



Parent and Student Handbook

2017 – 2018

The American International School of Freetown

“Preparing students for success in an ever-changing world”

24 Hillcot Brow,
Hill Station,
Freetown, Sierra Leone.
Phone: 076 622453
Website: www.ais-freetown.net
director@ais-freetown.net

Director's Welcome

Dear Parents and Students,

Welcome to the American International School of Freetown. We take our Mission seriously: "preparing students for success in an ever-changing world." At AISF every child is valued and important. Teaching is designed to meet the needs of each individual learner while simultaneously fostering independence and students' responsibility for their own learning.

This handbook is meant to provide an overview of school routines and guidelines. There is a separate Curriculum Guide and an Emergency Procedures Manual. The partnership between family and school is the key to student success. Your questions and ideas are welcome.

My door is always open. You may contact me at director@ais-freetown.net or at 232 79 552 345.

**Regards,
Dr. Irene Epp
AISF Director**

AISF Vision and Mission

AISF MISSION

AISF develops students' love of learning in an internationally recognized, safe, student-centered and interactive learning environment. Students develop a global perspective that fosters empathy and prepares them for success in an ever-changing world.

AISF BELIEFS

We believe that:

- Respect for everyone's progress, and care for their safety and wellbeing, are essential for a successful and interactive learning environment.
- The diversity of our community enriches our learning experience, and develops global perspectives.
- Each member of our community is both a teacher and a learner, participating in an ongoing process of self-realization.
- Collaboration and teamwork are vital for progress in an ever-changing, interconnected world.

AISF School Community

School Organization

The AISF school community is composed of students, staff, parents, and the school board. We believe that all these elements are vital to making learning happen. It is important to maintain good communication among all of them. In addition, the Freetown environment in which our school is located is an important curricular resource for our school. We make frequent use of it by inviting resource people in and going out on field trips. We encourage parental involvement in these activities, as in all aspects of our school life.

Association of the American International School of Freetown

All full-time teachers and all parents with children enrolled in the school are voluntary members of the AISF Association. A General Meeting of the Association (AGM) is held in October and in May for the purpose of electing the School Board and for reviewing annual reports and other matters referred to the Association by the School Board.

School Board

The School Board is composed of six members. Not more than three positions are filled by election at each May meeting of the Association. Members serve two-year terms. A representative of the U.S. Ambassador is a member of the Board. The school director serves as a non-voting member.

Parent Participation

A student's academic progress is greatly enriched by a family that is well informed and active in school affairs. Parent participation is needed and parents are encouraged to volunteer in classrooms and to be active in supporting school events.

All parents are invited to join the AISF Parent Organization and be an active supporter of the school in the local community

Parent Association

An active and supportive Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) is the heart of our school. Parents organize social events for students and families and volunteer in classrooms. They assist with field trips and support school events such as International Lunch, Fun Fairs, and student performances.

AWOKO (ah-wō-kō)

The AWOKO is our official school newsletter (an "awoko" in Krio is a talkative person who spreads news). The newsletter is published by the school weekly to keep parents informed of what is happening at the school. AWOKO goes online every Friday. AISF's AWOKO has appeared every year since 1990, and went digital in 2009 in order to save trees and help the environment.

AISF Website

The AISF Web presence at www.ais-freetown.net is for external communication and provides resource links for parents, students and teachers.

Accreditation and Memberships:

Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSA): AISF is the only US accredited school in Sierra Leone. The school has been accredited with the Middle States Association of Colleges and Colleges in the United States (MSA) since April 1994. AISF will host its next re-accreditation visit from MSA in the 2017/2018 school year. The school completed the required Self Study in the 2016/2017 school year.

U.S. Department of State: AISF is the only official US State Department Assisted School in Sierra Leone. AISF was founded through an agreement between the US Embassy and the Government of Sierra Leone in 1986. AISF operates now in Sierra Leone through a Memorandum of Understanding negotiated and signed between in US Embassy Freetown and the Foreign Ministry of Sierra Leone in 2003.

Association of International Schools in Africa (AISA): The school has full membership status in AISA allowing faculty to attend AISA conferences, participate professional development opportunities and benefit from a range of activities with similar international schools all over Africa.

Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) Testing Services: AISF is now an approved school for MAP testing. MAP is an external measure of student knowledge and skill in mathematics, reading, and English language. MAP is currently the most widely used and respected external assessment program in international schools, particularly in US Embassy sponsored schools. AISF administers MAP testing twice each year in October and May. Results are always shared with families.

University of Nebraska High School: AISF is connected with the University of Nebraska, Lincoln in the US using their online campus to include an accredited high school program in our curriculum. Students may complete a semester, a full academic year, or multiple years to earn a US High School Diploma. High school credits earned transfer smoothly to any US school either in the US or overseas.

The College Board: The College Board, of Princeton, New Jersey is the organization that sponsors both the SAT and the TOEFL exam. The current SAT Reasoning Test, which assesses a student's Mathematics, Critical Reading, and Writing skills, is offered multiple times during the year at the AISF Freetown location.

The Global Perspective at AISF

Our American School exists in an international setting

AISF is committed to providing an education comparable to high quality US public schools. AISF is also committed to providing students with a global perspective in all aspects of their education. We are both American and international. In particular, our social studies curriculum at AISF provides students with a broad view of today's world through a study of other peoples and countries and our host country.

AISF Curriculum

AISF offers an accredited US curriculum Pre-Kindergarten through grade 8 to students age 3 to age 14. All curriculum is based on US educational standards and is published and available to our families as well as to the public on our web site. The program of studies at AISF is adapted to take advantage of and serve the needs of our culturally-diverse school community. Accredited high school education is provided through the University of Nebraska High School online program of studies and can lead to a US High School Diploma.

Critical thinking and problem solving are integral to teaching and learning at AISF. What distinguishes an AISF education is the specific and expert focus on each individual student. Our faculty work with your children as individuals, making certain that each one has just the right amount of academic push and challenge. The aim is authentic student learning. The professional term in the US for this learning is "teaching and learning for mastery".

Learning for mastery means that your child has **mastered** a skill or an understanding of a concept. Mastery takes focus, practice, and active feedback between student and teacher. The teacher/student relationship is extremely important. In an active learning environment students and their teachers are alert, involved, and accountable for participation. No one is "just sitting there." The learning is meant to last with each child, not just for a few days until a test, but to last until it becomes part of each child's permanent development.

AISF uses a standards referenced curriculum. Teachers create Unit Plans for student learning using US Common Core Standards for English and Mathematics, US Next Generation Science standards, and McRel standards for Social Studies. Units of study are "planned backwards" starting with the desired

end results, which are the learning outcomes that students will accomplish. Teacher plans all flow back from that goal. External assessment through MAP serves a dual purpose: measuring how well all students have mastered skills and knowledge and comparing AISF student performance with the performance of students in other international schools and US schools.

Student understandings of concepts and learning of skills are measured by having students perform meaningful tasks in which they apply what they have learned. Assessments are learning activities in themselves not simply unit tests. Students work on real problems using real materials, they record and describe their thinking and methodology, and outcomes go beyond the simple recall of facts or one right answer.

Multi-Age Classes in 2017/2018

The blended age classroom is a strength of AISF education. AISF has created multi-age groupings of students that provide students with developmentally appropriate academics and an authentic social experience at school. Multi-age groups are rich social environments for students, supporting emotional and social growth and developing a greater sense of responsibility in students. Because class sizes are small and faculty are skilled in differentiating (adapting) instruction for each student, academic progress goes well, allowing students the opportunity to accelerate or review as they need. While the classroom has students of diverse ages and grade levels, each student does complete their specific grade level, fully prepared to move to the next grade level.

2017/2018 Classrooms

PreK/Kindergarten/ (Early Childhood Center (ECC)

Grades 1/2 (Main Building)

Grades 3/4 (Main Building)

Grades 5/6 (Main Building)

Grades 7/8 (Main Building)

In 2017/2018 AISF offers a Grade 9 Pilot, which combines the online academic courses with full time on site teaching. There are two qualified teachers and extra programs for both service learning and cultural exploration in Freetown.

