# SELF-STUDY VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT

# ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR SCHOOLS, WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

#### **FOR**

# Saigon South International School

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# I. Introduction

#### School Profile

Saigon South International School (SSIS) is an Early Childhood - Age 3 through Grade 12 college preparatory day school, with American style of courses, programs and schedules, and offering Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate Diploma Program in the High School. The school is composed of three divisions: Elementary (Early Childhood age 3 & 4 through grade 5), Middle (grades 6 - 8), and High (grades 9 -12). Student enrolment is at 1147 with steady growth in the last few years, most notably in the Elementary and Middle school divisions. Vietnamese students make up the highest percentage of the student body at 29%. This is followed closely by Koreans and Americans at 21% respectively. 78% of the faculty are North American and 72% of the faculty and administration have Master's Degrees or above.

The school is owned by Phu My Hung Corporation (PMHC) and governed by a three-member Board appointed by the Central Trading & Development Corporation (CT&D) Board of Directors. SSIS is the only not-for-profit international school in Ho Chi Minh City at this time.

#### Mission

SSIS is a college preparatory school committed to the intellectual and personal development of each student in preparation for a purposeful life as a global citizen.

# **Core Values (Learner Outcomes)**

Academic Excellence: A challenging academic program, based on American standards, that teaches the student how to think, to learn, to problem solve, and to work individually and in teams while acquiring a foundational knowledge base of the world.

Sense of Self: A community atmosphere in which each student can gain a sense of who he or she is in the world; to develop self-confidence, strong character, convictions, leadership abilities, grace, courage, the desire to be a life-long learner, and the commitment to achieve excellence in all he or she does.

Respect for All: A perspective that each individual is a person of worth.

*Balance in Life*: An academic program that promotes an appreciation for all of life and seeks to balance the sciences with the humanities; academics with the arts; mental wholeness with physical, social, and spiritual wholeness; and future career with family relationships.

Dedicated Service: A view that looks beyond oneself to the assets and needs of the surrounding community and the world and finds fulfillment in unlocking potential in the service of mankind. The model SSIS graduate will demonstrate a caring attitude, be environmentally aware, and persevere for the good of the community.

# School/Community Profile Data

The school uses American Standards as guides for subject area unit and course development and

the curriculum is delivered in developmentally appropriate contexts. The early childhood program is thematically based with an emergent curriculum focusing on physical, social-emotional, language, and cognitive development. The elementary curriculum is structured around four inquiry-based project-oriented units. These units follow the same overall themes each year (Understanding Ourselves, Understanding Others, Understanding our Environment, Understanding our World) and thinking focus (Reflective, Service-Design, Sustainability, Systems). Each unit integrates science and social studies as well as other subject areas as appropriate. These "Super Units" are in their third year of implementation.

The Middle School provides subject oriented classes and expands elective opportunities for students. Instruction and assessment is a mix of individual, small group and whole group; projects, written tasks, presentations, and individual assessments. Developing personal and social aspects of a student's life is critical, as well as academic preparation. A strong advisory and house system is in place for students through all grades of the Middle School.

The High School continues subject-oriented classes and there are extensive elective classes available for students. An advisory program also continues through all four years. Advanced Placement (AP) courses are available in grades 9 - 12. International Baccalaureate courses, including the Diploma Program, are available in grades for students in grades 11-12. For the 2019 Graduates, 94% matriculated to a college or university of their choice. The remaining 6% are either taking a gap year or are completing their military service. The SSIS graduates of 2019 applied to 16 different countries with a total of 270 acceptances. The six destinations with the most acceptances: United States (163), Canada (48), the Netherlands (17), Hong Kong (10), Korea (9), Australia (9). Further, 53 of 87 (61%) students from the Class of 2019 applied to at least one school in the United States.

## Student Achievement data since 2017

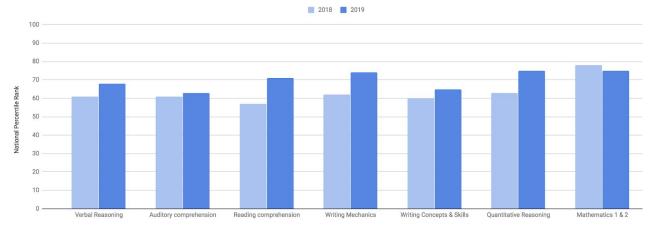
In 2017-18, SSIS switched to Education Records Bureau Comprehensive Testing Program (CTP) for students in grades 3 - 7. The program includes subtests in Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning which now allows for comparison with actual literacy and numeracy skills. The switch was made in order to benchmark students against United States national norms as well as United States Independent school norms.

