

Diploma Programme Case Study: Introducing IB in an AP school

OVERVIEW

As two of the most prestigious college preparatory programs, it is not uncommon for the College Board's Advanced Placement (AP) and the IB Diploma Programme (DP) to coexist in the same schools, and often within the same classroom. Examples of thriving co-existing programs are plentiful. However, it can be an intimidating concept when just starting out.

The key to successful implementation of an IB program in a school with an existing program is to generate interest and garner support from all of the major parties involved, administrators, teachers, parents, and students. This case study examines the steps one principal, Dr. Al Penna, took to gain the support of his teachers and community for the IB program. The case study additionally looks at some of the concerns teachers, such as Ms. Linda Mays Jones, can have about implementing an IB program.

Binghamton High School

For twenty years, Advanced Placement was the be all, end all for educator Albert Penna. Not only had he been the AP Coordinator for those twenty years, and a teacher of AP biology for seven, but he also founded the AP biology program at Susquehanna Valley High School in Conklin, NY, before becoming the principal at Binghamton High School in Binghamton, NY. In 1994, Dr. Penna first heard about IBO, and it was “transformational.” He then faced the question of, “How do you implement an IB program in a high school with an existing, flourishing AP program?”

The first order of business for Dr. Penna was to build support for the program amongs his teachers. “You have to invest in your teachers,” says Dr. Penna, “empower them, show them the difference between AP and IB.” To that end, Dr. Penna sent some of his AP teachers to an IB conference and listened to their individual concerns. Most were instantly hooked, though they still had questions as to how the IB program would fit into the existing AP program.

Dr. Penna and his teachers collaborated on an approach to fit the programs together. They agreed that the best way to do so would be to have both an AP and an IB coordinator, and to embed the existing AP courses into the IB curriculum framework of six core areas of study. During the first year, all students would receive concurrent credit for AP and IB coursework.

Once the faculty was behind the Diploma Programme, Dr. Penna held a series of informational meetings to introduce the IB program to parents and school board members. Some were skeptical and felt that if the AP program was working fine, why change it? Dr. Penna focused on the strengths of the IB program and the benefits that would be brought to the community, such as the higher profile of a rigorous program, greater

professional development for teachers, and an opportunity for the students to have a challenging, international education.

Specifically, parents wanted to know how the programs would affect students' GPAs, what sort of credit they would receive for coursework, and if their children would be able to have a life and still meet the high standards for the IB Diploma. Dr. Penna offered concerned parents and school board members detailed statistics on how IB students performed and praise for the program from college admissions officers, and promised them that all test scores would go up, the students would do better on Regents exams, they would take more AP tests; IB would pull everything up.

"It didn't happen in the first year, or even the second year, but over time, everything we said about IB came to pass. It really put the city on the map," said Dr. Penna. "And there's much more support after a decade of operation. Families express interest in the IB program before they even move to the area."

Dr. Penna continually stressed the reputation of IB as the gold standard in education, and the best value for the money. "There is evidence – it isn't rhetoric – that the IB can tangibly transform your school," said Dr. Penna. That was the argument that most resonated with parents, teachers, and school board members throughout the process of bringing the IB Diploma Programme to Binghamton High School.

Jefferson County IB School

In the late 1980s, the school board in Birmingham, AL explored bringing the Diploma Programme to the Jefferson County magnet school as part of a larger bid to make the community more attractive to large corporations considering relocating to the area. The idea originated with the school board, and parents were immediately receptive to the idea, as were most of the teachers – except for Linda Mays Jones.

The Jefferson County school already had an AP program and, as the AP US History teacher, Ms. Mays Jones felt that the IB Diploma Programme would mean time-consuming modifications to the existing history curriculum, a curriculum that had been working very well up to then.

"I was the youngest teacher on staff and I felt that the curriculum adjustments would fall heaviest upon me," says Ms. Mays Jones. "Also, as a young teacher, I took it personally, and felt that it meant that I was being told I wasn't doing a good job."

However, once she attended IB training and began teaching the curriculum, Ms. Mays Jones saw how helping students to draw relationships between disciplines enriched their overall education. "IB made me think of my teaching beyond just my subject, and it absolutely made me a better teacher. It made me think about my subject more in-depth and as one part of an interconnected discipline of study."

Ms. Mays Jones credits her AP background as laying the groundwork for IB and feels the two programs can happily coexist and, in fact, complement one another. "I've never discarded any part of AP and nor have I ever needed to with IB," says Ms. Mays Jones. In addition to her longstanding work as an IB coordinator, she also works as a consultant for the College Board, and as a reader for AP exams. "Just show teachers what IB is and how it fits with AP, and they'll support you," says Ms. Mays Jones.

Jefferson County International Baccalaureate School was rated first in *Newsweek* magazine's listing of America's 100 best public high schools.

Important Lessons

The experiences of these educators illustrate the importance of educating teachers and administrators about IB when introducing a new program, and listening to their individual concerns. In Binghamton, parents wanted assurances that the program would prepare their children for a rigorous college career while also allowing them to have a life in high school; in Alabama, Linda Mays Jones needed not only detailed information about how the Diploma Programme worked, but also reassurances that such a change did not reflect on her skills as a teacher.

- Approach various stakeholder groups with information tailored to their needs. For example, school superintendents will have different concerns than teachers or parents.
- Send teachers to informational IB workshops so they can see the differences and similarities between IB and AP first hand.
- Think of your campaign like a political campaign: enlist volunteers, hold meetings, and allow people to voice questions and concerns.
- Approach superintendents and school board members once you have built support among teachers and parents; their support speaks loudest of all.