

**A Framework for the Future
International Schools Services (ISS)
September 2016
FINAL**

INTRODUCTION

International Schools Services (ISS) was founded in 1955 by Arthur Sweetser to support the International School of Geneva, an international school that he had helped to found and that his children had attended when Sweetser was in Geneva to establish the League of Nations. From its modest beginnings, ISS grew into a leading provider of services to overseas American schools.

Over the past six decades, ISS has started and managed over 100 schools on five continents; recruited and placed more than 40,000 international educators; connected 2,000 supply vendors with schools worldwide; managed 75 school foundations, and developed standards-based language and other curricula and professional development programs. We have also helped to launch numerous organizations that support and promote international education, including the Association for the Advancement of International Education (AAIE), the Academy for International School Heads (AISH), and most recently, the International Task Force on Child Protection, and ISS continues to actively support many regional associations and international school organizations through conference sponsorships.

From its inception, ISS was animated by a desire to make the world a better place through education. Sweetser believed that good education was essential for a thriving world. Upon his retirement from the United Nations, Sweetser told his colleagues, “You are working for all the ends that make life worthwhile on this planet – for peace, for the eradication of war, for human advancement, for human rights and decencies, for better living standards, better education, better travel and communications – in short, for the world as it ought to be.” That commitment endures. Indeed, as part of our strategic planning process, the board and staff reaffirmed the importance of international education to foster global understanding and cooperation.

During the strategic planning process, the board and staff 1) reviewed how recent trends have affected the international school sector; 2) surveyed our constituents; 3) evaluated our strengths and weaknesses vis-à-vis key competitors; 4) conducted interviews and focus groups with select clients; and 5) spoke with respected leaders in the international school community. Through that process, we identified both ISS’s strengths and weaknesses. On the positive side, ISS is well liked and admired for having high levels of professionalism, integrity and excellence. On a more critical note, we need to become more agile and innovative and make our services more responsive and valuable to our clients. The feedback also suggested that while ISS should continue to provide comprehensive, customized services to international schools and educators, we need to do a better job incorporating technological and educational innovations, identifying and leveraging the synergies among our programs, and promoting our services to

the growing international school community. For a summary of the constituent feedback, see Appendix A.

HISTORIC VERSUS EMERGING ISS: STRATEGIC PRIORITIES & REVISED MISSION STATEMENT

The world has seen dramatic changes over the past six decades since ISS was founded, and the evolution of the international school community in general and ISS in particular have mirrored many of those changes. Figure I shows how ISS has evolved in response to key global trends by comparing “Historic ISS” to “Emerging ISS” and identifying seven strategic priorities.

FIGURE I – *Historic vs. Emerging ISS*

HISTORIC ISS	EMERGING ISS	STRATEGIC PRIORITIES
Overseas American Perspective	Global-Mindedness	Global Perspective
Isolated School Enclaves	Interconnected Educational Communities	Diverse, Co-Created Communities
Closed Homogenous Club	Diverse Open Networks & Strategic Partnerships	
Old Power-Consuming Services	New Power – Co-Producing & Co-Ownning Services	
School Management	School Leadership & Best Practices	Innovative, Best Practices
Tailored Projects	Documented Process of Customization & Research-Based Replicable Models	
Stability & Status Quo	Change Leadership, Innovation & Continuous Improvement	
Opportunistic Initiatives	Strategic Prototypes	Proactive Marketing
Responsive, Word-of-Mouth Promotion	Pro-Active Business Development, Marketing & Branding	
Customer Service	Value-Add	Customer Value
Profit-Making Business	Value-Creating Nonprofit/Social Venture	
Top-Down Management	Employee Initiative & Distributed Leadership	Collaborative Leadership
Silo’ed Departments & Services	Cross-Functional Teams & Integrated, Leveraged Solutions	
Hierarchical Governance	Generative Governance	
Cross Subsidies	Sustainable Programs	Sustainable Growth

Following are brief descriptions of the seven strategic priorities on which ISS will redouble our focus so that we best serve the international school community and most importantly prepare today's students to be thoughtful, imaginative, global leaders.