After two years of Comprehensive Testing Program (CTP) testing, most grade levels in all subtests demonstrated an increase against the national percentile rank for the grade level. Because the Comprehensive Testing Program (CTP) test provides additional subtests to better understand the areas of strengths and needs of students, the school will be in a better position to use the data to inform instruction. This level of analysis helps address Critical Learner Need #2 to develop and utilize a system to disaggregate data. Discussion with the Curriculum Director reveals that the administration believes that the improvement in results is due to an increased familiarity with the format and administration of the assessments on the part of the students and

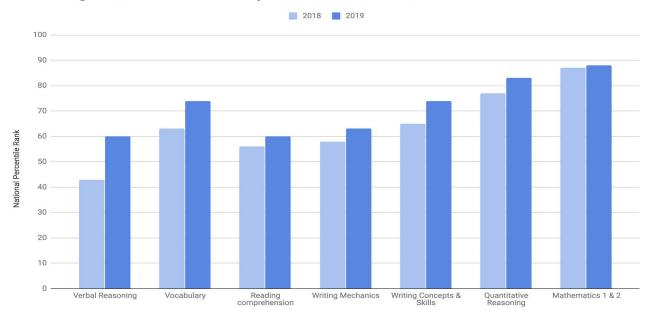
the teachers. There is a sense this will continue to improve. Each of the graphs below show the SSIS average percentile rank for the first two years of administration of the Comprehensive Testing Program (CTP) for a given grade level.

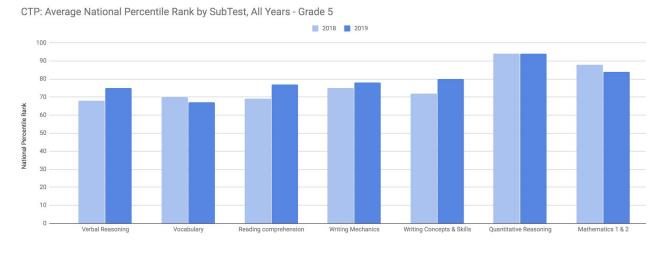
# Comprehensive Testing Program (CTP) Results for Grades 3 - 7; 2017 - 2018 and 2018-2019



