



AMERICAN OVERSEAS SCHOOL OF ROME

AOSR Progress Report

June 2008

By Douglas Kneeland, Chair, AOSR Board of Trustees

Introduction

As a supplement to the annual “State of the Corporation” report delivered in November, the AOSR Board of Trustees would like to take this opportunity at the end of a very successful academic year to update our community on progress with the Strategic Goals described in our recently ratified AOSR Strategic Plan.

In March 2008, the Board of Trustees approved a Strategic Plan for the School developed through a broadly inclusive process that included input from students, faculty, parents, and administrators. This progress report mirrors the format of the Strategic Plan which can be found on the AOSR internet site: www.aosr.org

The Strategic Plan builds on sixty years of wonderful success for AOSR. It identifies priorities for further improvements to ensure that resources and energy are properly aligned with the overall vision for the School.

In formulating the Strategic Plan, we asked some fundamental questions. A most profound example is “Should AOSR continue to offer education from Pre-K through Grade 13?” In asking this question we reaffirmed this important part of the School’s unique character and the need for diversity of students across a broad range of ages, not just cultures.

We asked, “Should AOSR should continue to offer both the IB and AP programs?” The IB is key to students who plan to attend a university in Europe, especially Italian students who look to Italian public universities. Advanced Placement courses are critical for students competing for placements in leading U.S. universities. At first thought, it certainly seems simpler to design a High School curriculum based on just one of these challenging programs. However, the Strategic Plan reaffirmed AOSR’s need to place equal emphasis on preparing students for universities in all parts of the world.

The purpose of the Strategic Plan was not to “start over”, but to take a hard look at the current status and the School’s future direction. As a Board member for four years, I personally felt it would be healthy for the school community to step back and assess our priorities and engage in dialogue to ensure we are on the right path. I am confident the Strategic Plan accomplishes this goal, and I want to personally thank Dr. Lora Shapiro and Ms. Anna Borg for their leadership in guiding this process.

AOSR was founded in 1947 as an independent, non-denominational, non-profit, college preparatory, co-educational day school to provide an American-based

education, with English as the primary classroom language. It was intended from the start that AOSR would provide an education for both international and Italian families in Rome.

It was intended from the start that AOSR educate both international and Italian students living in Rome. AOSR is today and always has been a diverse and truly international School.

In 2006, AOSR was re-accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, one of the leading US-based accreditation programs. This accreditation is valid for ten years, a solid indicator of AOSR's strength today, and we look forward with confidence to periodic re-evaluations by MSA to ensure we continue to meet the high standards set by this fine accrediting organization.

In December 2006, AOSR was the first overseas school to be granted the *International Credential* from the Middle States Association, an accreditation valid for five years. It states in part:

American Overseas School of Rome has demonstrated to evaluators that it is effectively advancing the quality of the international educational experience it offers to its students.

AOSR is an active member of the College Board, the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), the European Council of International Schools (ECIS), the Association for the Advancement of International Education (AAIE), the Mediterranean Association of Independent Schools (MAIS), the Rome Independent Schools Association (RISA), and holds a prestigious distinction as an *IB World School*. It also serves as the main testing center for Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Rome.

Academic and Extracurricular Programs

Strategic Goal 1: AOSR will develop a standards-based curriculum designed to meet the needs of students for the 21st Century.

Background: The Middle States Accreditation Report issued in June 2006 provides a "road map" for strengthening AOSR's academic programs using a standards-based curriculum. For the past two years, this Report has provided overarching guidance for solid improvements to the academic programs at AOSR and it will continue to be our future benchmark for the foreseeable future. Accreditation is commonly granted for a period of ten years, and the *International Credential* covers five years. Like any good school focused on continuous improvement, AOSR is always mindful of demonstrating its progress at the next re-accreditation evaluation.

Progress toward Strategic Goal 1:

- To ensure that its academic programs prepare students for global competition, AOSR requires its students to participate in the following standardized tests:
Educational Records Bureau Writing Assessment Program (ERBs) (grades 3-11), Gates MacGinitie Reading Assessment (grades 1-8), Everyday Math Tests

(grades 1-6), Pearson Group Mathematics Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GMADE) (grades 2 & 6), and PSAT's (grade 10 & 11).

