
Inspired Insight Into Academic and Admissions Success
What is the International Baccalaureate?

Every Spring, the chatter around “IB” starts to ramp up, and, often times, there are more questions than answers as parents and students try to determine if the IB curriculum is the right path to take and navigate course registration. In an effort to provide some of these sought-after answers, we have compiled the following research about the elusive and challenging International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme.

What is the IBDP?

The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme, often referred to as “IB”, was founded in Switzerland in 1968. IB is currently offered in 3,460 schools across 143 countries worldwide, with 1,370 IB programs in the US alone. While some schools are full-intensity IB schools, others have programs that students can opt into, allowing them to take only one or two IB classes as an enhancement to traditional studies rather than the full diploma curriculum. It is important to ask how your school works specifically in regards to whether or not the IB program can be opted into and, if so, which path your student wants to pursue.

The IB curriculum requires that students take an active role in their learning and education with increased collaboration amongst their classmates with an emphasis on critical thinking, group discussion, and creativity. Teachers, who often act as supervisors and mentors, teach students to think critically and help prepare them for college-level work.

IB or AP - What's the Difference?

IB is considered an alternative to AP classes. While IB was developed in Switzerland as an internationally recognized diploma, the AP program was developed in the US with the intent to prepare students for college. AP is much more widespread than IB; in 2014, approximately 2 million students took AP exams while only around 135,000 took IB exams. However, IB is an elementary through high school program while AP is strictly high school only. IB can also be a school-wide program, unlike AP, which students can choose to opt into to whatever degree they want. Teaching methods and testing vary greatly as well; AP focuses on learning for the exam, in a way, whereas IB focuses on research,

writing, and hands-on learning. The IB final exams are set up in a way to allow students to apply what they have learned throughout the course of the year in new scenarios in order to evaluate an individual's ability to respond to new info in a constricted period of time. Some other benefits of APs are that grades may be weighted which helps boost a student's GPA, which can also be true for IB classes, and that passing AP exam grades can be used for college credit. Many kids who take IB classes actually also take the coinciding AP exam(s) without actually taking the AP course, specifically to get college credit.

What Do Colleges Think?

Colleges don't automatically assume either the AP program or IB program to be more challenging or more impressive on an application. College admissions departments are looking at whether or not you have taken rigorous courses at your current high school ("strength of schedule") that demonstrate a wide range of skills and interests. IB isn't widespread enough for a colleges to hold it against you if you do not take it; however, since the IB program is for a diploma, and AP is not, is still might be smart to pursue IB if you're applying to highly selective colleges. Pursuing a diploma shows you are challenging yourself in *all* areas of study rather than a select few, while AP classes could easily just be taken in your strongest subjects, as the choice of which classes to take is up to you. If you choose the AP path, try taking a diverse range of classes that show to colleges you are challenging yourself and are a generally well-rounded student. Keep in mind though, you don't have to take classes from exclusively one program or the other; take a mix of IB and AP classes if your school offers the option!

Is IB Right for Me?

It is important to know your (your child's) learning style in order to determine whether IB is the right path. The program is highly academically challenging and time consuming, so consider extracurriculars and other previous engagements before committing to IB. In the classroom, there is less note-taking as the class is more discussion based rather than typical lecture style. The focus is more on group or individual projects, taking initiative, organization, public speaking, critical thinking, discussion, and peer critiquing. Students who like options and freedom when it comes to how to do their work and what topic to do it on might enjoy the IB program. Furthermore, IB discusses questions with a determination to find answers, no matter how controversial or politically charged the subject may be. A global approach and big questions are a constant; a large part of IB's mission, after all, is to help students appreciate that

“other people, with their differences, can also be right.” Since conversations may appear political or touch on points that counter a family’s belief system, open-minded students thrive, while those with set beliefs may struggle to get the most out of discussions.

IB requirements include expression through writing, community service, and an aim “to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.” The full IB diploma program is a two-year program that requires students to pass IB-level classes in six areas (language and literature, foreign language, individuals and societies, experimental sciences, math and computer science, and the arts) and complete a senior project which involves writing a 4,000 word essay on a topic chosen by each student.

Before making the decision as to whether IB is right for you, ask questions and be sure you fully understand your school’s program. Ask what kind of program your school offers (either full intensity or a program you can opt into), the possibility of GPA or testing requirements for entrance into the program, which foreign languages and electives are available, the need to pay for IB exams, and what to do if a student ends up having trouble acclimating to the IB program.

Pros & Cons: The Bottom Line

The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme takes care to always look at the broader picture. Students report that they enjoy their classes more, teachers take sincere interest in students as individuals, and students prepare themselves thoroughly for college-level work and research. IB students emerge from the program as global citizens with extensive knowledge of what is going on in the world, how to think critically, and with a passion for inquiry and pursuit of truth through discussion.

At the same time, the program is very time consuming and leaves little space in one’s schedule for serious extracurriculars. Students do not receive typical lecture-style teaching that is so prominent in many colleges. IB can be costly as there is a fee associated with each exam taken and a larger cost to participate in the diploma program, and it doesn’t always boost a student’s GPA or provide college credit.

At the end of the day, what matters most is that whatever path you choose has led you to a love of learning which will prepare you for success in your college environment and beyond!

For more information on the IB programs available through CMS, click the following link:

<http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/cmsdepartments/ci/astd/internationalbaccalaureate/Pages/default.aspx>

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