While Singapore American School (SAS) has a long history of high performance and an outstanding reputation, the school’s leadership recognized a need to innovate and change in order to remain relevant. We understood that good schools are often the most difficult to change, with good often getting in the way of being truly great. Further, for our students to be competitive in the global economy, NEW SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES would be required that were not adequately addressed in our current model of teaching and learning.

SAS sought to develop a PROCESS OF CHANGE that would move a large and successful system to a new place of excellence and relevance. This change process would ensure that the school effectively serves students for the future.

SAS is in its fifth year of transformative change. Each division undertook a comprehensive research and development process, with a full year for research, a full year for development, a year for planning, capacity building, and testing, and then implementation that will take several years. Our plan is now captured in our strategic plan—SAS 2020. Building the plan helped us to hone in on the most important priorities and to realize that it all will ultimately lead to PERSONALIZED LEARNING.

It was critical that faculty were leading this process across the system. By engaging faculty from the beginning, we had early champions and significant learning. Some of our lessons include:

1. Be unapologetic about who we are and what we will stand for.
2. Hire for what we want to become.
3. Invest in leadership development at all levels.
4. Create an environment of healthy discourse.
5. Engage our people at all levels in the discovery phase, not just the outcome.
6. Create a culture of innovation in which it is safe to fail.
7. Stay focused on the vision and the big goal.
8. Push the organization’s limits to learn the capacity for change.
9. Do it right and not just do it fast.
10. Be willing to adapt along the way to new learning.
11. Pace the timing in order to build capacity and focus on what is most important.
12. Decide what has to go in order to make time for the change we have planned.

Our summit idea is to use a deliberate process of change—the SAS R&D PROCESS—that would transform the school profoundly and systemically. This R&D process would inspire SAS educators, engage a broad range of constituencies, tap into research and the expertise of educators around the globe, and ultimately result in profound changes at Singapore American School—from the inside out.

Each step along the way required deliberate planning and action, and we built upon previous work and experiences. The process was messy at times, but the result is a deeply committed staff and new direction for learning.

The SAS R&D process is now found in a documentary—CHANGING EDUCATION FROM THE INSIDE OUT—an authentic look at the SAS journey and the challenges and triumphs of change.