

## CONCISE RESEARCH SUMMARY

### *Case Studies of Participation and Performance in the IB Diploma Programme*

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#### **Abstract**

This report analyzes the experience of two U.S. schools that have been particularly successful in recruiting low-income and minority students to the IB Diploma Programme (DP), and in ensuring their success. It discusses the DP's history, structure, and availability at each school; students' preparation, recruitment, selection, enrollment, persistence, and achievement in each case; and school-level, district, and state supports that appear to facilitate successful outcomes for DP students. Recommendations stemming from these case studies include structuring IB programs as magnets that target underrepresented groups in diverse school districts, aligning schools' 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum with the IB to provide early preparation for the DP, developing recruitment strategies that specifically target underrepresented applicants, evaluating schools' capacity to adequately support struggling students if they decide to expand access, carefully monitoring students' progress, and ensuring adequate district-level support. Efforts should also be made to share best practices among district leaders, and to continue to advocate in favor of state-wide policies that foster broader IB participation.

## Summary

In the United States, a gap has been observed in the participation and performance of low-income and minority students in the IB Diploma Programme (DP). As part of the IBO's effort to expand access and improve student outcomes among these underrepresented groups, it has commissioned case studies of two U.S. schools – Lamar Academy in McAllen, Texas, and Hillsborough High School in Tampa, Florida – that have particularly strong records recruiting low-income and minority students to the DP, and ensuring their success in the programme, achieving high pass rates. This report describes the history and structure of the DP at each school, and then discusses general programme availability and student preparation, recruitment, selection, enrollment, persistence, and achievement in each case. It also explores school-level, district, and state supports that appear to facilitate successful outcomes for DP students; finally, it identifies lessons from these case study schools that can inform broader efforts to increase access to the DP.

## Findings

There is substantial convergence between both case study sites with regard to general programme availability and early student preparation to support entry to the programme. In terms of programme availability, both sites offer the IB DP as a magnet in large and diverse school districts. Thus, the demographic composition of the districts themselves, as well as the fact that magnet enrollment is not restricted to residential boundaries, allows these schools to reach a broader cross-section of students than may be possible elsewhere. Early academic preparation has been supported in both cases by the establishment of 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade feeder programmes (Middle Years Programme – MYP - at one school and “pre-IB” at the other), and by the establishment of IB's Primary Years Programme (PYP) and MYP at several other schools in each district.

There is some convergence in the recruitment strategies of both schools, which include mailing information, open houses for students and parents, and shadowing opportunities for prospective students. Notably, both schools highlight the level of motivation of any student as a key factor for applying, rather than focusing only on the highest-achieving students. In terms of selection, both sites establish grade-level academic performance as a minimum requirement for entry to the DP, and they have an admission process that includes grades, teacher recommendations, essays or interviews, and other measures of qualities such as motivation. However, there are key differences in the ways in which each school balances these factors when selecting students for the programme, leading to divergent outcomes. Thus, relatively open admission at Lamar results in broader entry, but substantial attrition rates, while Hillsborough's more selective admission process results in the retention of the majority of entering students.

Both case study sites provide substantial school-level academic and social support to DP students, and they create a sense of community by keeping the programme relatively small, requiring that all students attempt the full IB diploma, and emphasizing the IB's shared values.

They also carefully monitor student progress by fostering communication among teachers and using data to identify struggling students and support them. In both cases, there is also strong district-level support for the IB, with district leaders allowing for site-based hiring decisions, providing funding, and ensuring the availability of ongoing professional development. Finally, due to the large number of IB programmes in both Florida and Texas, and to the advocacy work of IB associations, there are state-wide financial and academic incentives that encourage IB participation, such as college credit and scholarships for DP graduates and financial incentives for schools and teachers whose students are successful on IB exams.

## Recommendations

After analyzing the ways in which the DP functions at both of these schools, which have successfully included underrepresented groups, a series of recommendations for broadening access can be made to schools, district and state entities, and IB leaders. Firstly, locating IB programs in diverse school districts, structuring them as magnets that target underrepresented groups, and highlighting the importance of student's motivation even if grades are not high appear to be key elements for expanding programme availability. Secondly, increasing rigor in elementary and middle schools, and aligning the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum with the IB to provide early preparation that contributes to student success in the DP.

Thirdly, developing recruitment strategies that specifically target applicants from underrepresented groups and encouraging high-potential students to participate, perhaps nominating them as programme leaders, would help to broaden outreach. Fourthly, it is important to reflect on the relationship between selectivity and student persistence, and programme staff should evaluate their capacity to adequately support struggling students if they decide to expand access. Fifth, student progress should be carefully monitored and the availability of academic assistance ensured; IB schools can also benefit from networking with each other and sharing best practices with regard to ensuring students' progress in the programme.

Finally, adequate district support is a key factor in influencing school-level IB programme quality, through measures ranging from programme design to professional development. IB leaders are encouraged to promote sharing of best practices among district leaders. Schools, districts and IB leaders should also continue to work together to increase awareness of the value of the DP among state policymakers, and encourage them to adopt policies that expand IB programmes and provide incentives for IB participation.

This summary was developed by the IB Research Department. For more information about IB research, e-mail the IB Research Department at [ibru@ibo.org](mailto:ibru@ibo.org).