



## A CULTURE OF ACCESS AT STURGIS CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL

All of its 800-plus students come to Sturgis Charter Public School via public lottery. And all of them participate in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme in the 11th and 12th grade.

More than 830 students attend Sturgis Charter Public School, but 600 more students would like to go there and have put their names on its waiting list. This IB World School, authorized in 2004, quickly grew from 350 students to 415 students in the 2010-2011 school year. It added a second campus in 2011 to accommodate its lengthy waiting list. Being what it calls an "IB for all" school is central to the Hyannis, Massachusetts, school's mission and one of the main reasons it attracts so many students.

"Our version of IB for all is that all seniors have spent the last two years fully immersed in the Diploma Programme," says executive director Paul Marble. "There are no gatekeepers, no prerequisites for any courses, no [minimum] grade point averages, no teacher recommendations required, nothing of that kind." That framework follows through on the founders' goal, Marble says. Their thinking was "Let's create a school that has world-class expectations for kids and that has a world-class curriculum. Let's make it available to any kid in this area."

In the spring of 2018, 111 of 190 seniors pursued the full IB diploma and 67 earned the diploma. In the class that will graduate in spring 2019, 130 out of 192 students are working toward the diploma. "We say it's the experience that is really transformative," Marble says. "Success is really individualized. We're always coming back to this theme."

Twenty-five percent of Sturgis's student body is classified by the state of Massachusetts as high needs, which means they receive special education services or their families are economically disadvantaged. Eighty-five percent are white; 5 percent are Asian; 5 percent are Hispanic; 4 percent are multi-race non-Hispanic; and 2 percent are African American.

The school aims for an average class size of 17, and if more than 20 students are in a class, it is split into two classes. Teachers have five periods of teaching and two periods to plan and prepare. All teachers teach both Diploma Programme (DP) classes and 9th- or 10th-grade classes, Marble says, "so that every kid in the school is being taught by somebody who has been IB trained and IB experienced and so that the IB approach seeps into what is happening." Those guidelines were set in place early in the school's history, and Marble gives the school's founders the credit for setting the school on its IB for all path.

### Sturgis Charter Public School: Grades 9-12

First offered the Diploma Programme (DP):  
2004

Total number of students:  
838

Executive director:  
Paul Marble

DP coordinator:  
Cynthia Gallo

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—PAUL MARBLE,  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
STURGIS CHARTER PUBLIC  
SCHOOL

Equally important, he says, are the steps taken to make the school function well after it almost closed in 2004. The first step was bringing in a new executive director named Eric Hieser, who brought along colleagues with IB experience. “They’d seen kids grow. They’d seen nontraditional kids have a great transformation along their path,” Marble says. “Those early leaders really helped set the tone ... that IB for all can work.”

From the day students walk into Sturgis, there is a clear expectation that they will participate in the DP. That may not always be an easy adjustment for them, as many students who are traditionally underrepresented in the DP and other advanced curricula often have played a passive role in the classroom, Marble says. “I think when students come into an IB for all school, at first it’s a bit jarring, a bit unsettling. They’re learning new habits, and they’re unlearning old habits. They are developing—they wouldn’t call it this—a sense of agency.”

Providing all students with academic, social and emotional, and financial support is built into the framework at Sturgis. When visitors come by during the 45-minute lunch period, they often see math teachers at the board with students and language teachers speaking one-on-one with other students in a target language. “They’re wondering whether this is compulsory,” Marble says. “No, it’s just the ethic. It’s what we do.” The school also provides a structured make-up learning time and a quiet spot in which to work. Sturgis recently doubled the number of theory of knowledge (TOK) teachers, who work with the extended essay coordinators, Creativity, activity, service (CAS) coordinators and DP coordinators as a team. “Part of their job is connecting with the kids, knowing what these 20 kids are doing in, say, their CAS program, setting up one-on-one times with them and chatting with them,” the executive director says.

The team-based approach extends to the school’s social and emotional supports. In addition to six guidance counselors for the whole school, each campus has a full-time social worker, a special education coordinator and three special education teachers who have TOK training. A student support team consisting of the principal, a guidance counselor, a nurse and teachers meets every six weeks to assess a range of student-related data and look at each student who might be struggling.

Less visible is an important type of financial support designed to remove barriers to the DP: The school pays all exam fees for all students. That policy was set by the board of trustees early in the school’s history after students from low-income households told the school that the fees were a barrier for them. Similarly, the board recently decided to pay public transportation costs or provide charter buses for students in specified areas, beginning in fall 2019. Trustees were concerned that students live as far as 35 miles away from Sturgis and saw that as another potential barrier.

Some of the school’s support is structural, Marble says. In terms of how classrooms function, study halls, counselor-to-student ratios and bringing in wellness teachers. Some of it is attitudinal. “One of the essential qualities of the IB for all that I think resonates with the kids is ‘This teacher believes that I’m able to do this.’” But each type of support is assessed against an overall goal. “If it’s going to help more kids embrace the IB, then we’re going to consider it.”

Once Sturgis students embrace the IB, they are transformed by it. They talk about that in the graduation speeches the school has them write, and alumni return to say the same thing to current students. The IB helps students find their voice and prepare for and get more out of their university experience. “The IB is a wonderful mechanism for growth for all students, particularly those who tend to be underrepresented in the most rigorous courses at a school,” Marble says.

Sturgis Charter Public School has been transformed, along with its students, by offering the IB for all. Not only has it more than doubled in size, but the leadership and the teachers have learned to work together as a team across two campuses, to assess what is working well for students and what could be done better, and to determine priorities. “I don’t think that it can be underscored enough that [IB for all] is most importantly about the kids and the transformative effect it has,” Marble says. “But it also transforms adults, and it transforms schools.”



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