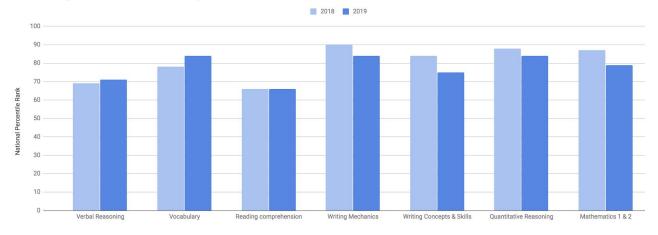


CTP: Average National Percentile Rank by SubTest, All Years - Grade 4

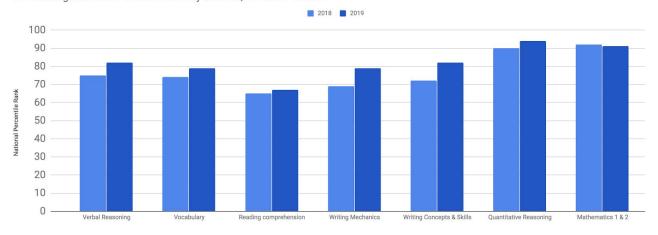








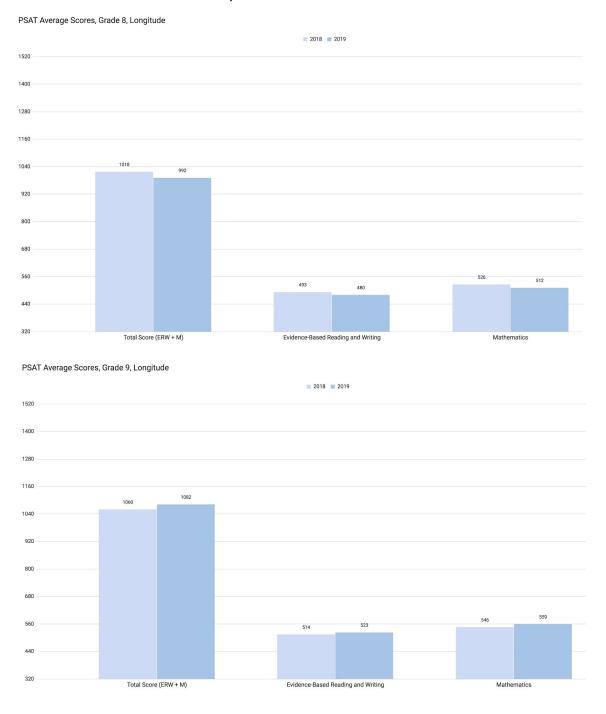


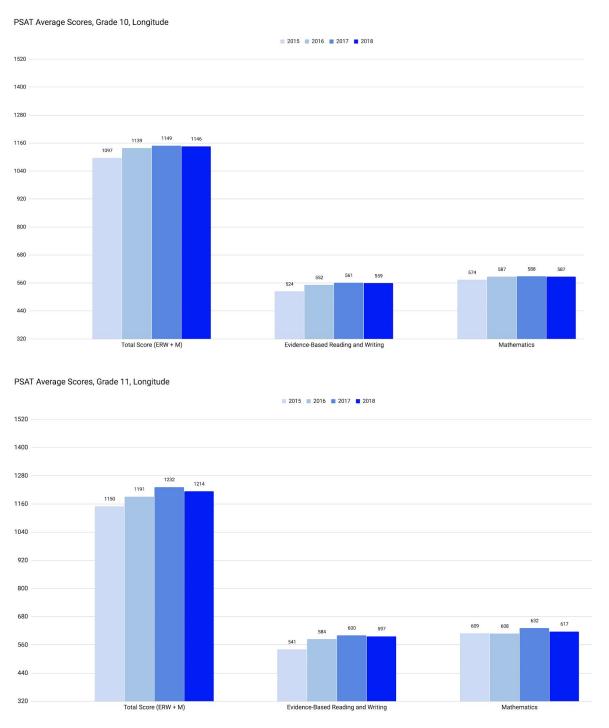


SSIS added the PSAT for students in grades 8 and 9 while continuing for students in grades 10 and 11. This will enable the school to follow PSAT results for grade-level cohorts. SSIS is in the process of comparing student trend performance in literacy and numeracy across Comprehensive

Testing Program (CTP) and PSAT over time for cohorts (and utilizing MAP as appropriate). While cohort data is not reported in this report, the Curriculum Director indicated that they do have that data and are using it to help inform instruction and assessment decisions.

## **PSAT Results for Grades 8 - 11; 2015 - 2019**

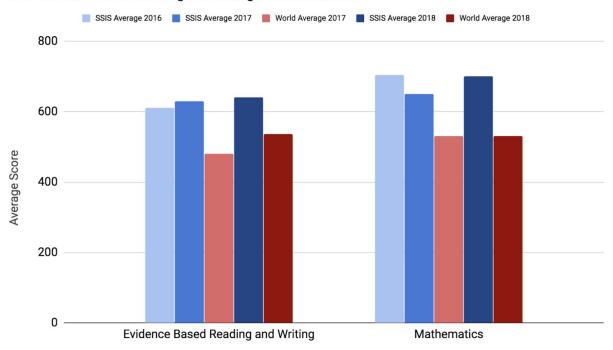




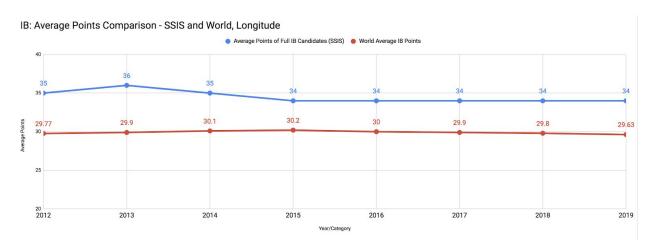
Advanced Placement courses and the International Baccalaureate remain strong pathways for students. Data displayed below shows that the results of the opportunities within the curriculum are resulting in consistently strong scores on both of these external exams as well as the SAT. It should also be noted that there has been a significant jump is the number of AP Exams that are being administered (from 106 in 2017 to 274 in 2020).