Assessment of Student Learning

Report Cards and Conferences

Report cards are distributed three times a year. At the end of the first trimester a day is set aside in the school calendar for parent – teacher conferences. Near the end of the third trimester another day is set aside for conferences. Report cards are designed to match exactly with our standards referenced curriculum. The report cards indicate the extent to which each child has met every learning standard on a one to four scale.

Standardized, External Assessment

AISF uses the measure of Academic progress (MAP).

MAP is a computer based test in which questions adapt to each individual's responses. The data is intended mainly to help teachers to differentiate students' learning experiences to address each student's areas of strength and challenge. We administer MAP twice annually in October and May. Parents receive a full report of their child's MAP results. MAP testing at AISF begins at grade 2.

School Policies and Procedures

Attendance

Regular attendance is necessary to achieve maximum academic growth. For each absence, please send an email to the school (admin@ais-freetown.net) explaining the reason for the absence. Students who leave for travel will not be given work to take with them. The student will need to come in at lunch, recess and after school to make up work missed. We strongly urge parents to avoid taking students out of school for travel.

Please note that students who miss more than 10% of school days in one school year are at risk. A student absent for more than 10% of the total school days may not be promoted to the next grade level. Extraordinary needs for an absence must be documented in a letter to the director in advance of the absence.

It is important that all children arrive on time for school. Children who arrive late miss important instruction, and also disrupt the class in session.

Length of the School Day

- Children from PreK-9th grade should be at school by the time for them to enter class at 8:00 AM. Please do not drop students off before 7:30 AM.
- The school day for full time PreK-9th grades ends at 3:00 PM on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays.
- Optional after-school activities on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays extend the school day to 4:00 PM.
- Wednesdays are early release days for staff development. School ends at 1:00 PM on Wednesdays for all students except grade 9. There are no after school activities.

Field Trips

Field trips are a valuable learning resource for students and are regarded as regular school learning taking place in alternate venues. Follow-up classroom activities can be graded. Parental help with planning, driving and chaperoning is always greatly appreciated. Permission slips will be sent home prior to each trip, and must be signed by a parent and returned to the school. In no case will a student be allowed on a field trip without written parental permission.

Our Expectations for Behavior at AISF

The AISF Rule: Respect everyone's learning, safety and well-being.

This is the one, over-arching commitment of all students and staff at AISF. All students, educational staff, and parents sign this expectation in September every year.

Detailed guidelines:

1. Polite and respectful behavior is expected at all times.
2. A general atmosphere of orderliness and quiet is expected in and near the school buildings.
3. Actions which hurt other people, or damage the property of the school or its natural environment, or the property of other people, cannot be tolerated. Parents will be held financially responsible for damage caused to school property by their children.
4. Dress and appearance should be clean and appropriate to the learning environment.
5. All members of the school community respect the personal dignity of others regardless of race, gender, age, or cultural, social, or economic differences.
6. Verbal, physical, or any other form of abuse or bullying will not be tolerated. Any form of disrespect, any humiliation, threat or violence toward another person is contrary to the spirit of the school. The AISF Bullying Policy defines bullying as follows: "Bullying is a repeated unacceptable intentional action or behavior that can have a negative impact physically, mentally, emotionally or socially on the target." Students who are involved in bullying or consistent disciplinary issues may be asked to leave AISF. (There are no refunds of tuition for any child asked to leave AISF.)
7. AISF reserves the right to remove a student who is a serious, continuing impediment to the learning, safety, and well-being of others. The School Board will be involved in any such decision.

Substance Abuse: The American International School of Freetown maintains a drug-free workplace. AISF forbids both staff and students to unlawfully manufacture, distribute, dispense, sell, possess or use any controlled or illegal substances on school property. Immediate action such as suspension or dismissal will be taken against employees and students for violation of this policy. Alcohol may be permitted on campus for adult functions, approved by the AISF Board or Director.