- In addition, the following standardized tests are offered on an optional basis:
SATs and SAT IIs in the High School
- Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate examinations are offered for High School students.
- During 2007-08, regularly scheduled meetings were convened involving the Head, Principal, Coordinators, and selected faculty to monitor the progress of implementing the Accreditation Report recommendations.
- Elementary School curriculum maps were reviewed and updated; a Science articulation team was established; and standardized grading criteria were established, including a new electronic ES Report Card.
- Middle School English and ESL teachers jointly developed innovative new approaches to closely align content and skills in their respective programs; the MS humanities team developed a comprehensive research project combining English and Social Science.
- MS and HS teachers collaborated to develop summer reading lists for grades 6 – 12.
- An Admissions Team was established, policies, forms and procedures were streamlined, and new publicity materials were prepared.
- Mandarin Chinese Language and Culture and Advanced Placement Comparative Government and Politics were offered in the High School for the first time at AOSR

Strategic Goal 2: AOSR will recruit and retain the highest caliber teaching staff.

Background: AOSR has a long-standing tradition of recruiting high-caliber teachers, primarily from the USA, but also from other countries. Three out of four members of the faculty have advanced university degrees and many have wide-ranging teaching experience in more than one country.

Progress toward Goal 2:

- The caliber of teachers recruited in 2007-08 was exceptional; 15 highly qualified and experienced teachers joined AOSR in September 2007. (Biographical sketches for new teachers are published in the September edition of the Falcon Flyer; past Flyer issues are found on the AOSR web site under “Community.”)
- Members of the AOSR faculty are eligible for ongoing career development opportunities; teachers are offered opportunities to attend specific courses, programs, and/or conferences and, in the summer of 2007, 12 faculty members participated in advanced training opportunities and numerous others did so during the School year. During the 2007-08 School year over €50,000 has been allocated and spent on professional development for the School's faculty and staff.
- Faculty retention rates at AOSR are similar to other top-rated international schools (20% turnover in an average year). While we all regret to see excellent teachers move on, we realize AOSR is a great place to gain top quality experience. So, we celebrate our teachers' growth and are happy to see them take on new challenges.

Strategic Goal 3: AOSR will offer outstanding college preparatory programs including Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs.

Background: Most international schools offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. AOSR also offers the American-based Advanced Placement (AP) program. This is not new – AOSR has offered both programs for a number of years. The reason this was incorporated as a Strategic Goal was to re-affirm AOSR’s commitment to both programs and the need to offer students and their parents the flexibility to choose the program best suited to their individual needs.

Progress towards Goal 3:

- In May 2007, 40 students participated in 88 AP exams in 15 different subjects.
- In May 2008, 48 students participated in 129 AP exams in 16 different subjects.
- In June 2008, 7 students will receive the AP International Diploma.
- Three students accepted the challenge of 7 or more AP exams.
- In July 2007, all 13 AOSR candidates successfully earned the IB diploma, including 10 who received IB Bilingual Diplomas (two languages at the high level).
- It is predicted that in July 2008, all 10 IB candidates will receive their IB Diploma and the IB Bilingual Diploma.
- 14 IB candidates are enrolled in the program for 2008-09 and 16 are enrolled for 2009-10 at this time.

Strategic Goal 4: AOSR will incorporate technology to facilitate and enhance teaching and learning.

Background: AOSR is at the forefront of international schools in Rome in the introduction of new technology for education programs, with four state-of-the-art computer labs and computers in every classroom. Technology is ever changing, and maintaining our leadership position will require seizing every opportunity for future improvement.

Progress towards Goal 4:

- Elementary and High School computer labs were modernized and cutting-edge flat screen monitors were installed throughout the School.
- The “Edline” on-line system was introduced giving parents and students an up-to-the-minute opportunity to monitor student progress from home.
- An electronic report card is now utilized in the Elementary School.
- High School students produced a new view book and recruitment materials using state-of-the-art computer-assisted publishing tools.
- There has been a significant increase in the use of technology by both teachers and students across the curriculum. Classes such as Music Composition, Photojournalism, English Composition, and Geometry, regularly use the state-of-

the-art computer labs for teaching and learning. All Elementary and Middle School students take computer courses.

Strategic Goal 5: The educational program at AOSR will reflect a balance of academics, the arts and athletics

Background: The Strategic Plan re-affirms AOSR's commitment to a well-rounded education. AOSR is a school where "it is cool to be smart", while at the same time it is equally cool to participate in sports and performing arts.