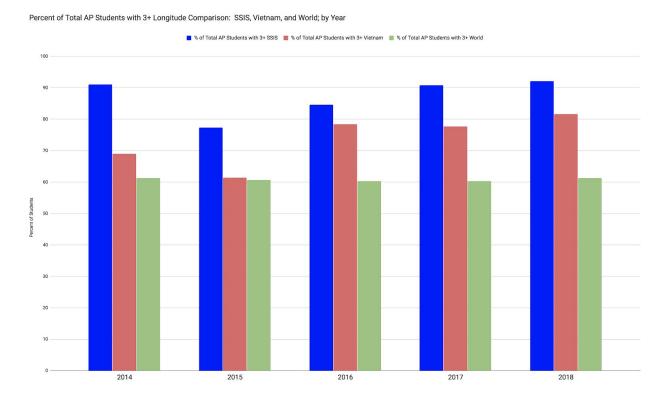
# **SAT Results**

SAT: Evidence Based Reading and Writing and Mathematics



# **AP and IB Summary**





#### Community Perception data since 2017

Community Surveys are administered annually to parents, students, and faculty. The data is analyzed and disaggregated by responding group, division, and language group. While numerous questions are asked and analyzed, informing steps for improvement each year, the benchmark question is, for Parents and Teachers, "Overall, I am satisfied with SSIS", and for Students, "I am happy at SSIS." For 2019, percent agreement to these statements are: 91% agreement for Parents, 71% agreement for Teachers, and 87% agreement for Students. Results for the past three years are positive across divisions, respondents and language groups, shown in the chart below.

Discussions with a representative group of parents and a representative group of middle and high school students corroborates the findings of the school survey. Both parents and students report a high level of satisfaction with the school and its programs and opportunities. The parent group expressed a perceived need in an increase in differentiated support for both high and low achieving students, while acknowledging that the school has made some improvements in this area recently.

		Overall, I am satisfied with SSIS. (Parent and Teacher Question) I am happy at SSIS (Student Question)						
		By Division			By Major Language Groups (Parent/Student)			
		Elementary School	Middle School	High School	Vietnamese	Korean	English	
	Parent	89%	91%	95%	98%	84%	90%	
2010	Student	91%	85%	78%	85%	87%	89%	
2019	Teacher	74%	89%	92%	NA	NA	NA	
	Parent	95%	92%	93%	100%	89%	93%	
2018	Student	88%	74%	72%	89%	73%	82%	
-	Teacher	86%	100%	91%	NA	NA	NA	
	Parent	92%	93%	89%	100%	82%	94%	
2017	Student	NA	85%	83%	100%	78%	81%	

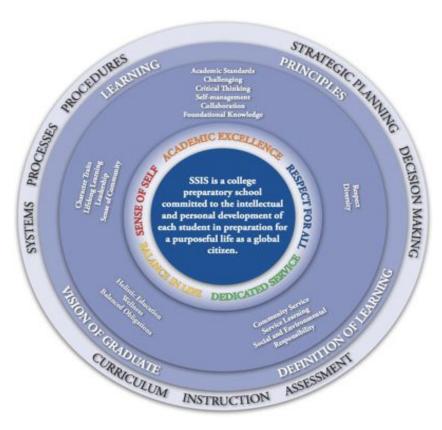
#### Significant Changes and Developments

Student enrollment continues to increase each year, most notably at the Elementary and Middle School levels. The goal is to work for a 5% - 6% student enrollment increase each year, until reaching a total enrollment of 1800. Since the previous WASC visit, additional classroom teachers have been added to maintain appropriate class size. Program needs and support of students led to an additional Elementary School Counselor, Elementary School and Middle School English as an Additional Language teachers, Middle School Dean of Students, High School Social-Emotional Counselors, an additional High School Science Teacher, expanded time for the IB Coordinator, part time Secondary STEM Coordinator, and an all school Activities Director.