Faculty/Support Staff Responsibilities for Student Supervision

1. **Supervision and vigilance:** The staff person on duty must never be out of immediate sight of all students under their supervision.
2. **Correction:** The staff person on duty is responsible for students' safety outside of the classroom and is, therefore, the ultimate authority during breaks. Failure to follow and agree to the rules and expectations, and/or incidents of verbal or physical abuse may cause a student to have playground or break privileges suspended.
3. **Documentation:** All serious instances of negative student behavior must be documented in

writing by staff and reported to the director immediately after the incident. Serious issues of negative behavior will reported immediately to parents with a written notice sent no later than 24 hours after the incident.

Clothing for School

AISF does not have a school uniform. Clothing worn to school should be neat, clean, comfortable, appropriate to the learning environment, and respectful of the multiple cultures in our school. Parents should also expect that their students will be playing, as play is an important part of school life. Therefore, students should not wear clothes that they cannot get dirty. No cleats or soccer boots can be worn to class. On Physical Education days students must wear sport shoes and bring an extra t-shirt for PE. During the rainy season all students need rain gear.

Child Protection at AISF

We are a US accredited school in an international setting. AISF holds to US and international child protection standards.

All AISF employees are required to report immediately any concern regarding child abuse or neglect to the Director. This includes concerns regarding neglect or abuse by AISF staff or students. The Director is required to act on all concerns.

AISF CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Child abuse and neglect are concerns throughout the world. Child abuse and neglect are violations of a child's human rights and are obstacles to the child's education as well as to their physical, emotional, and spiritual development. The American International School of Freetown endorses the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which our host country, The Republic of Sierra Leone, is a signatory.

Schools fill a special institutional role in society as protectors of children. Schools need to ensure that all children in their care are afforded a safe and secure environment in which to grow and develop, both at school and away. Educators, having the opportunity to observe and interact with children over time, are in a unique position to identify children who are in need of help and protection. As such, educators have a professional and ethical obligation to identify children who are in need of help and protection and to take steps to ensure that the child and family avail themselves of the services needed to remedy any situation that constitutes child abuse or neglect. As well, educators have a professional and ethical obligation to identify children in need of protection within the school staff and student body. Educators must be vigilant in raising awareness of possible abuse by staff and recognition of student on student abuse.

All staff employed at the American International School of Freetown must report incidents of child abuse or neglect whenever the staff member has reasonable cause to believe that a child has suffered or is at significant risk of suffering abuse or neglect. (Possible examples of abuse and neglect may be marks on a student's body, dirty and unkempt appearance, lack of dental care, unusual exhaustion, onset of unusually withdrawn or aggressive behaviors, obvious anxiety.) Reporting and follow up of all suspected incidents of child abuse or neglect will proceed in accordance with the administrative

regulations respective to this policy. Furthermore, cases of suspected child abuse or neglect may be reported to the appropriate employer, to the respective consulate in Freetown, to the appropriate child protection agency in the home country, and/or to local authorities.

The American International School of Freetown seeks to be a safe haven for students who may be experiencing abuse or neglect in any aspect of their lives. As such, the American International School of Freetown *will distribute this policy annually to all parents and applicants, will communicate this policy to students, will provide training for all staff, and will make every effort to implement hiring practices to ensure the safety of children.* In the case of a staff member reported as an alleged offender, the American International School of Freetown will conduct a full investigation following a carefully designed course of due process, keeping the safety of the child at the highest priority. For detailed information on the Convention on the Rights of the Child see the following link:
http://www.unicef.org/crc/index_30160.html.

Policy Approved by AISF Board: May 30, 2017

Practical Daily Information

School Supplies

AISF supplies the students with most of the items needed for school. Occasionally parents may be required to supply some items for a special purpose. Younger students enjoy having their own pencil cases, pencils etc. All students must have backpacks and water bottles. All students need sport shoes.

Lunch and Water

The school provides two breaks a day: a morning recess and a thirty-minute lunch break. During these times the students are permitted to eat and drink. Parents are to provide their students with healthy snacks and lunches. AISF provides access to a catered lunch service. The lunch service provides hot lunch and is billed monthly in advance.

Parents are asked to send in food that is prepared properly and able to be kept warm or cold (thermos or ice packs) until it is consumed. Parents are encouraged to send in foods that can stay warm or do not need to be heated, as there is limited facility to heat food, which means students frequently have to wait if their food needs to be heated up to eat.