Global Mindedness

When ISS was founded, there were few international schools and most served exclusively or nearly exclusively *ex pat* students, many of whose families lived overseas for just a few years before returning to their home countries. American international schools were designed to be as similar to US public schools as possible so students could return seamlessly to the States when their parents' overseas assignments ended. The faculty of such schools were also predominately *ex pats* and the schools generally adopted American curriculums.

As the world became more global, the make-up of international schools changed to include many more local or host country national families and local faculty as well, particularly in some regions of the world such as South America. The International Baccalaureate (IB) was founded in 1968 and grew in popularity, as many international schools developed global curriculums to reflect their more diverse constituents and the more interconnected world.

While the percentage of schools serving *ex pat* students has declined significantly over the past decade, the overall international school market continues to expand at the rate of about 7 percent a year as a middle class emerges, wealth increases around the world, and parents of children in countries with emerging economies seek to ensure that their children are ultimately prepared to participate in the global economy. This desire is so strong that parents are willing to invest a significant part of their earnings in their children's education. In particular, parents want their children to become fully fluent in English, develop critical thinking and creative problem solving skills, and attend American or other Western universities – all in preparation for careers with multinational companies or organizations.

Nearly all the growth in international schools has been of schools serving predominantly local students. Such schools tend to be established by the business elite of the host country, have more modest tuitions than the schools developed for *ex pat* children with corporate tuition allowances, and employ more local teachers. These new global schools aim to expose students to a world-class international education while still maintaining fluency in their native language, instilling a strong sense of local culture and values, and honoring local societal norms.

While ISS has traditionally focused on education outside the boundaries of the US, independent schools in the United States have also recognized that their graduates will live and work in a global world. To that end, they are increasingly globalizing their student bodies, their faculty and their curriculums and seeking ways to meaningfully partner with high quality international schools. Moreover, ISS itself has become more global too, with staff hailing from a myriad of countries and the establishment and growth of a regional office in China.

In response to the aforementioned trends, going forward, we will apply our 60 years of experience starting international schools to develop **ISS Schools**¹ to serve local children and to train and mentor local faculty in student-centered curricula and pedagogies. We will also try to engage more US independent schools in the global community in meaningful and mutually beneficial ways, and we will diversify the ISS staff and board and locate more staff overseas, closer to the schools we serve. At the same time, since ISS's headquarters will remain in Princeton, we will invest in global mindedness training for all staff and board members to enhance our global perspective and increase our effectiveness, and at the suggestion of the ISS school heads, we will provide global mindedness training, resources and models for our schools to use too.

Diverse Co-Created Communities

Given the relative ease of transportation and the ubiquity of technology, our sense of community has been radically altered in modern times. As Kwame Appiah describes in his book *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers (2006)*, for most of human history, people lived their entire lives in close proximity to where they were born and interacted with a relatively small number of people with whom they were often related and certainly familiar. With the advent of global trade, rapid transit and mass communication, people now interact regularly and easily across continents and time zones.

Originally, many international schools felt like isolated enclaves, because they served mostly *ex pat* children, employed predominantly *ex pat* faculty, and were often located on *ex pat* compounds. While that sense of isolation was already beginning to change when ISS was founded in 1955, because like Sweetser many international school founders and leaders valued cross-cultural interactions, the tenor has shifted dramatically in recent decades as the international school community has grown and evolved and the world has become more interconnected. International schools today now routinely engage in both their local communities and the global education community.

The community of international school educators often feels “like a small world”, and sometimes even like a closed club, because over the course of their careers, many international faculty work at multiple schools in different countries and even different continents. Bonds first established in person as colleagues have traditionally been renewed at regional association meetings and recruiting fairs and are now also maintained and nurtured online.

