



November

2016

GEMS American Academy

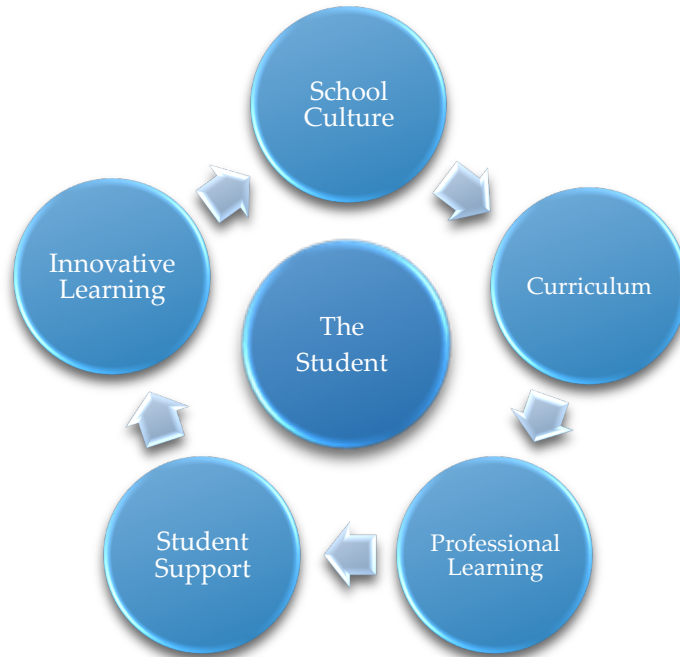
School Development Plan Progress Report

As an American and IB School, we strive to inspire, educate, lead and innovate within a culture of kindness that promotes success for all.

This Progress Report of November 2016 marks the formal review of our Journey to Outstanding as outlined by our School Development Plan.



The GAA Design - The Student at the Center



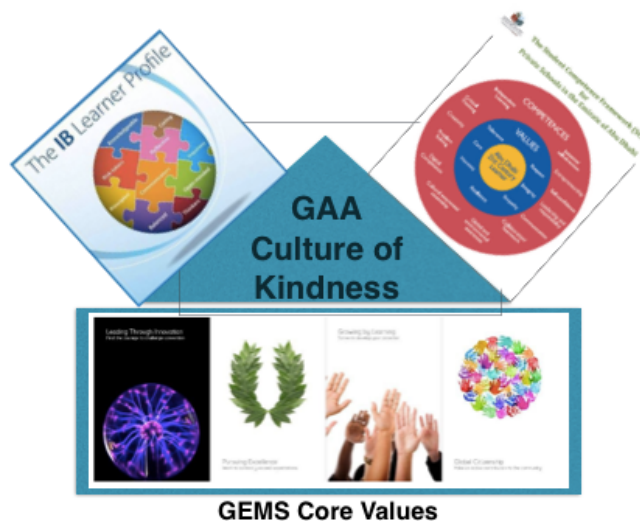
Each student challenged and inspired in an inclusive, supportive and kind community.

Core Values

Culture of Kindness

At GAA, we pride ourselves on our Culture of Kindness. It is more than just a motto, but rather a way of living. It is something that you feel when you walk through our halls, something you see on the playground, and something you hear in the classrooms.

The Culture of Kindness is an expectation of all students, teachers, administrators, support staff, in fact the whole school community. Supported by the IB Learner Profile and the ADEC Student Competence Framework (SCF), our homeroom classes in the elementary school and advisory program in the secondary school provide opportunities for students to learn about and practice using the character traits and values that foster a Culture of Kindness.





GAA Mission & Vision

Our Vision:

We Inspire. We Educate. We Lead. We Innovate.

Our Mission:

GEMs American Academy provides a rigorous academic program to our international learning community. As a selective international school, our mission is to inspire, educate, lead and innovate.

In our GAA learning community:

- We **inspire** through a well-balanced educational experience that celebrates cultural diversity.
- We **educate** through high academic standards, global values and unique approaches to learning.
- We **lead** through cutting edge learning tools, environments and experiences.
- We **innovate** through creativity, inquiry and a common desire for a better future.

We strive to inspire, educate, lead and innovate within a culture of kindness that promotes success for all.