A new Head of School began in July 2018. This led to an analysis of current initiatives and a general needs assessment. Strategic plans and action plans were reviewed for appropriate continuation. The Head of School immediately directed the community toward the future of the school, expansion of necessary programs, increase of student numbers, and addition of facilities. This direction is termed "Vision 2030" and captures where and how SSIS is headed by the year 2030. This Vision will be informed by the school's Mission, Core Values, WASC Accreditation Goals, existing school plans, current research on student

learning and an emerging "Portrait of a Graduate". Attainment of this new vision will be supported by the next iteration of the strategic plan. Articulation of this visionary work will be completed by June 2020.

Under the direction of the new Head of School, the Curriculum Framework was renamed "Values In Action: A Framework for Instilling Core Values into our Curriculum", which communicates how the SSIS Core Values are experienced through the written, taught, and assessed curriculum. Layering these documents with the Mission resulted in the following visual in order to communicate how the various elements fit together:



In addition to the New Head of School, other new or changing positions in administration include:

- Facilities Manager to better prioritize and coordinate facility improvements and maintenance.
- Communications Officer was added to the Admissions and Marketing Office to better communicate internally and externally about vision of the school.
- A new Curriculum Director started in July 2018 with an expanded role of data collection, management and analysis.
- An Activities Director

Building on the past work with Critical Friends Group (CFG), the administration added Cognitive

Coaching training for teacher leaders for the 2019-2020 school year. The intent of this training was to build the leadership capacity of middle level teacher leaders.

In 2017-2018, the School began Project X, an inquiry-based experience for students and teachers in grades 1 - 8. This experience took teachers off their regular time-table, mixing them with different groups of teachers and students (multi-grade level). Each year had a designated theme for projects and skill areas focus. The project theme for 2017-2018 was Movement and the skills focus was Design Thinking and Collaboration. The project theme for 2018-2019 was Time and the skills focus was Inquiry Questions and Implementation Plans.

During the 2018-2019 school year, the decision was made to inventory the various ways that "wellness" is nurtured at the school and to look for an overarching model. The School Leadership Team decided to embrace Positive Psychology as the theoretical basis for wellness and to employ the Institute for Positive Education for initial introduction. Professional development for teachers took place in the Spring and the Fall of 2019. Further articulation of an overall approach to wellness and necessary support will be a part of the new Strategic Plan beginning in July 2020.

The school has begun planning for program and facility expansion. This has involved numerous meetings and communications with all groups of stakeholders. In addition, visits to exemplary programs and facilities took place and are continuing. The school contracted with Flansburgh Architects to develop a Master Plan and architectural design for a new series of buildings. Construction is anticipated to begin after the construction and building licenses are granted.

#### On Going School Improvement

Teachers review classroom and grade level data on an on-going basis. External testing results are analyzed annually at a yearly data retreat in June with the full School Leadership Team. Parents receive summarized data about overall student performance annually through the Annual Report and a Head of School Coffee each fall. Students and parents receive their results when they become available. Teachers, advisors, counselors, and principals assist students with the interpretation of data as needed. A new data platform provides an additional vehicle to engage faculty in the analysis of student data. The school wide action plan is monitored by the School Leadership Team and is reported on by the Head of School to the Board on a quarterly basis.

The WASC Mid-Term Progress Report was created through input of various groups at various times.

 Progress on the strategic plan was provided by all departments represented by the School Leadership Team including: Head of School, Associate Head of School for Finances and Operations, Elementary School Principal, Middle School Principal, High School Principal, Associate Principal for Elementary School, Associate Principal for High School, Admissions and Marketing Director, Information and Communication Technology Director, Athletics Director, Activities Director, Curriculum Director. Student and Community Profile data was submitted by the Admissions, Human

- Resources, and Curriculum Offices.
- The draft of the Mid-Term Progress Report was crafted by the Curriculum Director.
- The Head of School reviewed the full draft of the report and suggested edits and additions. Revisions were made by the Curriculum Director.
- The School Leadership Team reviewed the next full draft of the report and suggested edits. Revisions were made by the Curriculum Director.
- The faculty reviewed different parts of the next full draft of the report and suggested edits, specifically evidence and impact on student learning. Revisions were made by the Curriculum Director.
- The final report was given to the Head of School for final review and presentation to the Board.