¹ We originally intended to distinguish between “international schools” serving mostly *ex pat* students and “global schools” serving predominantly host country national students. But, we realized that the make-up of the student body is just one characteristic of schools; others include the make-up of the faculty, the quality of the facilities, the size of the school, the ownership structure, the curriculum, etc. Recognizing that variety, we decided to focus on the community of ISS Schools rather than the distinctions among our schools.

The new generation of international teachers admires the closeness among the more seasoned generation of international educators and seeks similar connections, but on their own terms – not as part of a closed relatively homogenous club, but rather through the more diverse and open networks with which they're familiar. The challenge for ISS is how to foster the same sense of loyalty and endearment that the older generation of international educators has for ISS among younger, emerging school leaders, and how to ensure that the future leadership of international schools reflects the greater diversity among international school students and families.

In a 2014 article in *The Harvard Business Review* entitled, "Understanding 'New Power'", the authors distinguished between new power and old power. Traditionally, companies and organizations developed products and services for customers to consume. With the development of Web 2.0, people now prefer to be co-creators and co-owners of the services they use. In that spirit, ISS will build on the significant use of #issedu over the past year to co-create **ISS Communities** to connect and support international educators with shared interests, and we will establish an international global ambassadors program and staffing advisory board to extend and promote ISS services. We will also periodically communicate with all the educators at ISS schools throughout the year, beginning with a back-to-school message in late August, to strengthen the sense of community and encourage collaboration among ISS educators and across ISS programs.

Innovative Best Practices

Since 1955, ISS has helped to establish over 100 international schools around the world. We operate on a custom rather than a franchise model, beginning each engagement with a visioning exercise and feasibility study to understand both the specific desires of our clients and the local context and circumstances. While such a customized approach ensures that we best meet the needs of our clients and ultimately the students, it can lead to inefficiencies and a reinventing of the proverbial wheel, unless we have well-documented processes.

When the first international schools were founded in the wakes of World War I and World War II as part of efforts to promote global understanding and world peace, there was a strong emphasis on stability and reestablishing the status quo after the devastation and chaos the world had just encountered. Today, there is much more focus on change management, innovation and continuous improvement, given the fast-paced, competitive, interconnected world in which we live and work.

There is a wealth of knowledge, experiences and educational innovations among our schools. The challenge for ISS is to respect the unique circumstances of each of our schools while at the same time establishing processes and incentives for sharing best practices and learning among our schools and beyond. Such sharing also makes continued involvement with ISS valuable beyond the initial start-up phase. We've recently made concerted efforts in this direction through the hosting of an annual June gathering in Princeton of the educational leaders of our schools, the development of Central Desktop, and the hiring of curricular and creativity &

innovation directors to support our schools. One of the highlights of the June gathering of school leaders was “One Best Thing,” at which the school heads shared innovative programs and special initiatives from their schools, and there has been considerable communication and collaboration across our schools through Level Five, Open Book and Twitter posts to #issedu.

To ensure that ISS and the schools with which we work continually improve, we will build on those efforts by finding more effective ways to document and share ISS best practices among our schools and with the international school community more broadly. At the same time, we are committed to keeping abreast of educational trends by staying connected to leading educational innovators around the world. To that end, we will partner with respected educators to pilot **ISS Professional Learning** initiatives with ISS schools in 2016-2017 on the science of learning, global mindedness and student leadership. Internally, we as an organization will also embrace innovative best practices. Specifically, we will remain a “leading follower” in the use of technology, adopt generative governance practices, and become a greener organization.

Pro-Active Marketing

ISS has traditionally relied on word-of-mouth referrals to generate new business, and rather than strategically move in a new direction, we tended to respond to challenges and take advantage of opportunities as they arose. Such a responsive, opportunistic approach to business development and marketing was sufficient when there were few players in the international school world. Today, however, ISS faces increased competition from mostly for-profit entities, many with aggressive business development plans and large marketing budgets.