Progress towards Goal 5:

- AOSR once again was highly competitive in High School sports, winning the European girls cross country championship; placing second in both boys and girls soccer; placing third in cheer; and placing in the top half of all other sports including tennis, volleyball, basketball and wrestling.
- The Athletic Director assisted in standardizing policies and procedures for many aspects of HS sports, such as travel, uniforms, scheduling, etc.
- Opportunities were greatly expanded for AOSR students to compete in Elementary and Middle School sports, but there is still plenty of room for growth in this area that remains important to the AOSR community.
- The AOSR music and theatre programs were once again outstanding in 2007-08.
- AOSR students continued to perform very well in inter-school art competition, and High School students were offered a variety of electives related to the arts (i.e. Guitar, Music Ensemble, Drawing & Painting, etc.).

School Structure, Management, and Board of Trustees

Strategic Goal 6: AOSR will be managed by a clearly defined management structure that supports a multi-divisional American international independent school.

Background: This goal was adopted based on a consensus of the Board that improvements were needed in the administration of the School if AOSR is to become highly effective and competitive in the long term.

Progress towards Goal 6:

- The AOSR organization chart has been revised to reflect clear lines of authority and to more closely reflect a structure appropriate for an international school the size of AOSR
- The key positions of Elementary and Secondary Principals have been added to the organization, essentially doubling the resources and expertise that can be focused on strengthening educational planning and curriculum development. The position of a Business Manager has been added and the position of Financial Consultant eliminated. These positions report directly to the Head of School.
- Performance evaluation procedures are in process.

- Job descriptions for all administrative jobs at AOSR have been updated.

Strategic Goal 7: The AOSR Board of Trustees will adhere to accepted good practices in independent school governance, and work in concert with the Head of School to ensure the School's fiscal integrity and sustainability.

Background: The Board has a unique role at AOSR. While we are all parents, we are first and foremost "trustees," that is, we have been entrusted by the parents of students at AOSR ensure that the School is properly managed and remains financially viable into the future. The Board does not manage the School – rather, it is our job to hire a competent, professional Head of School and to evaluate him or her against established criteria for running an excellent school.

Progress towards Goal 7:

- The Board of Trustees adopted a Code of Conduct for the Board as a whole, and it also adopted a Code of Conduct for individual trustees which each Board member has signed. (See attachments).
- A policy for evaluating the Head of School was adopted and a requirement for annual performance evaluation was included in the contract.
- At the beginning of the school year, the Board and the Head of School agreed on "Head of School Performance Goals and Indicators for 2007 – 2008." The Head provided monthly reports to the Board, and at the end of the school year, an Evaluation Committee reviewed the Head's accomplishments.
- The Board continued to hold an annual workshop on Board governance led by a professional consultant.

Finance

Strategic Goal 8: AOSR will model best practices in American international independent school financial management.

Background: In the early 1990s, AOSR faced financial difficulties which forced a number of structural changes. This resulted in a decision to secure a relatively large mortgage to allow the School to stay in operation. Starting in the mid-1990s, AOSR experienced a period of enrollment growth and the School's finances are now on more solid ground. The annual external audit by the international accounting firm Ernst and Young continues to indicate that the School's books are kept in accordance with internationally accepted principles without reservation or qualification. No new loans have been needed nor secured during this time period.

Progress towards Goal 8:

- During 2007-08, significant savings were achieved by reducing administrative salary costs, by reducing the cost of supplies, and by applying consistent criteria for financial aid. That said, cost increases for utilities offset these savings. The overall cost of faculty salaries – accounting for roughly half of all expenses –

increased by 3.7% in 2007-2008, and they will increase 5% in 2008-09 due to the average salary increase for teachers. An overall cost increase of 5% is projected for 2008-09 assuming that School's enrollment does not substantially change.. In accordance with its financial responsibilities, the Board approved a 5% increase in tuition for the 2008-09 school year.

- During 2007-08, the Administration began a review of AOSR business practices. This review is still in progress. Several improvements have already been made in internal business practices (i.e. re-distribution of job assignments to improve efficiency and communications; teachers in each area now pool orders for common supplies, reduction of overall operating costs).
- A Business Office Procedures Manual is being developed.
- The School's administration and Board members have continued to actively work on analysis of AOSR's fiscal status. While this long-term effort has to date yielded only modest results, the Board continues to seek avenues toward tax relief.