# II. Progress on Critical Areas for Follow-up/Action Plan

# Critical Areas for Follow up from Visiting Committee April 2017

- 1. Strategically prioritize school initiatives; build systems and capacity to ensure sustainability for continuous school-wide improvement.
- 2. Further develop the School culture that: broadly defines and promotes multiple paths to success; embraces self-discovery; supports social-emotional well-being; and values the love of learning.
- 3. Develop and utilize the K-12 system to disaggregate and analyze external and internal student achievement data and stakeholder perception data.
- 4. Develop systematic intervention programs to support all students in the attainment of high standards in all subject areas and divisions.
- 5. Develop a schoolwide assessment philosophy, including practices and beliefs, that describes an aligned, consistent and coherent K-12 assessment system.

# SSIS Strategic Plan and its Links to Critical Areas for Follow Up

- 1. Institutional Excellence (Critical Area #1)
  - a. Growth Plan growth to maximize the quality of rigorous programs and opportunities which demand academic excellence from each student across all divisions, including AP and IB opportunities at the high school, to serve the community now and in the future.
  - b. Financial Sustainability
    - i. Generate sufficient revenue to support to maximize academic and program excellence and the retention of best staff.
    - ii. Effective stewardship of all school resources for strategic initiatives.
  - c. Facilities Develop a facilities plan driven by the academic and programmatic needs of the school and the community.
- 2. Academic & Program Excellence (Critical Areas #2, #3, #4 and #5)

- a. Establish clear and measurable targets for students across all divisions, benchmarked against the best private schools in the world to demonstrate performance by individual students and school years equal to or above those schools.
- b. Articulate a curriculum of excellence, including course design and expected learning outcomes, to ensure excellence in every grade, every class, with every teacher, in every subject.
- c. Complete a school-wide assessment, including grading and reporting, policy.
- d. Strengthen the English language proficiency (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) of all students.
- e. Examine and implement best and emerging practices at world-class schools in robotics, STEM, and online learning.
- f. Articulate the important role and caliber of the performing arts in the education of SSIS students.
- g. Articulate the important role and caliber of the athletics in the education of SSIS students.

#### 3. Faculty Excellence (Critical Area #1)

- a. Benchmark hiring standards and compensation to build and retain a world-class faculty.
- b. Continue to enhance the professional development program to ensure that faculty members perform at the highest levels.
- c. Strengthen the evaluation system in order to recognize excellence and support continuous improvement and highest standards in teaching and pedagogy.

#### 4. Community Pride & Engagement (Critical Areas #2 and #3)

- a. Develop ways to more fully engage parent engagement in the life of the school, increase parent education, and build school pride.
- b. Develop ways to build School spirit and pride among students, parents, alumni, and faculty.
- c. Build connections and engagement with the local community to take advantage of available resources and share our capabilities.
- d. Tell the SSIS story to strengthen awareness of, and pride in, the school locally, regionally, and internationally.

# Progress on Critical Areas for Follow up:

School Wide Critical Area #1

Strategically prioritize school initiatives; build systems and capacity to ensure sustainability for continuous school-wide improvement.

Since the last visit, SSIS has undertaken the following steps to address this area:

• Immediately following the last visit, a strategic plan was developed, integrating the

feedback from the Visiting Committee at the time

- The existing Curriculum Framework, was renamed Values in Action, as it is the fulfillment of the school's Core Values
- For the 2019 2020 school year, the leadership team clarified the focus for the year, including three areas: Programs, People and Places:
  - Programs: 100% of taught units will be documented in the designated format.
  - People: Teachers will focus on learning about an approach to wellness based on positive psychology.
  - Places: The facilities master plan will be completed and communicated. An architectural firm has been retained for this purpose.
- The Assessment Policy has been developed and approved as of August 2019.
- During the current school year, the administration is preparing teachers for the start of implementation of the Assessment Policy for 2020 2021, especially at the high school.
- By the end of school year 2019 2020, the following will have been accomplished:
  - A Portrait of a Graduate in 2030 will be articulated, informed by:
    - The school's Mission
    - The school's Core Values
    - Reading in current research
    - Feedback from local business leaders'/school parents' expectations about future employees
  - The Portrait of a Graduate, the Mission and Core Values will be considered in the creation of Vision 2030, a set of aspirational goals for the next 10 years for SSIS
  - A 5- year Strategic Plan will be articulated to work toward the realization of the goals from Vision 2030
  - Other current plans and foundational work, including the Values in Action framework, will be folded into the next iteration of the Strategic Plan
- The current school leadership team has been part of the building and understanding of the work described above, and they will be central to its implementation and on-going monitoring.

