



## ACCESS FOR ALL AT FRIDLEY HIGH SCHOOL

Some schools bring in an IB programme to boost educational opportunities for only the most advanced students. At Fridley High School, however, expanding the Diploma Programme was instrumental to promoting equity and excellence for all students.

Fridley High School (HS) was impressed by the rigorous college preparatory content they received four years after they began offering the Diploma Programme (DP). Administrators and coordinators were so impressed, in fact, the school decided to remove barriers to entry and make DP courses the default pathway for all students at the Minnesota school.

In the 2016-2017 school year, 877 students attended Fridley HS. The demographic breakdown of the student body that year was: 39% Caucasian, 36% African American, 10% Hispanic, 9% Asian; and 2% American Indian. Approximately 64% of the student population qualified for free or reduced meals.

The school sees its mission as preparing all students for a postsecondary education. Although not every student will go to university, exposure to the DP content provides them with benefits in the long run, says DP and Career-related Programme (CP) coordinator Jessica Baker. “The question was more like why wouldn’t we want all students to be a part of this?” said Baker. “It’s a matter of access – we didn’t want to deny any student the opportunity [to be part of] something that brings them a benefit.”

Baker and her colleagues worked with district leadership and teachers to make the DP the default pathway. They achieved this by using programme data and discussing its benefits.

“One thing we made sure to communicate was that this was for the good of all, including staff, students and the community,” said Elizabeth Jensen, Fridley High School’s Middle Years Programme (MYP) and DP language and literature teacher, IB leader and Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) Coordinator.

### Fridley High School (public): Grades 9-12

**First offered the Diploma Programme (DP):**  
2009

**Total number of students:**  
877

**Principal:**  
Patty Hand

**DP and CP coordinator:**  
Jessica Baker

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— JESSICA BAKER,  
DP AND CP COORDINATOR,  
FRIDLEY HIGH SCHOOL



The school has developed a firm belief in what this program can do for students and they recognize that they must work harder to get more students involved. The school began offering the CP during the 2016-17 school year to provide even more opportunities for their students.

Fridley HS took its first step towards creating the default pathway by making DP language and literature the required English curriculum in grades 11 and 12 beginning in the 2016-17 school year. DP global politics and history of the Americas became the two options to fulfill the school's social studies requirements, and nearly all students began taking math studies or math standard level (SL).

"Removing barriers to the DP makes it possible for students to see that the DP is open to any student and know the program is a place to be," says Jensen. Except those who have special education needs or are English language learners with modified course standards, every student takes at least one DP course.

Since DP courses have become accessible for all students, the school's achievement gap has narrowed and the graduation rate has improved by 10%. Baker believes that open access to DP courses has played a role.

Given that Fridley HS aims to prepare students for postsecondary education, staff members are following up with graduates to see how taking DP courses has helped them. Those who have taken DP language and literature report being more prepared and successful at university. Graduates come back and say that they use the analysis and critical thinking skills they learned from the DP.

One student, a former refugee, told the IB coordinators that she felt prepared to talk about controversial topics in a meaningful way. Language and literature and global politics allow students to look at the world through a different lens. In addition, Jensen shares that students really like the theory of knowledge class and they see its value in further studies. "University is tough," said Jensen. "Being able to tackle the issues that confront them is an amazing asset."

Fridley High School's DP graduates feel they are better prepared for university exams, which are often similar to DP exams. While their peers find university exams more challenging, "they've got it," says Jensen.

Many students at Fridley HS are the first in their families to graduate from high school, much less graduate with college credit. "For those families, the DP has helped make real a possibility which they had not realized could be available to them," said Baker. Whether students go on to university or choose another path, she adds, the DP prepares them.

"Changing who your DP students are changes how you teach," Jensen says. At Fridley HS, she sees more focus on strategies for engaging students with different backgrounds and different skills. "We need to do more for students who are not ready to go...[and] there is more skill building," a programme element supported by the IB approaches to learning framework.

To other schools that want to attract minority students to their IB programmes, Baker and Jensen suggest gaining support from teachers rather than announcing, "This is how it is going to be." At Fridley HS, they decided to train the entire English and social studies departments together in language and literature and global politics courses. By training entire departments, everyone was informed and able to see the end goal. The groups worked collaboratively to build their curriculum and select resources for students.

Baker explained that some work was required to gain support from staff about the change from IB courses being targeted only towards higher-achieving students. "We talked as a building about the research around IB preparation and the harm of tracking students," said Baker. "We did a lot of staff development around growth mindset and culturally responsive instructional strategies. Teacher mindset and believing that all students are capable of this rigorous work is very important."

Fridley HS believes that no matter where you start, moving towards open access is a start. "Dip your foot in the pond," says Baker. One small action by the school can lead to big strides toward student success.

