is required but the Visiting Committee believes that the school leadership, both Board and administration, recognize this and are moving with all deliberate speed in this direction.
Overall Areas to Celebrate

- The Board and senior administration have created an atmosphere of collaboration, trust and transparency that enables all stakeholders to focus on student learning.
- The Board of Directors have developed and adhered to a newly constructed board policy manual. They are exercising sound governance of the school and are an asset to TAS and its community.
- The collaboratively constructed strategic plan harnesses the energy of the school and provides a framework for ongoing improvement focused on student learning.
- The administration and divisional leadership have broadened and enriched course offerings based upon students’ varied interests, goals and levels of achievement.
- TAS teachers and administrators have created a culture of learning and well-being for all students.
- The Board and TAS administration are strongly committed to the continual professional growth of teachers through generous support for strategic and targeted internal and external professional development to improve the learning of students at TAS.
- The Assistant Superintendent for Learning and curriculum review committees have revised and redesigned curricular areas resulting in a K-12 aligned and coherent vertical curriculum to support student learning at TAS.
- Faculty provide students with individual assistance outside the regular classroom contact time.
- TAS provides students with myriad opportunities to advance their talents and explore new interests through the curricular and co-curricular programs, at all levels of the school.

Overall Areas For Focus

- Faculty and administration articulate a K-12 assessment policy outlining the school’s beliefs and practices regarding assessment, grading, and reporting of student learning.
- Faculty and administration analyze and revise common assessments to ensure the inclusion of important concepts and big ideas which provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate application and transfer of their learning.
- Faculty and leadership realize the vision for character education by implementing programs schoolwide and measuring the success of such programs in the next Strategic Plan.
- The TAS community develop a common understanding of what constitutes “a balanced life” for its students.
- To better support the learning needs of all students in all divisions, faculty and administration examine and consider more ways of differentiating instruction within the mainstream classroom.
- The Board, the business office, and the development office, together with the superintendent, pursue tuition and giving initiatives in order to maintain the School’s posture as a 21st century learning community.