#### School Wide Critical Area #2

Further develop the School culture that: broadly defines and promotes multiple paths to success; embraces self-discovery; supports social-emotional well-being; and values the love of learning. Since the last visit, SSIS has undertaken the following steps to address this area:

- Four Super Units have been developed at each grade level in the elementary school. Currently, these are being aligned with standards.
- Additional courses have been introduced in the high school to support multiple pathways to graduation, including AP, IB, school based courses, or a mix of the three. The bulk of the courses that have been added are for those students who need options that are neither

AP nor IB. These offerings have been added to most of the departments at the high school.

- Wellness initiatives:
  - Broad exploration into a wellness framework for the entire community.
  - Professional development in positive psychology for a core group of leaders.
  - Leadership team agreed to 'learn it and live it' for the current school year before implementing anything schoolwide.
  - An emphasis on wellness will be included in the next iteration of the strategic plan.
  - Book study on wellness during inservice at the beginning of the current year.
  - o PD at the end of September 2019 for all faculty on positive psychology.
  - Consideration of availability to offer PD in Vietnamese for relevant staff.
- SSIS is now a member of an additional athletics league, giving more options for students and an Activities Director has been added to the staff
- A Communications Officer position has been added to facilitate effective communication with parents and the community.

#### School Wide Critical Area #3

Develop and utilize the K-12 system to disaggregate and analyze external and internal student achievement data and stakeholder perception data.

Since the last visit, SSIS has undertaken the following steps to address this area:

- The role of the Curriculum Director has been expanded to include more work with the collection, analysis, management and communication of student achievement data.
- A data platform has been added to the student information system to facilitate work across the school with data.
  - Currently, past data from multiple measures have been uploaded to the platform including: Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), Comprehensive Testing Program (CTP), English Proficiency Levels (WIDA), Running Records, SSIS grades, PSAT, SAT, International Baccalaureate (IB), and Advanced Placement (AP)
  - Administrators and some teachers have begun to explore the potential uses of the data platform
  - For the current year, use of the platform is not required; however, discussions on its use will take place in the second semester
  - Beginning in 2020 2021, teachers, teams and administrators will use the platform to inform instruction, assessment and any needed interventions, based on the strategic plan
- A part time position was added in the area of Student Support Services, and one primary responsibilities of this position has been to systematize the collection, organization and

documentation of English Proficiency Level (WIDA) data.

- The Elementary school is implementing a new, wholistic, interactive reporting system for families.
- The Comprehensive Testing Program was introduced in the spring of 2018 to replace Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) testing in grades 3 7.
- The PSAT is now being administered in grades 8 and 9, expanded from 10 and 11, to gather more data on this age group.

#### School Wide Critical Area #4

Develop systematic intervention programs to support all students in the attainment of high standards in all subject areas and divisions

Since the last visit, SSIS has undertaken the following steps to address this area:

- English Proficiency Level (WIDA) data is being collected more systematically, which, in time, will result in more targeted interventions for students and groups of students.
- The EAL program has been redesigned and expanded in the Elementary and Middle schools.
- In support of student wellness, three additional counselors and one dean of students have been added to the faculty.
- Teachers in the elementary school have been trained by the school psychologist in emotion coaching so that teachers are equipped to intervene in social-emotional issues.
- In the middle school, the math curriculum and its delivery have been redesigned to allow for more differentiation opportunities.
- Transition programs from elementary to middle and middle to high school, as well as for new students, have been strengthened.
- At the high school, there has been a significant increase in the number of course offerings, supporting students who need courses that are neither AP nor IB.

#### School Wide Critical Area #5

Develop a schoolwide assessment philosophy, including practices and beliefs, that describes an aligned, consistent and coherent K-12 assessment system.