The water at school for our toilets and hand washing is not potable. Potable water is widely available on campus in water dispensing machines. Students need a non-breakable water bottle. AISF does not provide drinking cups.

Parties

Families are welcome to send cupcakes or cake for their children's birthday. The time for a short celebration is at the discretion of the teacher. We ask that no invitations to private parties be distributed at school unless all the students from the classroom are invited. It is best to use other means of distribution for any outside party.

Hats, Sunscreen, Insect Repellent

All students are encouraged to wear hats on the playground due to the intensity of the African sun. We also encourage parents to put sunscreen on their students every morning. Mosquito repellent is strongly advised.

BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) at AISF

All students in grades 5 through 9 are required to bring a fully functioning laptop (with charger) to school every day. The flyer describing requirements for that laptop is in an appendix at the end of this handbook. Technology is fully integrated into every academic subject. The laptops are used daily.

Students in grades 1 through 4 use school-issued iPads in their classes.

Homework

Homework given at the elementary level is meant to reinforce daily classroom work done under teachers' direction. It may also be unfinished class work, or work on an ongoing project. Homework is expected to be completed precisely when it is due. In the PreK/ KG/Grade 1/ Grade 2 all students are expected to read with parents every day after school. Students in grade 3/4 can expect reading plus about 15 minutes of IXL work in math. Students in grades 5/6 should expect 45 minutes of homework each day. Students in grades 7, and 8 can expect about one hour to one and a half hours of homework each night. All students in grades 2 through 8 are expected to complete regular work in IXL Math and IXL English.

Students need a quiet, well-lit study area at home. Parents should encourage students to complete homework as part of a daily routine. Students must complete homework on their own.

Media Center/Library Use

Our Media Center/Library plays a central role in the school curriculum. The book collection for young students is in a separate room from the upper grades section. Students are encouraged to become regular library borrowers. Students may borrow books during their own library classes, or at any other time there is a staff member at the desk. A maximum of two books is allowed out at a time, and anyone with an overdue book must return it before she/he can resume borrowing. Parents will be held financially responsible for loss or unreasonable damage to library items.

Sick Students

Students showing signs of illness should not be sent to school. Any student who runs a fever above 38 degrees MUST be kept at home until the fever is gone for 24 hours. **Any student who demonstrates a fever, verified by the Nurse above 38 degrees will be sent home.** The student will remain in the Nurse's Office until transport arrives. Please notify the school immediately if your student has chicken pox, lice, conjunctivitis (apolllo) or other easily transmitted diseases.

AISF has a full time school nurse to assist with any student who is injured during the school day. In those cases, the school will try to contact the parents or designated person authorized to make decisions for the parent. In cases where a parent or designated person cannot be reached, the school may take the student to Choithram Hospital or Aspen Clinic if deemed necessary. **Parents should always have a second contact person (never a paid employee such as a nanny) who can be contacted in an emergency, and make sure contact information is updated.**

Medicine

Medications for chronic conditions cannot be administered by the AISF nurse or staff. Medications should be administered only by a parent or a designated guardian.

Emergency Procedures

Medical Emergency

In the event of an emergency that obviously requires immediate hospitalization, the school will transport the student to Choithram Memorial Hospital or Aspen Clinic, while simultaneously attempting to contact the parents at the phone numbers provided. In the case of U.S. Embassy dependents, the Embassy nurse will also be contacted. If parents cannot be reached, the school will contact the individuals that parents have authorized to make emergency medical decisions on their behalf. After being contacted, parents (or authorized decision makers) should proceed immediately to the appropriate hospital.

In situations that do not require immediate treatment, the school will make the utmost effort to contact parents so that they can pick up the student from school. If parents are unavailable, the individuals authorized to make medical decisions will be contacted.