In order to remain competitive, we have had to become more pro-active and strategic. Since we are a relatively lean non-profit, we can't afford large, costly investments in unproven initiatives. But, we can leverage our reputation, our connections, and our long track-record, to experiment with strategic prototypes that can then be expanded and disseminated, either by us or through strategic partnerships, once we have demonstrated their effectiveness.

We have already had some success taking a more pro-active approach to business development and marketing. Last year, we hired Timms Holdings, Inc. to help promote ISS services to wealthy clients interested in investing in education. Their efforts have led to promising new opportunities in India and Bangladesh and taught us a lot about positioning and pitching our services to business people interested in founding global schools, so we will continue to work with them going forward to source new clients. We have also worked with Agency M, a branding and web development company, to create a compelling tag line that captures the ultimate purpose of ISS, “Making a World of Difference;” rebrand ISS with a more modern look and feel; design a dynamic website to better serve current and prospective clients; and develop a comprehensive communications and marketing plan to promote ISS's varied services. The new website will be launched in late Fall 2016.

Customer Value

Customer service has long been a hallmark of ISS. Indeed, respondents to our constituent survey gave the highest scores to questions related to customer service and their interactions with ISS staff, such as “deliver well on commitments”, “respond in a timely fashion”, “look forward to my interactions”. But, the value added of our services did not score as high as our client interactions, including “respond well to my needs”, “improve my efficiency and effectiveness”, “helped make my school a better place”, “an important resource” and “money well invested”. The divergent feedback suggests that we need to identify, monitor and enhance key sources of customer value in each department.

We will also emphasize our nonprofit status. With the proliferation of for-profit schools and for-profit service providers, there is increasing cynicism about fee-based services. Educators are more likely to support value-creating nonprofits or social ventures than profit-making businesses, because they appreciate that any surpluses will be reinvested to meet our mission and better serve our clients.

On the constituent survey, respondents scored services involving recruitment, career development and professional networking by far the highest, followed by professional development opportunities, particularly those regarding creativity and learning innovation, technology and teaching, leadership development and literacy. There was also strong interest in safety and security topics.

In response to those interests, in addition to the **ISS Communities** described above, we will develop **ISS Professional Learning**, which will include ISS’s Level 5 creativity and innovation hub, our Open Book curricular resources, and the World Language Initiative, among other offerings, to provide face-to-face workshops and seminars, virtual professional development classes and webinars, and certification programs. We will also support schools’ efforts to develop strong safety, security and child protection policies.

Collaborative Leadership

Just as the world has become flatter over the past decades, so too have organizational cultures and structures become less hierarchical and more collaborative. As described above, new power has supplanted old power, and similarly, distributed leadership has replaced top-down management, and generative governance has superseded more hierarchical structures.

ISS is one of the only international organizations that provides comprehensive services to international schools and educators. While ISS managed schools take advantage of the full range of our services, ISS departments have otherwise traditionally been fairly silo’ed. We are committed going forward to integrating and leveraging our programs more intentionally so we can provide greater value to our clients and distinguish ourselves from our competitors, most of whom offer a narrower suite of services.

In order to create a culture of collaboration and leadership among the ISS staff and board, we will invest in strategic professional development for all staff, consider investing in a customer relationship management (CRM) database, and also renovate the ISS Princeton office to facilitate greater interaction among all ISS departments. We will also better connect the ISS home office to our regional offices and schools, and the ISS board to our organization and work by, for example, inviting the board to parts of the gathering of ISS heads in June and hosting a future board meeting in conjunction with a NYC recruitment fair.