Strategic Goal 9: AOSR will seek new non-tuition revenue streams.

Background: AOSR depends on tuition and other direct payments (e.g., registration fee, bus fee, capital assessment, exam fees, and activity fees) for 99% of its revenue. It is very difficult for an independent private school to be financially secure without receiving other revenues, especially if the School strives to improve its infrastructure and facilities.

Progress towards Goal 9:

- The Fundraising Committee has been replaced by a Communication and Development Committee with an expanded mandate to explore new approaches for increasing revenue.
- Fundraising initiatives were launched in Italy and the USA.
- New partnerships were formed with the American University of Rome and with the National Italian American Foundation as part of a solid effort to expand AOSR's network of connections with potential donors.
- Several multi-national corporations were approached with funding proposals.
- While admittedly modest (under €100.000), revenues from non-tuition or fee sources have in fact more than doubled this year over the previous year.

Infrastructure

Strategic Goal 10: The AOSR campus will be commensurate with the best American Schools.

Background: The realization of this Goal depends on the mobilization of significant new resources to be invested in infrastructure. In addition to financial constraints, zoning restrictions essentially prohibit expansion within our current campus: new buildings cannot be added, and the current buildings cannot be enlarged. During the Strategic Planning process, the option of moving to a new campus in the near future was carefully considered but eventually ruled out.

Progress towards Goal 10:

- H2L2, LLC., a global US based architecture and planning firm specializing in international schools, recently carried out an initial review of the AOSR campus, making several recommendations to address security, space utilization, and aesthetic issues around the School. In the Fall, the firm will undertake an overall Facilities Audit and Campus Assessment to address short and long-range improvements to the campus. Working closely with the School community, a Facilities Master Plan for AOSR will be developed that will incorporate educational objectives of the School along with an evaluation of the physical environment and its suitability to meet our stated objectives. This will enable us to maintain and improve the School in line with a coordinated long-range vision as resources allow.

Strategic Goal 11: AOSR will remediate deferred maintenance and will ensure future maintenance needs are funded and resolved.

Progress towards Goal 11:

- Recent facilities investments for the fiscal year ending June 2008 include new roofs on all Elementary and High Schools buildings; new fencing around the outdoor tennis and basketball courts; completion of phases I and II of the security fence; upgrading of computers and classroom furniture; and new Pre-K playground (financed with Mayfair donations).

Priorities for the 2008-09 fiscal year will continue to be based on improvements in the areas of safety, security and adherence to Italian and EU building codes and regulations. Based on the Facilities Audit and Master Plan, and the availability of funds, we will continue to focus on basic improvements in the short term including the renovation of the gym with a new roof, floor, fire escape, lighting, locker rooms, offices, storage areas, and weight room along with improvements in other areas of the campus.

Enrollment, Marketing, and Communications

Strategic Goal 12: AOSR commits to sustainable, full enrollment reflecting the diversity of the international community in Rome.

Background: The School needs to maintain enrollment above 600 students (close to the physical capacity of the campus) in order to continue to offer a full range of programs at all grades.

Progress towards Goal 12:

- Throughout the 2007-08 school year, the average total enrollment has been between 620 and 630 students. Approximately 30% are from the USA, 30% from Italy and the remainder from over 50 countries.

Strategic Goal 13: AOSR commits to maintaining close, mutually supportive relationships with students and parents.

Background: AOSR is blessed with a large number of committed parents who volunteer their time on a regular basis, whether it is to work on the PTO, to help with Mayfair, or to cook at the Booster Bar. While it has not been difficult to maintain a close, mutually supportive relationship in such an environment, Goal 13 reemphasizes the School's commitment to this important partnership.

Progress towards Goal 13:

- The Head of School and Principal have organized several informal opportunities to meet with parents during the school year.
- Either the Head or the Principal attended virtually every after-school or weekend activity (theatre, sports, etc.) during the year, providing parents with ample opportunities to speak with them informally.
- The PTO has regular monthly meetings to which all parents are invited, and the Head of School and Principal regularly attend.
- The Board of Trustees set up a web site listing its members and identifying officers and committee chairs.
- The Board has begun using the Falcon Flyer as a regular communication tool for keeping parents informed about issues the Board considers to be important.