

What is Project AERO?

American Education Reaches Out (AERO), began as a project to adapt the U. S. national standards in Mathematics, Science, Language Arts and Social Studies to serve the needs of multi-national student bodies. Over the years, standards have also been developed in Music, Visual Arts and World Languages. In addition, three other components have been added: AERO:SAW, which provides a focus on standards-based assessment, AERO:SBC, which is a collection of week-long summer institutes on curriculum design, and OSAC-funded AERO mini-workshops, which are one to two-day introductions to the principles taught more deeply in the summer institutes.

History of AERO

AERO was conceived and overseen by the Near East South Asia Council of Overseas Schools (NESAS) and conducted by the former Council for Basic Education (CBE), a non-profit group with extensive experience in developing standards at the local, state and national level. Funding for the project came from the Overseas Schools Advisory Council (OSAC) and the U.S. State Department's Office of Overseas Schools. The AERO standards and benchmarks for mathematics and science were made public in Spring 2001; language arts standards were released a year later, and social studies standards were released in 2003. The later standards in Music, Visual Arts and World Languages were completed in January 2007. By developing these standards and benchmarks, Project AERO hoped to provide a framework for curriculum consistency in overseas schools with high teacher turnover and ensure that challenging curricula and meaningful assessments would become the norm for American students overseas.

Under the direction of CBE, representatives of twelve international schools lent their expertise to the project, working together as a team twice a year, and extensively at the school sites to discuss and refine the standards and benchmarks to ensure that they were appropriate for the international school community. The twelve schools were: American Community School, Amman; American Cooperative School, Tunis; American International School, Dhaka; American International School, Johannesburg; International School of Luxembourg; American International School, Riyadh; American International School, Tel Aviv; American School Foundation, Monterrey, Mexico; International School of Islamabad; International Schools Group, Dhahran; Nido de Aguilas International School, Santiago; and Singapore American School.

Since the completion of the first sets of standards and benchmarks, three other elements have been added to Project AERO. The first was AERO:SAW, developed out of CBE's Schools Around the World Project. Twelve schools initially piloted AERO:SAW, using the AERO Standards as the basis for designing and evaluating assessments of student learning. Since then, numerous schools and individual teachers have participated in AERO:SAW training and have implemented the process in their home schools.

The second element added to Project AERO was AERO: SBC, or Standards-Based Curriculum. AERO:SBC has been delivered in week-long summer institutes in the Washington, D.C. area. The AERO faculty leads teachers and administrator participants from overseas schools through an intensive introduction to the principles

of backward unit design, including the development of assessments, rubrics and instructional plans that are standards-based and student-centered. Participants gain greater knowledge of the subject-specific standards and benchmarks and become familiar with the backward design process of curriculum writing.

The third element added to Project AERO was the development of other support courses which are also offered during the annual summer institute. The first is Curriculum Mapping which addresses the needs of a school to review its existing curriculum and determine its correlation to the standards. This process helps schools systematically plan for curriculum improvement. The second course, Academic Leaders, is designed for those staff who serve a school in a curriculum capacity. The content addresses the issues related to institutional change and provides steps for action planning to achieve that change. A third course, Using MAP, Additional Data Sources and Instructional Strategies to Improve Learning has been added as well. (MAP is the Measures of Academic Progress developed by NWEA and used in many international schools.) This course provides instruction and support for interpreting data and applying the results of that analysis to classroom instruction to improve student learning.

How does a school obtain the AERO Standards?

The AERO Standards and Frameworks are available for any school interested in adopting or adapting them for use. They can be downloaded from the AERO Web site.

How can the AERO Standards be used in an IB School?

Schools with IB programs use the AERO Standards in various ways. Some expect students to meet the standards by the end of grade 10 and then use the IB as the basis for the curriculum for the last two years of high school. Another choice is to maintain the AERO Standards through grade 12 for students not enrolled in the full IB program.

In schools that follow the Primary Years Program and/or Middle Years Program, AERO provides a clear, measurable set of expectations for content knowledge and skills that integrate with the curriculum design criteria for PYP and MYP.

Who is using the AERO Standards?

Because the standards can be obtained from the Web site, it is impossible to determine how many schools are using the standards as a basis for the curriculum. However, so far over 1800 faculty from over 400 international schools have participated in AERO training. Ninety-eight schools around the world are implementing standards that are AERO-based.

Do we have to use the AERO Standards if we participate in AERO training?

No, schools are not required to implement the standards to participate.

How do AERO Standards compare to the U.S. national voluntary standards and to the MCREL Standards?

The AERO Standards used the Council for Basic Education's Standards for Excellence in Education as the basis. Standards for Excellence in Education is a condensed, edited version of the U.S. national standards, so the relationship between the U.S. national standards and AERO is quite close. The representatives of the twelve schools that collaborated to produce the AERO Standards made changes in the standards in several ways: by adding content or skills they felt were missing, by modifying the benchmarks for international schools, and by making the benchmarks more challenging, either through editing or by bumping down the grade span during which the benchmark would be targeted for achievement (e.g., from "by the end of grade 8" to "by the end of grade 5".)

The MCREL Standards include the complete set of U.S. national standards, so they are both more comprehensive and more overwhelming. MCREL also incorporated Habits of Mind into the standards. Although there is considerable overlap between AERO and MCREL, each offers something unique.

How do schools or individuals participate in AERO training?

AERO training is presented in various ways. First of all, our faculty present at the regional conferences held in various locations around the world. These training sessions are open to anyone attending the conferences. Secondly, AERO offers a Summer Institute each year in the Washington, D.C. area. Information and application materials are sent to schools in January of each year. Applications are forwarded to the AERO office by March for review. Selection is based on several criteria, including the school's relationship with American Overseas Schools. Thirdly, AERO faculty members conduct some on-site training for school staffs. This training is done on a limited basis because most of our faculty are on school staffs themselves and unable to travel extensively.

Does AERO have any new initiatives underway?

We have completed the review and expansion of our Mathematics and Science Standards and Benchmarks into Frameworks. These reviews have been led by subject experts in each discipline. The new Frameworks include the Standards and Benchmarks for each grade, K-8. (Previously the benchmarks had been arranged in grade level bands, i.e. by the end of Grade 5.) Student performance indicators complete the Frameworks. Training of teachers with the new Math and Science Frameworks has been accomplished. English/Language Arts is currently in the review process and we are planning to publish the new Framework in 2011. Social Studies will be the next subject to undergo the review process and that is expected to begin in the spring of 2011.