Program Articulation

At GEMS American Academy (GAA) we provide each student with a holistic, inquiry based, engaging program of studies. We prepare each student to be an internationally minded citizen who takes action to contribute positively to their community and the world.

Our program brings together the best curricula in the world incorporating International Baccalaureate (IB) Scope and Sequence, Project AERO (American Education Reaches Out/Common Core), National Arts Standards, and the UAE Ministry of Education.

We are proud to be an IB World School offering the Primary Years Programme and Diploma Programme accredited by the Council of International Schools (CIS) and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC); guided by the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC).

GAA School Development Plan (SDP) Priorities:

We Inspire. We Educate. We Lead. We Innovate.

Priority 1:

Foster a culture of kindness within our GAA community:

- Create a safe, healthy and positive learning environment
- Cultivate mindfulness, resilience and empathy
- Champion character education through modeling the expected behaviors of the IB Learner Profile
- Encourage student initiative and voice

Priority 2:

Improve attainment and progress through the collaborative development, implementation and review of a comprehensive written and aligned K12 curriculum including quality assessments and innovative learning and teaching practices.



Priority 3:

Engage in professional learning focused on improved student development, attainment and progress through:

- Integration of IB learner profile traits within the culture and curriculum
- Collaboration including coaching, peer observations and professional learning communities
- Student engagement and evidence of inquiry
- Innovative practices
- Differentiation informed by quality assessment
- Planning, teaching, and assessing curriculum including elements of individualized education plans

Priority 4:

Differentiate student learning through:

- Inclusive instructional practices
- Engaging learning environments that demonstrate student understanding of clearly articulated learning objectives
- A proactive, collaborative network of support including: classroom teachers, students, parents, administration, English Language Learners Support, Learning Support, and Counselling.

Priority 5:

Cultivate and share innovative learning experiences and practices that are grounded in research and authentic application.

Our Journey to Outstanding

GEMS American Academy is a high performing school!
Read more...

ADEC INSPECTION RESULTS

أكاديمية جيمس الأمريكية - أبوظبي
GEMS American Academy
ABU DHABI

GEMS American Academy | Rating: Band A
High Performing School - **Very Good** with some **Outstanding** provisions.
GAA has improved in nearly all areas since the last inspection in January 2014.

BAND A

GEMS American Academy-Abu Dhabi is a diverse international K-12 American and IB School offering both the Primary Years Programme (PYP) and Diploma Programme (DP), with 2,015 students in attendance comprised of 94 nationalities, speaking 40 languages and a faculty of 178.

Established in 2011 and accredited by the Council of International Schools (CIS) and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), GEMS American Academy is the flagship American curriculum school for GEMS in Abu Dhabi and sister school to Dubai American Academy.

Ranked as a “Band A” school by local authorities in rigorous biennial inspections, GEMS American Academy offers a college preparatory educational program in the English language in a state-of-the-art facility in Khalifa City.

Parents, students and faculty consistently report that GEMS American Academy is a warm and welcoming school community and that our culture of kindness can be observed throughout the day, throughout the school, in the daily interactions of faculty, students, staff



and parents.

GAA Governing Board

The Governing Board at GAA was established in 2016 and serves to support the school as a sounding board for our School Development Plan efforts and holds an important strategic role in overseeing the achievement of GAA's aims and objectives. The Governing Board:

- Understand and uphold the school's vision and values
- Challenge, advise and support the school on matters of strategy and policy
- As a critical friend, hold the school accountable for standards and performance

In the January, 2017, Governing Board Meeting, members consisting of teachers, parents, administrators, and GEMS representatives, reviewed and approved the November 2016 Progress Report.

GAA School Development Plan (SDP)

The School Development Plan 2015-2016 developed after the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) Inspection in November 2015, was written to address and respond to specific recommendations as a result of the inspection. The SDP was written in collaboration with many stakeholders (teachers and administrators) in the school with input from members of all of our improvement committees.

The SDP plan addresses ADEC Framework Standards and references specific recommendations from the January 2016 Inspection Report (which was based on the November 2015 ADEC Inspection.) The SDP also addresses the Council of International Schools (CIS) Standards, supports our school Mission, Vision, Core Values and integrates the GAA School Development Priorities (SDP) upon which our improvement committees are organized.

