

# International Baccalaureate

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The International Baccalaureate (IB) program is an advanced course of study that spans four high school years: a pre-IB program in ninth and tenth grades and an IB Diploma Program (IBDP) in eleventh and twelfth grades. Research finds that participation can boost high school graduation rates for students from low-income families, along with a host of other positive outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, IB graduates report the program prepares them well for postsecondary studies, most notably developing time-management and critical-thinking skills.<sup>2</sup> The IB program also offers a career-related program for eleventh and twelfth graders.

The IBDP is a comprehensive curriculum that includes six subject groups, a study of theories of knowledge, and high-level essay writing, including a 4,000-word independent research paper. Students are required to participate in the “Creativity, Activity, Service” course each year that includes non-assessed experiences in the arts, physical activity, and community service.<sup>3</sup> The IB programs were founded to provide an international option for the children of diplomats. They currently are used in 4,655 schools around the world. In the United States, 1,800 schools offer at least one of the four IB programs,<sup>4</sup> and 60 percent of those schools are designated as Title I.<sup>5</sup>

## IB’s Impact in Chicago Public Schools

In the United States, the IB program has been associated with mostly white, affluent suburban students. But in 1997, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) introduced the IBDP in thirteen struggling high schools in some of the city’s most deprived areas. These programs comprised only one or two classrooms; they were not whole-school interventions. Participation in the programs also was restricted to students whose seventh-grade test scores were at or above the 50th percentile and was not open to all students.

A 2014 RAND analysis examines the student demographic and academic data of 20,422 students who attended the thirteen CPS high schools between 2002 and 2008. The analysis examines students’ IB enrollment status, ACT scores, high school graduation status, and college enrollment rates. The analysis finds that participation in the IB program positively impacted all of these measures and improved participants’ high school graduation rates by 17 percent over those of similar students who were not in

the IB program. The program also was cost effective for CPS since the district allocated existing professional development dollars for extensive teacher training required by the IB program.<sup>6</sup>

In 2012, the Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (the Consortium) published an examination of the college-level outcomes of the IB students who graduated between 2003 and 2009. This analysis matches the IB cohort of 2,589 students with 13,598 demographically and academically similar students who would have been eligible for the program had it been available to them. IB students in Chicago were 75 percent African American or Latino and “predominantly first-generation college students.”<sup>7</sup> The Consortium finds that students who completed all four years of the IB program were 40 percent more likely to attend a four-year college, 50 percent more likely to attend a selective four-year college,<sup>8</sup> and significantly more likely to persist in college than their matched peers outside the program. The program influenced not only students’ academic success but also their self-regard and confidence. In-depth interviews showed a strong academic orientation and high sense of self-efficacy among graduates of the IB program. There were no negative results for the students involved, even for those who began the program in ninth grade but did not complete all four years of the program.<sup>9</sup>

These findings persuaded CPS to expand the IB program significantly,<sup>10</sup> and it now includes kindergarten, elementary school, and middle school grades.<sup>11</sup> In contrast to the classroom model that the Consortium studied, the new programs are wall-to-wall IB neighborhood schools with admissions criteria only for those students applying for entrance into the eleventh-grade IBDP from within their school or from a different school. In one of Chicago’s largest high schools, all ninth and tenth graders are in the IB’s Middle Years Program (IB’s five-year program for students ages eleven to sixteen years).<sup>12</sup> Then in eleventh grade, these students choose between the academic IBDP or IB’s Career-related Program, which includes a variety of course options from digital media to web design.<sup>13</sup> Benefits for students from low-income families of the open-enrollment model and career-related IB programs have not yet been subjected to rigorous research, however. For more information about the IB program,

view the Alliance for Excellent Education's webinar "How the International Baccalaureate's Diploma Program Supports Underserved High School Students" at <https://all4ed.org/webinar-event/nov-29-2016/>.

## Guiding Questions

- Are district leaders willing to deploy per-teacher professional

development dollars to support the IB program's content-focused training? If so, is there a gap between the available funding and the cost of IB's training?

- What are the implementation costs of becoming an IB-authorized school?
- Does the IB program have a local champion, such as a high-profile philanthropy or mayor, who can sustain this effort over time?

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> A. R. Saavedra, "The Academic Impact of Enrollment in International Baccalaureate Diploma Programs: A Case Study of Chicago Public Schools," *Teachers College Record* 116, no. 4 (2014).
- <sup>2</sup> M. L. Taylor and M. Porath, "Reflections on the International Baccalaureate Program: Graduates' Perspectives," *Journal of Secondary Gifted Education* 17, no. 3 (May 2006): 149–58; K. K. Inkelas et al., *Exploring the Benefits of the International Baccalaureate Extended Essay for University Studies at the University of Virginia* (Charlottesville, VA: Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, Curry School of Education, University of Virginia, 2012), <http://ibo.org/contentassets/d74675437b4f4ab38312702599a432f1/finalfulluvaibreport10-18-12.pdf>.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid.; International Baccalaureate, "Creativity, Activity, Service," <http://www.ibo.org/programmes/diploma-programme/curriculum/creativity-activity-and-service/> (accessed July 31, 2017).
- <sup>4</sup> The IB programs include the Primary Years Programme for students aged three to twelve years; the Middle Years Programme for students aged eleven to sixteen years; and the Diploma Programme and Career-related Programme both for students aged sixteen to nineteen years. International Baccalaureate, "Programmes," <http://www.ibo.org/en/programmes/> (accessed July 31, 2017); ———, "Facts and Figures," <http://www.ibo.org/about-the-ib/facts-and-figures/> (accessed July 10, 2017); ———, "IB by Region: United States," <http://www.ibo.org/about-the-ib/the-ib-by-country/u/united-states/> (accessed July 31, 2017).
- <sup>5</sup> M. Gordon, E. VanderKamp, O. Halic, "International Baccalaureate Programmes in Title I Schools in the United States: Accessibility, Participation, and University Enrollment" (Washington, DC: International Baccalaureate, 2015) <http://www.ibo.org/globalassets/publications/ib-research/title-1-schools-research.pdf>.
- <sup>6</sup> Saavedra, "The Academic Impact of Enrollment in International Baccalaureate Diploma Programs."
- <sup>7</sup> V. Coca et al., *Working to My Potential: The Postsecondary Experiences of CPS Students in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme* (Chicago: University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2012), pp. 17, 20, <http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/IB%20Report1.pdf>.
- <sup>8</sup> The research team defines college selectivity by using *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges* (Woodbury, NY: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 2005), which "rates four-year colleges on the academic qualifications of the students that attend the college (e.g., ACT or SAT scores, grade point average, and class rank), as well as the percentage of applicants who are accepted."
- <sup>9</sup> V. Coca et al., *Working to My Potential*.
- <sup>10</sup> City of Chicago, "Mayor Emanuel, CPS Announce City-Wide Expansion of International Baccalaureate Programme," press release, April 21, 2014, [http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/mayor/press\\_room/press\\_releases/2014/apr/mayor-emanuel--cps-announce-city-wide-expansion-of-international.html](http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/mayor/press_room/press_releases/2014/apr/mayor-emanuel--cps-announce-city-wide-expansion-of-international.html).
- <sup>11</sup> Chicago Public Schools, "Office of Access and Enrollment: International Baccalaureate Programs," <http://cps.edu/AccessAndEnrollment/Pages/IB.aspx> (accessed July 10, 2017).
- <sup>12</sup> S. Leven, Secondary Magnet and IB Schools Coordinator, Chicago Public Schools, personal communication, September 2, 2015.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Photo by Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for **American Education: Images of Teachers and Students in Action**

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