Sustainable Growth

Like all long-standing organizations, ISS has experienced numerous organizational lifecycles, as programs and initiatives are launched, develop, mature, and then are either reinvented or decline. A graphic history of ISS resembles a roller coaster, tracing the lifecycles of various initiatives, from the growth and then abrupt closure of our international schools in Iran when the political regime changed, to the establishment and then liquidation of an insurance program for international educators, to a large start-up contract in the Middle East, as well as more gradual fluctuations in our programs due to competitive pressures, economic trends and technological innovations. To better manage the lifecycles of our programs, ISS will create a more systematic process of proposal development and program review and develop rolling, three-year budget forecasts.

Today, ISS is fortunate to operate in a growing market. Nevertheless, revenues from our services have been flat, because the number of competitors for each ISS department has increased substantially, and some of our traditional markets, such as the extractive industry schools, have declined. In order to maintain our reputation in an expanding market, ISS needs to grow too, so we will extend our work to new markets, particularly China, Southeast Asia, the United States, and host country national schools in other developing markets.

Revised Mission Statement

ISS has drafted a new mission statement to reflect the Emerging ISS and emphasize our strategic priorities:

Since 1955, ISS has been a nonprofit leader in international education. We provide comprehensive, customized, student-centered services to schools and educators that exemplify best practices, catalyze innovation, foster collaboration, and connect educators around the world. We are committed to creating and supporting world-class schools across the globe that educate students to be thoughtful, imaginative leaders and promote global understanding.

We will use that mission statement, along with our new tagline – Making a World of Difference – as guides to determine new service offerings.

ROLLING THREE-YEAR PLANS, OBJECTIVES AND SIGNATURE PROGRAMS

In order to ensure that ISS achieves our mission and continues to be a leader in international education, we developed comprehensive three-year plans focused on the seven strategic priorities. The key objectives for each strategic priority are summarized in Figure II.

FIGURE II – Key Strategic Objectives

Global Perspective

- ✓ Develop the **ISS Schools** model, including teacher training programs
- ✓ Build up ISS staff in the regions, closer to the work we do
- ✓ Recruit diverse board and staff with international experience
- ✓ Provide global mindedness training to ISS staff, board and schools
- ✓ Connect international schools and US independent schools in mutually beneficial ways

Diverse, Co-Created Communities

- ✓ Co-Create **ISS Communities** (e.g. Open Door, #issedu) to connect and support international educators
- ✓ Lead a campaign to diversify the leadership of international schools

Innovative Best Practices

- ✓ Document and share ISS best practices
- ✓ Connect leading educators with international schools and highlight and spread best practices among international schools
- ✓ Adopt and leverage best practices in technology
- ✓ Adopt governance best practices
- ✓ Become a “greener” organization

Pro-Active Marketing

- ✓ Rebrand ISS, including redesigning our website
- ✓ Actively market our services using multiple strategies
- ✓ Develop and implement a comprehensive communications plan
- ✓ Establish strategic partnerships to extend our services and impact

Customer Value

- ✓ Develop **ISS Professional Learning**, including Level 5, WLI, etc., to offer face-to-face and virtual professional development and certification programs
- ✓ Support schools’ efforts to develop strong safety, security and child protection policies
- ✓ Identify, monitor, enhance and communicate key sources of customer value in each department

Collaborative Leadership

- ✓ Create a culture of collaboration, initiative, innovation and leadership among all staff
- ✓ Invest in strategic professional development for all staff

- ✓ Renovate the ISS office space to promote collaboration and reflect our values and brand
- ✓ Better connect the board to our organization and work

Sustainable Growth

- ✓ Create a more systematic/interdisciplinary process of proposal development, feasibility assessment and program review
- ✓ Codify our school start-up and management practices
- ✓ Extend our work to new markets, particularly China, India, the US and HCN schools
- ✓ Develop rolling, three-year budgets
- ✓ Explore new funding sources, such as corporate sponsorships, foundation grants and personal contributions

Appendix B includes a more detailed version of our plans sorted by strategic priorities. For each activity, the plans indicate the strategic priority, the functional area, the timeline for implementation (FY17 through FY19), the responsible people, and the budget implications. We anticipate that the plans will be rolling, that is, as we complete each fiscal year, we will review and refine our activities based on our experiences over the course of the year and then add an additional year to our plans. That approach acknowledges the fast pace of change in today's world, but also ensures that we continue to monitor the external environment and make timely adjustments as needed.