Developed to guide our direction and progress to better serve our students, this SDP represents the collaboration of many faculty, staff and administration, working tirelessly on the behalf of students, to achieve our goals and objects. In order to ensure that these goals and objects are met with fidelity and within the expected timeline, two rigorous reviews of the SDP were scheduled, at the mid-point in March, 2016, and again at the close of the two-year plan. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) conducted an mid-point review of the SDP in March, 2016, which included participation of by members of each committee member and a presentation to faculty and staff.

The enclosed summary of achievements represents a formal end of plan review by the SLT, faculty members and the GAA Governing Board.

Next Steps in the Journey to Outstanding

GAA is committed to being **outstanding** in all areas. This commitment is found throughout our policies, plans and most importantly, our school community. Feedback from all stakeholders were incorporated into the subsequent School Development Plan. Next Steps in the GAA Journey to Outstanding can be found in the two-year School Development Plan of 2016-2018.



Progress Toward School Development (SDP) Goals & Impact on Student Learning

November 2016

Based on ADEC Framework Standards & GAA Priorities

1. Student Achievement: Attainment, Progress and Learning Skills

Our commitment to student achievement has resulted in a significant number of initiatives this year. Arabic Studies has been separated from overall achievement goals. Some initiatives are in the second and third phases of implementation.

Arabic Studies:

- Our Arabic coordinator has taken the lead in providing specific training and feedback to our Arabic staff incorporating evidence-based teaching and assessment strategies.
- Parent feedback, assessment data, EMSA data and McRel Walk-Through classroom observation data show impact on student learning. Each assessment was analyzed for improvement and support needed.
- The Arabic department has hosted other schools in response to their requests for guidance on improving their instruction.
- Planning documents are reviewed weekly by the coordinator to ensure that they meet ADEC requirements as well as PYP and IB expectations.
- Specifically, EMSA Test results for G11 students in reading and writing showed significant improvement and impact on achievement in reading and writing. Our Arabic students achieved the highest results in Abu Dhabi in 2016.
- New rubrics developed resulted in more specific tracking of progress and achievement of the four skills- reading, writing, listening and speaking.
- Plans were shared with parents, who commented that they were better able to see student goals and progress of their children.
- Classroom observations data shows more student engagement in Arabic Studies classrooms (Arabic, Islamic Studies and UAE Social Studies). Such engagement helps students to draw connections between effort made and achievement. Supporting teachers in authentically incorporating more instructional strategies has been effective in improving achievement.

All Subjects:

- The SLT completed 400 observations by June 2016. This data allowed the SLT to identify areas for improvement and development for teachers' instruction and professional development (PD) need patterns across the whole school, by grade level and by subject. Data from walkthroughs conducted in the fall of 2016 informed a plan in which teachers were provided with professional development which then provided a focus during future walkthroughs (ie. Learning Outcomes (January 2017), Effective Questioning (February 2017)).
- Data coordinators have provided training to both SLT and teachers on how to analyze data to inform instruction to meet the needs of all students.
- Data analysis has allowed us to better identify those students who would benefit from compacting and extending the curriculum as well as those students who require additional support. Analysis has allowed us to determine which specific areas require further instruction in order to improve student achievement.



- K-12 LS & ELL handbook, policy and related forms were completed collaboratively and shared with teams during Student Support Team (SST) meetings.
- Individual MAP student data has been shared with students in order for them to be able to set their own goals. Goal setting has become more intentional in terms of how they will improve rather than just determining a target. There has been additional support and direction for our students to provide test-taking strategies (ie. mindfulness, extended time).
- In the Elementary School, all differentiation is recorded in weekly planning. There is a consistent approach to differentiation that has been collaboratively planned with English language learners' teachers (ELL), learning support (LS) and Primary Years Programme (PYP) coordinators to meet the needs of all learners.
- An ongoing Gifted & Talented committee reviews assessments and oversees plans for individual students.
- Clear articulation of policies and practices are made available to all staff ensures that all students' needs are met.
- A baseline assessment has been created for administration to both KG and Grade 1 students to determine achievement, monitor progress and to identify students who may require additional support.
- Readers' and Writers' workshop has been fully implemented from KG1 – Grade 5. The focus is on improving learning outcomes for all students. Progress will be monitored through KG / Grade 1 baseline assessments and MAP data.
- All students work through the writing process as evidenced by their work in writing folders, notebooks and published pieces and reflect on their work as evidenced by end of unit reflection documentation. Students are given specific and descriptive feedback to their work so as to improve their level of attainment. Impact on learning is evidenced in that students know and reflect on their writing goals and writing instruction is highly differentiated.