Civil Disturbance

In case of civil unrest during school hours, it is school policy that all students are to remain at school until a parent or authorized driver arrives to pick up their student. For this reason, parents are required to supply the school with the names of at least two persons who are authorized to pick up the student(s) in case of such an emergency. No student will be released to anyone not explicitly authorized by the parents. **NOTE: UPDATED EMERGENCY CONTACTS ARE VITAL. EMERGENCY CONTACTS ARE NOT PAID EMPLOYEES.**

For contacting the school community quickly, the school relies on e-mail, What's App, and text messaging. Parents and staff alike are asked to keep the e-mail addresses, What's App numbers, and cell phone numbers they supply the school updated, and check them regularly both to stay in touch with their students' teachers, and to receive emergency alerts. **UPDATES ARE VITAL.**

Family Practical Information

Dropping Off and Picking Up Students

Students are dropped off and picked up in the circular drive at the top of the hill right off the main road. Please travel slowly when dropping students off and departing in the afternoon. AISF has a strict **ONE WAY** traffic pattern: Enter in to the small road between Adnan's and St. Mary's, continue slowly to AISF entrance. Exit continuing one way past the Nigerian Embassy. Students need rain jackets and umbrellas to walk down to the school on rainy days.

At the beginning of the school year, parents must list the drivers who will be coming to pick up their students on our pick-up form. It is important for parents to inform the school in writing if there are any changes in their usual going-home arrangements. A support staff person will inform older students (grade 3 and above) when their ride arrives. Younger students will be escorted to their rides. The pick-up

area is always supervised by the Security Guard Force.

Parents are asked to have their students picked up on time. Parents who are more than 30 minutes late picking up their students will receive one warning. Thereafter a fee of Le200,000 per day will be billed to parent. The bill will be sent at the end of the month. Any student who is picked up later than 5:00pm will be billed Le400,000 for that day.

Telephone and E-mail Use

The AISF campus is a cell phone silent zone. Cell phones should be placed on silent when entering the school compound in order to avoid interruption of instruction. If during the school day there is a real need in the class teacher's or director's view, students will be allowed to use the phone at reception.

The school cell phone is 076 622453. You may also contact the Director at director@ais-freetown.net and at 079 552345

Student Withdrawal from AISF

At the end of your stay at AISF, or when the school term ends for the summer, all families are given an official copy of their student's report card and school information for the current year. Parents assume responsibility for arrangements and cost of sending records should they not pick up hard copies of the documents from the office prior to leaving.

For families leaving AISF permanently, the school will supply a leaving packet containing an official school leaving document and previous report cards. If a family departs without the Leaving Packet, the family may request that materials be sent electronically.

AISF now maintains electronic student records. Electronic records can be sent to a receiving school after the student's departure (if that is acceptable to the receiving school).

Please note that school records will not be released until all fees and charges are cleared.

Procedure for Misunderstandings or Disputes with School Personnel

AISF Board Approved Procedures

Definitions: "Staff" includes faculty, administration, maintenance, and security guards. "Parent" includes guardians.

- a. Any parent or staff of AISF who has a difference of opinion in regards to a school or administrative decision shall first attempt to resolve this problem directly with the person responsible and at the lowest possible level. Most concerns or misunderstandings can be resolved at this level.
- b. If the petitioner feels that this cannot be done because of privacy or other concerns, or has unsuccessfully attempted a direct resolution of the dispute, he/she may confer with the Director.
- c. Steps a) and b) shall be attempted prior to any further steps. The process of attempting to settle the issue should be clearly understood by both parties.
- d. If conferring with the Director is unsatisfactory, the parent or staff member may appeal directly and only to the Chair of the AISF Board, in writing, cc'ing the Director.

- e. Within ten days the Chair of the Board will respond to the parent or staff member's concern.

IMPORTANT NOTES AND REMINDERS

- Our school day begins at 8:00. At 8:05, students are considered late.
- Our school day ends at 3:00 on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.
- Our School day ends at 1:00 on Wednesdays to allow for meetings, curriculum work and teacher professional development.
- After school activities (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday) end at 4:00.
- Parents of students picked up 30 minutes late or more from school or activity dismissal may be charged a late fee to offset costs of extra supervision.
- Students should bring a full water bottle to school every day.
- Tuition payments must be made on time. If the family fails to submit fees on the due date, the student must remain at home until the debt is settled.
- This handbook is updated each year. Though not expected, in some cases the procedures and operating policies stated herein could be subject to change. All efforts will be made to communicate any changes.