In developing and prioritizing our plans, we realized that it was helpful to sort the activities not only by strategic priorities, but also by functional areas, including board, facilities, technology/community/outreach, staff and programs. Appendix C includes our three-year plans sorted by functional area, and Figure III summarizes our overall objectives in each functional area.

FIGURE III - *Functional Objectives*

Board

- ✓ Recruit diverse board with international experience
- ✓ Optimize the use of the board's time and expertise
- ✓ Adopt governance best practices
- ✓ Better connect the board to our organization and work

Facilities

- ✓ Renovate ISS office space to promote collaboration and reflect our values and brand
- ✓ Use the new office space to host meetings and events
- ✓ Become a "greener" organization

Communication/Technology/Outreach

- ✓ Rebrand ISS, including redesigning our website
- ✓ Document and share ISS best practices
- ✓ Actively market our services using multiple strategies

- ✓ Develop and implement a comprehensive communications plan
- ✓ Connect leading educators with international schools and highlight and spread best practices among international schools
- ✓ Adopt and leverage best practices in technology
- ✓ Use technology to monitor and enhance customer value

Staff

- ✓ Build up staff in the regions, closer to the work we do.
- ✓ Recruit a culturally diverse staff
- ✓ Create a culture of collaboration, initiative, innovation and leadership among all staff
- ✓ Invest in strategic professional development for all staff (particularly technology and global mindedness)

Programs

- ✓ Create a more systematic/interdisciplinary process of proposal development, feasibility assessment and program review
- ✓ Codify our school start-up and management practices
- ✓ Establish strategic partnerships to extend our services and impact
- ✓ Extend our work to new markets, particularly China, India, the US and HCN schools
- ✓ Develop **ISS Schools** model, including teacher training programs (e.g. IETC)
- ✓ Develop **ISS Professional Learning**, including Level 5, WLI, etc. to offer face-to-face and virtual professional development and certification programs
- ✓ Co-create **ISS Communities** to connect and support international educators
- ✓ Lead a campaign to diversify the leadership of international schools
- ✓ Support schools' efforts to develop strong safety, security and child protection policies
- ✓ Focus all programs/departments on customer value and sustainable growth

ISS Signature Programs

From among our many objectives and activities, we identified three signature programs that reflect our strategic priorities and will be critical to realizing our vision and mission:

- **ISS Schools** will serve the growing population of host country national students and faculty interested in international education
- **ISS Communities** will connect the various constituencies with whom ISS works and co-create content to serve each constituency
- **ISS Professional Learning** will offer face-to-face workshops, webinars, online courses and other professional development opportunities for international educators

During the 2016-2017 school year, we will develop pilot programs for ISS schools in each of these areas so that we can test out various ideas before launching larger programs to serve the broader international school community in subsequent school years.

CONCLUSION

Over the course of his distinguished career, Arthur Sweetser saw tremendous progress in the establishment of international organizations to promote global understanding and preserve world peace. He, in fact, had a hand in establishing many pre-eminent international organizations, most of which still exist today, including ISS, the United Nations, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, the International Baccalaureate, and the United Nations International School (UNIS).

Sweetser succeeded in creating so many enduring institutions because he understood that organizations “like all living organisms must either develop and grow or wither and die.” He also recognized that nurturing organizations takes resolve, hard work and a willingness to adapt and change. With this Framework for the Future, ISS honors Sweetser’s legacy by ensuring that world-class schools across the globe that promote global understanding and educate students to be thoughtful, imaginative leaders continue to develop and thrive. Over six decades after Sweetser founded ISS, we remain committed to “Making a World of Difference.”