2. Students' Personal and Social Development and their Innovation Skills

- Fostering positive relationships with staff and students is essential for a positive school climate and a positive learning environment. Student survey data from spring 2016 indicate that 74% of students have at least 1 adult in the school they can speak to if upset or worried. 84% feel respected by their teachers, 85% feel cared for by their teachers, 73% feel connected with their advisor.
- We have a Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) plan which encompasses K – 12. It is reviewed and revised annually using input from staff, students and parents. All students in grades K-8 are now recognized for positive behaviors through the GEMS program. Students and or classes earn "Gems" that are displayed on bulletin boards and are acknowledged in assemblies. This has had a positive impact on student behavior and consequently on student engagement and learning.
- Our culture of kindness has been elevated to the number one school priority and has been the focus of many assemblies in conjunction with Bully Prevention Week known as the *Campaign of Kindness*. This focus on social responsible responsibility has a positive impact on student learning by raising awareness of how their actions impacts others and their learning environment.
- All elementary students experience the IB learner profile integrated into curriculum. Middle and high school students all take part in an advisory program that focuses on a different IB learner profile trait each month. IB/DP students take part in the CAS program. Many student club initiatives focus on social responsibility such as Roots & Shoots, Key Club, Big Brothers, Big Sisters and GIN.
- A professional learning community team (PLC) is learning about and incorporating mindfulness into their practice and their teaching. The principles of mindfulness are being incorporated into applicable Units of Inquiry in KG1, KG2, Grade 1 and Grade



5. MindUp is a research-based curriculum that offers tools and strategies to students to practice mindfulness within a positive learning environment. It is in the first phase of implementation in KG1 and KG2.

- Atlas Rubicon (online database for unit lesson plans) plans are currently being developed for the advisory program. This will ensure the continuity of objectives for the advisory and social/ emotional curriculum.

Innovation Skills

- Seesaw digital portfolios have been implemented from K – 5 providing ongoing information and celebration regarding student learning; 100% of elementary parents are signed up and are accessing SeeSaw and feedback of this new system has been overwhelmingly positive.
- The Hour of Code involved students from K - 12 as they learned critical thinking skills needed to create JavaScript codes.
- Teachers, students and parents took part in UAE Innovation week. Students and parents created artistic robots, explored electronics and participated in STEAM activities.
- Elementary and secondary students are piloting a robotics program for GEMS. Students are learning programming, engineering and design skills.
- Two Makerspaces have been created. Students explore inquiry concepts and have the opportunity to create solutions for international challenges within the Makerspaces. The results have been profiled in GEMS magazine.

3. Teaching for Effective Learning & Assessment

- Professional learning communities are in their second year of implementation. PLCs have been aligned with the SDP with the primary focus on student learning and achievement.
- There is a consistent approach to differentiation that has been collaboratively planned with ELL, LS and PYP coordinators to meet the needs of all learners. This is documented in the weekly planners and in Individual Education Plans (IEP), where appropriate. In addition, our elementary Student Support Team (SST) has monthly half-day collaborations in which differentiated instruction and child studies take place. This is to ensure that intentional differentiation is a focus.
- By separating the observation and appraisal systems, GAA administrators are able to involve more staff members in the observation process to promote discussions about best practice.
- Model classrooms have been established to promote peer observation of best practice, questioning, lesson objectives and formative assessment were focused of the GEMS Review and have been incorporated into the professional development (PD) plan.
- Our professional development plan has significantly shifted so that large groups of teachers receive the same training. This includes CoachingU (Coaching clinic), Train the Trainer, Inquiry. With this commitment, the implementation of the PD and support of all of our teachers has been leveraged. For example, our staff are providing workshops in which they share their research and their learning with each other on a monthly basis. A monthly newsletter outlining opportunities and recognizing staff's expertise has been created. Teachers have been encouraged to visit colleagues' classrooms to observe best practices and generate professional dialogue.
- 100% of teachers/leaders and educational assistants (EA's) have set team and individual goals aligned to the ADEC standards and school improvement plan. The Professional Development (PD) committee utilized this data and staff survey to plan in-house professional development and Professional Learning Communities (PLC's).
- Teacher moderation is being used in writing assessments in order to facilitate consistency and inform instruction.



