



International Network for School Social Work

<http://internationalnetwork-schoolsocialwork.htmlplanet.com>

Contact mhuxtable@olympus.net

Electronic Newsletter September 2018

Editor: Marion Huxtable

**Child Protection and School Social Work
at the American International School Vietnam**

**Wes Thompson, Associate Director of Student Services,
American International School Vietnam**

Vietnam is a nation on the rise, having largely overcome many challenges it has faced in its long history. Since 1986, with the government's policy of *Đổi Mới* (Renovation), a series of bold economic reforms aimed at establishing a market economy and becoming more open to the rest of the world, Vietnam has undergone a vast modernization. Vietnam attracted over US\$14 billion in foreign direct investment in 2017 and has become a center of business, education, and technology. Vietnam's government is focused on improving the nation's economy and the life of its people. Education is among the major focuses for transforming the country's future prospects. Vietnam's population has increased dramatically in the past decade, from 77.6 million people in 2000 to 92.7 million in 2016. In the same period, Vietnam's GDP soared from US\$33.6 billion to US\$202.6 billion.

Education in Vietnam

According to the Global Partnership for Education, Vietnam's government has made the improvement of education a national priority, <https://www.globalpartnership.org/country/vietnam>. The government has invested about 20 percent of its annual budget in education since 2008. The Vietnamese people likewise place great importance on getting the best education for themselves and their children. School completion rates are good, but many parents seek better alternatives for their children, often in the form of an international school. In an effort to embrace the demands and expectations of work and life in the 21st century, the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has been open to not only allowing, but even encouraging, the development of private and international schools, not only for expatriate students, but for Vietnamese as well. As of 2017, over 39,000 students in Vietnam were enrolled in 109 English-medium private and international schools from ages 3 - 18 (ISC Market Intelligence Report for Vietnam).

American International School, Vietnam (AIS) <http://www.ais.edu.vn>

AIS Vietnam began on a single, small campus in Ho Chi Minh City's District 1 in January 2007. It quickly grew to the point where two additional campuses were needed. Today, all programs from pre-kindergarten to grade 12 have moved into a beautiful, purpose-built facility in the Nha Be district of the city, with 1,200 students, over 120 teachers, and 400 staff. AIS has been authorized

since 2010 to offer the prestigious and rigorous International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (IBDP) to students in grades 11 and 12. Currently, the school is in the process of expanding its IB program to include the Primary Years Program (PYP) and the Middle Years Program (MYP).

Students at AIS Vietnam

AIS Vietnam's student population is 95% Vietnamese, which is unique among international schools in the country. Traditionally, all international schools were required to cap Vietnamese student enrollment at 20 percent. Since AIS Vietnam's first graduating class in 2009, graduates are attending (or have graduated from) over 250 universities in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Europe. AIS Vietnam graduates are attending, for example, UCLA, UC Berkeley, Boston University, Northeastern University, the University of British Columbia, and Monash University.

The Child Protection Policy <http://www.ais.edu.vn/child-protection-handbook>

Since its first days, AIS Vietnam has placed great emphasis on the health, safety, and wellbeing of its students. However, the school's teachers, counselors, and leadership recognized the need to formally establish policies and procedures to ensure the wellbeing of every student.

Beginning in February 2017, the school retained the services of child protection consultants to aid in the development of a child protection policy and program that have now been formally adopted. There is also a committee of school staff from all school levels, comprised of representative staff with responsibility for overseeing the training of staff and setting policies and procedures related to child protection. The school's Child Protection Handbook serves as the de facto policy and procedure guide to make certain that every staff member, including bus drivers, bus guardians, nannies, teaching assistants and housekeepers, are well versed in how to help students stay safe and well protected, both and school and elsewhere.

Why did the school decide to hire social workers?

Through the annual report from our school counselors, it was clear that, as our student number grew, there were more and more cases that potentially fell under the category of child protection, some of which clearly required support by local expertise, specifically in communicating with families. On top of that, child protection is rather a new, if not quite unfamiliar, topic for Vietnamese parents, staff and students, who are the majority of the school community population. Bringing these groups up to speed with child protection prevention, policies and procedure required extensive training by a local social worker, who could utilize real-life case studies. And lastly, with the language barrier, we found that our local Vietnamese social worker would best represent the school in working with parents, students and families in the most effective and efficient way.

The social work role at the school

The role of Social Worker is to establish, develop and coordinate the social work program at AIS in order to provide the best support to the students' well-being and psychological development and to uphold the children's rights in accordance with the Children Law. The social worker works in close cooperation with the counselors, teachers, staff, parents and operation managers to develop plans and strategies to enhance the students' academic capabilities and social skills. The social worker works closely with staff who work closely with students to help students resolve psychological or abuse-related issues, as well as assuring an environment which is most favorable to student learning and social life. The social worker also plays an important role as the liaison between the school and various government agencies to seek resources necessary for prompt and adequate support to situations related to students, parents or any other member of the school community.