Since the last visit, SSIS has undertaken the following steps to address this area:

- In August of 2019, the board approved the newly written Assessment policy, which includes an articulated vision for Assessment.
- A set of Administrative Regulations for the implementation of the policy has been developed based on existing assessment guidelines.
- According to the school's report, "divisional leadership teams have provided insights into areas of support needed for implementation." These needs vary by division and will be

topics for conversation in the second semester of the current school year.

- A consultant has been hired to help the administration address these needs with teachers.
- Appropriate administrators will attend professional development sessions in this area at the upcoming EARCOS Leadership Conference.
- Implementation of the Policy will begin in the 2020 2021 school year.

# III. Schoolwide Action Plan Refinements

#### SSIS Strategic Plan for 2017 - 2020

- 1. Institutional Excellence
  - a. Growth Plan growth to maximize the quality of rigorous programs and opportunities which demand academic excellence from each student across all divisions, including AP and IB opportunities at the high school, to serve the community now and in the future.
  - b. Financial Sustainability
    - i. Generate sufficient revenue to support to maximize academic and program excellence and the retention of high quality staff.
    - ii. Effective stewardship of all school resources for strategic initiatives.
  - c. Facilities Develop a facilities plan driven by the academic and programmatic needs of the school and the community.

#### 2. Academic & Program Excellence

- a. Establish clear and measurable targets for students across all divisions, benchmarked against the best private schools in the world to demonstrate performance by individual students and school years equal to or above those schools.
- b. Articulate a curriculum of excellence, including course design and expected learning outcomes, to ensure excellence in every grade, every class, with every teacher, in every subject.
- c. Complete a school-wide assessment, including grading and reporting, policy.
- d. Strengthen the English language proficiency (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) of all students.
- e. Examine and implement best and emerging practices at world-class schools in robotics, STEM, and online learning.
- f. Articulate the important role and caliber of the performing arts in the education of SSIS students.
- g. Articulate the important role and caliber of the athletics in the education of SSIS students.

#### 3. Faculty Excellence

a. Benchmark hiring standards and compensation to build and retain a world-class

faculty.

- b. Continue to enhance the professional development program to ensure that faculty members perform at the highest levels.
- c. Strengthen the evaluation system in order to recognize excellence and support continuous improvement and highest standards in teaching and pedagogy.

# 4. Community Pride & Engagement

- a. Develop ways to more fully engage parent engagement in the life of the school, increase parent education, and build school pride.
- b. Develop ways to build School spirit and pride among students, parents, alumni, and faculty.
- c. Build connections and engagement with the local community to take advantage of available resources and share our capabilities.
- d. Tell the SSIS story to strengthen awareness of, and pride in, the school locally, regionally, and internationally.

The above version of the Strategic Plan was articulated after the last visit from the Visiting Committee in 2017. It has not been refined or updated as of this writing. However, as described above, a new iteration will be completed by June 2020, and this will incorporate the coming work on envisioning the future needs of graduates and the education needed to prepare them.

# IV. Commendations and Recommendations

#### **Commendations**

- A palpable sense of excitement and aspiration for the future of SSIS throughout the community.
- A supportive, positive and engaged parent and student community.
- SSIS students at all levels continue to achieve at high levels.
- Purposeful reflection around current status and future needs has led to more efficient and prioritized systems thinking.
- The acquisition of a new data platform will aid in the collection and analysis of student achievement to inform instruction and assessment to further student learning.
- A commitment to further expanding learning opportunities for students through:
  - o implementation of cross-disciplinary "super units" at the Elementary School
  - an ambitious master facilities plan with priority given to new Middle School,
     Design and Performing Arts buildings.
  - o creation of different pathways for students to engage in and demonstrate their learning in the High School.
- Staffing considerations are responsive to student needs including, in particular, social-emotional and English language proficiency needs.

## Recommendations

- As a learning community, embrace the work around Vision 2030 and its potential for the future of SSIS.
- Fully document a guaranteed and viable curriculum; ensure sufficient resources are allocated for this work.
- Collect, analyze and use achievement data systematically to inform instruction and assessment decisions in support of student learning.
- Ensure that the new schoolwide Assessment Policy is understood and implemented as appropriate across all divisions.