- The student support team coordinator and Director of Arabic Studies have collaborated on the delivery of workshops for the Arabic Studies Department focused on differentiation and special education needs and meeting the needs of all learners including Gifted & Talented. Individual Education Plans (IEP) have been translated into Arabic.
- Our recent internal GEMS review (November) focused on PYP and DP within our school. The results of that review were shared with the entire faculty. As a result of those recommendations, professional development was shared on learning objectives, questioning and assessment. Monitoring is being completed through classroom walkthroughs.

Effective Use of Data to Improve Student Outcomes

- Data coordinators were appointed in June 2016 and have provided training to teachers on how to analyze the data to inform instruction to meet the needs of all students. In the Elementary School, all differentiation is recorded in weekly planning.
- The data team is implementing an all school assessment handbook for GAA and has created a resource bank on differentiation strategies and strategies for Gifted & Talented instruction. An assessment windows chart has been created for elementary so as to ensure consistency.
- A data handbook is being developed which outlines protocols, procedures and best practices for administering assessments and analyzing the resulting data. This will ensure that data is used to improve student achievement and inform instruction.
- Teachers have received MAP data training based on using the Learning Continuum for reading, math, language usage and science. One example of how the data is being used to further student achievement is that specific students have been identified for a reading intervention program that is delivered daily.
- Progress over time is being analyzed by teachers in the areas of reading and mathematics.
- The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) completed 400 classroom observations by June 2016. This data allowed us to identify areas for improvement and development for teachers' instruction and professional development needs.

4. Curriculum : Design, Implementation & Adaptation

- Curriculum committees have been created from K – 12 in all curriculum areas. The goal is to create articulated curriculum based on concepts and approaches to learning. This will be completed by April 2016.
- Reflection has become more intentional during our second year of the elementary Program of Inquiry (POI) which will inform next year's POI so that it is more relevant, significant, challenging and engaging.
- The K – 12 Curriculum Review Cycle was completed in June 2016, all subjects were mapped with 4 phases and will be fully implemented in ~~rolled-out~~ August 2017, once all curriculum is aligned.
- Readers' and Writers' workshop has been implemented with significant professional development. It is being aligned with the Units of Inquiry by a committee.
- An elementary committee has also been focusing on developing a revised scope and sequence in mathematics based on the 2015 AERO Common Core Plus math standards.

5. The Protection, Care and Guidance & Support of Students, Including Health & Safety

- 100% of staff attended compulsory Child Protection training.



- Through training, staff are given heightened awareness of a child's right to safety in accordance both universal rights and local laws safeguarding children. Student learning was affected as children are taught their rights to feel safe and comfortable and how to respond if their safety is threatened.
- Posters have been put up throughout the school advising staff, student and parents regarding people who can be contacted when there is a concern.
- All Child Protection concerns were communicated to ADEC and the Ministry of Interior are documented in a consistent manner as we must consistently document all concerns, regardless of when those that are not sufficient to report to ADEC and MOI.
- An evidence-based developmentally appropriate child protection curriculum is being constructed to implement in the classrooms. Teachers emphasize creating an environment that prioritizes the welfare of the student.
- A team is working on implementing a parenting program to support our families. This will include research-based strategies and / or workshops.
- A Health & Safety Committee meets monthly to address health and safety concerns, conducts proactive planning and monitors accidents, incidents, risk assessments and protocols, conducts walk-through's weekly throughout the facility and Health & Safety inspection data and recommendations.

