

Value proposition

Support for a school in transition

In November 2021 Branksome Hall Asia International School in Korea launched a new strategic plan.

*Principal **Dr. Cinde Lock** looks at how the school worked with Consilium Education to address the communication issues involved.*



Context

The school is a school deeply committed to the education of girls, operating within the context of a very competitive landscape on Jeju Island off the Korean mainland.



Here four schools vie for a limited market share of mostly Korean students who hail from the Korean mainland. Since inception, the school has offered a co-educational Junior School program and an all-girls Middle and Senior School in Grades 6-12.

There is no all-boys school in the surrounding area. As a result, enrollment has traditionally sourced primarily from families who have only girls, or those who have a single child.

Also, while boys had a place in the Junior School, they did not have a pathway through to graduation and were required to leave the school at the end of Grade 5 as the school focused on the needs of the girls.

Boys were thus denied the full Branksome Hall Asia educational experience. Enrollment was further affected by the fact that new families with male and female children had to choose between having their children in two schools or choosing a school other than Branksome Hall Asia. This reality made Branksome Hall Asia unusually vulnerable to competition.

While many Junior School parents had expressed understandable dissatisfaction with the school's admission policy for Grades 6 - 12 arrangement, other parents regarded the single-sex policy as an authentic reflection of the school's ethos.

Strategic change, 2021



After much discussion with the Board of Governors and education partners, in September 2021 it was determined that a change of school structure was needed. The school decided to develop a “school within a school” model, whereby an all-boys Middle School would be introduced on the school campus. Under the new model, classes would be co-educational in the Junior School, single-sex in Middle School, and co-educational in the Senior School.

The adoption of this ‘diamond’ model of education would ensure that girls and boys achieve the confidence and voice that is featured in the current educational model while integrating the genders in a socially healthy way in the Junior and Senior Schools.

International school of the year

At the time of this decision, the reputation of the school was at an all-time high, with the school receiving the 2021 International School of the Year Award from ISC Research for its technological and curricular innovations. An education at the school was in high demand as attested to by both strong enrollment figures and waiting lists.

We knew, however, longer term sustainability required change. The school’s leadership team had confidence that the mission and vision of the school could be upheld and the provision of an education that empowers both older boys as well as girls could be implemented and maintained.

The risks

Given the context, there were many risks associated with implementing this new program model. Most importantly, this change could lead to a potential destabilization of the girls population in the Middle and Senior Schools as boys would be introduced to these divisions for the first time. The school was determined that the sense of identity and opportunity for girls not be lessened or perceived to be negatively influenced by this change.

Developing the plan with Consilium

To have support through this transition period, the school sought consultation through Consilium Education. School administrators wanted to develop a strong communication plan and implementation timeline that would ease the transition for all members of the school community, including current and prospective students, parents, alumni, and other stakeholders.



The school also wanted to learn from other schools that had already gone through a program change and to review research related to this kind of change management. Consilium Education responded to support this work, along with helping in the development of a value proposition to align the school's proposals for change with the school's well-established commitment to girls' education.

The school also asked for support in defining the channels and process for communicating this value proposition to key stakeholders in the school's community. The brief was to be completed within a tight time frame.

Value-added proposition



Consilium consultants met the school's needs to produce a value-added proposition and construct an effective communication plan. Indeed, many reports were developed to assist the school in their transition, including the generation of a full list of anticipated questions with answers that could be called upon in the myriad of meetings set with parents and other stakeholders.

In November 2021, the school's plans to adopt a Diamond Model of education was communicated to all stakeholders in the school's community.

Community reaction

As anticipated, the transition was a complex and time-consuming process. The Junior School parents were more accepting of the decision and, even those who would have preferred a girls-only educational environment for their child, found it difficult to voice a concern with other parents of boys in close proximity. Despite the fact that the boys' program would be grandfathered in over a 10-year period, some of the Middle and Senior School students and the school's alumni expressed a feeling of loss, as they felt that the school they would graduate from, would not be the same going forward.

The Middle School and Senior School parents exhibited a mixed reaction to the decision. While some were happy with the decision, acknowledging that the mixed-gender environment would be beneficial for their daughters' education and it was necessary for the future of the school, the majority of them received the news with surprise. There was also a risk associated with destabilizing the parent representatives to the school, and, as a result, in line with the plan, the school arranged a series of information sessions and meetings to listen to the parents and reassure them of the value of their voice and the unwavering quality of education on offer at the school, as well as showing them the school's appreciation for their participation and partnership.

It was also important that Consilium Education was able to work closely with the school's marketing team and PR agency in Korea to ensure that key messages remained culturally sensitive and on point when delivered in Korean.

Moving forward

As discussed with Consilium, the school knew that it was not going to be an easy process to deliver a message that would surprise some. But the leadership had every confidence that any unsettling period would be transitory for three main reasons:

1. The long-term strategic plan was well-conceived and was right for the school.
2. The communication plan was well-thought out and enabled the school to keep control of the central message.
3. There were no surprises in any of the objections raised and the school was able to answer all the questions in depth.

Overall, it was a much smoother transition than had been thought possible because of the school's attention to detail and the support it received from its consultants.



Cinde Lock is the Principal of Branksome Hall Asia.

Feature and Support Images: Courtesy of Branksome Hall.