6. Leadership and Management: The Effectiveness of Leadership, Self-Evaluation & Improvement Planning, Partnerships with Parents & Community, Governance, Management, Staffing, Facilities & Resources

- The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) members, as well as a number of teacher/leaders, serve as committee "Champions", charged with leading the Five School Development Priorities and to monitor progress toward intended outcomes through their respective committees.
- The Senior Leadership Team members work to develop the capacity to lead the change outlined in the School Development Plan by leading ongoing professional development for teacher/leaders at all levels. For example, SLT members have developed a 5-part leadership development workshop series, sessions have been well attended by faculty and staff, with 28-44 participants at each session.
- A Governing Board was established to serve as a critical friend, charged with upholding the school's vision and values, to challenge, advise and support GAA on matters of strategy and policy and hold the school accountable for standards and performance.
- Periodic reviews of School Development Plan (SDP) progress assists the SLT to monitor, use data for decision-making and push the timeline to realize the SDP plan and goals. Data are reviewed and discussed in SLT weekly meetings and are documented in evidence folders.
- A variety of avenues are available for parents to provide important feedback to GAA leaders. For example, Arabic and All Parent "In Touch" parent feedback sessions conducted in October and November 2015 and 2016 as well as parent surveys completed in spring of 2016. All feedback reported back to the parent community as well as to faculty and staff.
- Senior Leadership Team members effectively use data for making decisions and for monitoring progress toward improvement goals. Classroom observation data, McRel Walk-Through's are reviewed frequently in SLT meetings as well as all parent survey, teacher/staff survey and student survey data.
- MAP testing data are reviewed by the SLT, data coordinators present data and share goals/objectives on behalf of the larger Data Team. SLT members use data, with support from Data Team Coordinators, to provide critical professional development to teachers on effectively using data to inform instruction and improve student learning outcomes.
- Evidence folders are created for all data collection, such as parent survey data, McRel Walk-Through data, GEMS Review Report, and MAP Testing & CAT-4 Testing.



- Senior Leadership Team members continually plan, monitor, communicate and organize resources, learning environments and facilities to ensure for effective teaching optimum learning for all students as evidenced in weekly SLT meeting notes, Health & Safety meeting notes and by effective and efficient use of resources, finances and budget.

Major GAA Accomplishments:

- Arabic students at GEMS have the highest overall score in native Arabic reading and writing on the standardized EMSA exam in Abu Dhabi.
- Director of Arabic Studies Samah Awad was nominated for the GEMS Teacher of the Year in 2016.
- GAA Students were finalists in the January 2017 Model United Nations Conference
- A student represented GAA as an innovation leader at the Global Innovation Challenge.
- Article published in GEMS magazine highlighting our Makerspace (January 2017)
- GAA was named the second Most Healthy and Fit school in Abu Dhabi in 2016.
- A GAA student was the first GEMS student to successfully audition for the AMIS Honor Band in 2016 and joined students from around the world for a residential course and performance in Doha.
- A GAA student was accepted to study composition at the prestigious conservatory; The Manhattan School of Music, USA.
- A GAA student was accepted to study Popular Music and Production at the highly prestigious conservatoire; Leeds College of Music, UK.
- Our High School Jazz Band was invited to perform at the UAE Band Festival in Dubai with the best of the UAE.
- 6 GAA students were accepted into the AMIS Middle School World Honor Choir.
- A GAA student was accepted into the AMIS High School World Honor Choir – 3rd consecutive year GAA has had a student in – and the only GEMS school to do so.
- 4 GAA students auditioned and were accepted to perform as paid musicians with the Abu Dhabi National Symphony Orchestra as they put on the Opera *Hansel and Gretel*.
- Advanced Choir students auditioned and were chosen to sing backup for Andrea Bocelli.
- 2 GAA students auditioned and were able to perform in a masterclass with members of the cast of *Les Miserables*.
- A GAA student made it to the finals of the “Best of The Best Competition”.
- The GAA High School Advanced Choir was invited to perform for the United States Embassy, The British Embassy, as well as many hotels and businesses throughout Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

Next Steps:

EXPANDING OUR HORIZONS

GAA is committed to sharing excellence in teaching and learning. We have provided support, guidance and leadership for other schools in Abu Dhabi and Dubai in the following ways:

- Makerspace (visits from 5 schools);
- Hosting Innovation, Research & Design workshops and meetings;
- Providing Mindfulness professional development through the GEMS network (GEMS TELALL Group);
- Hosting other schools to demonstrate excellence in teaching (visit from Qatar); and,
- Hosting teacher candidates from local universities to model best practices for local teachers.