



Washington Township: International Baccalaureate for All Students in All Schools

By:

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District: Metropolitan School District of Washington Township

Superintendent: Nikki Woodson

Program category: [Student achievement](#)

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Program: International Baccalaureate for K12

When school choice is abundant in a large urban public school system, innovation is key. So, in 2009, the Washington Township School District implemented the International Baccalaureate framework for teaching and learning for its 11,000 students and 1,500 staff.

IB had been offered since 1988 to its North Central High School junior and senior students. The district adopted the IB Primary Years program for grades K through 5 and the IB Middle Years Program for grade 6 through 10, which is still awaiting authorization.

With IB, which requires a high level of curriculum alignment and inquiry-based instruction, the district has increased teacher effectiveness and student achievement, seeing record levels on state standardized tests. There is also greater strategic leadership by administrators and fewer student discipline issues.

“One of the things that I am enjoying most about the children going to an IB school is that they are being taught how to think for themselves,” says Sarah Manion, a Washington Township parent. “They will have started in kindergarten with learning how to come up with answers on their own.”

Through the community service and action components of IB, the Washington Township community has been engaged with student learning. The district has raised nearly \$1 million from private funds to support IB.

In recognition of the innovation and success of this initiative, Washington Township has been named a District of Distinction by District Administration. The district was among 49 districts that were honored in the inaugural round of Districts of Distinction, the magazine's new national recognition program.

“We are pleased to honor Washington Township as a District of Distinction,” says JD Solomon, editorial director at District Administration magazine. “Like all our honorees, Washington Township serves as a model for school leaders across the country.”

Additionally, the district serves as a constant professional development hub for inquiry-based instruction. It hosts school teams interested in IB on a monthly basis and hosts large, on-site PD sessions that are open to other districts.

For more information about Districts of Distinction, including how to apply and a list of all current honorees, visit www.districtadministration.com/dod.

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Chalkbeat Indiana

Washington Township first in Indiana to offer IB in all grades

MSD Washington Township is one of six districts in the world offering IB to all students

by [Shaina Cavazos](#) on August 7, 2014



PHOTO: Shaina Cavazos

Above: Helene Achgill, department chair for the information center at North Central High School, speaks during a presentation by IB regional director for the Americas Drew Deutsch on Tuesday afternoon.

Washington Township administrators gathered last week to prepare for a first day of school they'd never had before — one in which the district would be offering an International Baccalaureate education to every student in every school.

On Monday, the district became the only district in Indiana — and just the sixth district in the world — with IB classes for all grades, from fresh-faced kindergarteners to high school seniors. IB aims to prepare kids for a global world by teaching them to think critically, use research, ask probing questions and get involved in their communities.

Over the past decade, the district has seen dramatic growth in poor families and students learning English as a second language, especially foreign students. IB is one strategy for adapting instruction to that new reality, Superintendent Nikki Woodson said. Not to change would be “educational malpractice,” she said.

“Obviously the way we taught 20 years ago can’t be the way we teach today,” Woodson said.

To get ready, the district’s principals, administrators and department heads and others — a few dozen in all — gathered last week at Maggiano’s restaurant.

Drew Deutsch, the Maryland-based regional director of the Americas for the International Baccalaureate, urged them to spend some time telling the district’s “IB story” to students, parents and others in the community who might not be completely sure what the big deal is.

“When schools bring in IB, we see a revitalization and energizing of the instructional team as well as broader parent and student community,” Deutsch said. “Teachers embrace the ideals — inquiry based learning, critical thinking, making the world a better place and second language learning.”

Bringing IB to Washington Township

IB is a nonprofit group that was created in 1968 by educators at the International School of Geneva, Switzerland. The original idea was to serve students in international schools who wanted to prepare for college, according to its website. The curriculum does not tell teachers what content to teach. Instead, it sets high expectations for students to come up with their own ideas and do independent work. IB learning also encourages students to have “international mindedness” — they study culture and national identity. For example, IB students must learn a second language.

Around the world, IB works with almost 3,800 schools in 144 countries, Deutsch said. Its program is divided into four parts, which can be offered individually or as a “continuum,” which is what will happen in Washington Township.

The most well-known program is the Diploma Program for juniors and seniors, which North Central High School has had in place since 1988.

But starting this year, students in every grade have the opportunity to learn the IB way. From kindergarten to fifth grade, all Washington Township schools will follow a curriculum based on IB’s Primary Years Program. Curriculum for sixth-graders through high school sophomores will track the group’s Middle Years Program.

High school juniors and seniors will have to apply if they want to take IB classes under IB’s final stage, the Diploma Program. For those students, completing IB classes and passing a series of tests can earn them college credits in much the same way students do in Advanced Placement classes. However, IB is infused into existing honors classes at North Central, so students seeking

a diploma will be in class with other honors students who are not. They just have a few extra classes and classwork components to complete.

Woodson said the district decided to the K-12 IB plan as a way to transform teaching and learning.

Washington Township schools have long been well regarded in Indianapolis, with suburban-like strong test scores and a slew of accomplished alumni, including former Gov. Mitch Daniels and astronaut David Wolf.

But over the past decade, a demographic shift has brought new challenges. The percentage of students from families poor enough to qualify for free or reduced-price lunch jumped from 40 percent in 2005 to 60 percent last school year. The percentage of students learning English as a second language also nearly doubled to 15 percent, including an influx of foreign students at some schools. The district is 65 percent minority today, up from 57 percent in 2005.

Woodson said at first the district considered more of a magnet school approach for integrating IB. But she hopes going all-in will benefit more students.

“If this is good teaching and learning for one child, why isn’t that good for every child in our school district?” Woodson said.

The program isn’t cheap, so the Washington Township Schools Foundation took up fundraising to help make it happen. So far, \$900,000 has been raised toward a \$1 million goal to support IB. The money pays for classroom world language resources, application and authorization fees, and curriculum writing.

When you single out the costs of IB, Woodson said, it adds about \$32 per child per year in spending. That cost was significant but “not an insurmountable amount,” Woodson said the district leaders decided.

Adjusting to a new framework

Assistant Superintendent Jon Milleman said the district needs to find its “elevator speech” in order to better explain and promote IB in the district.

Although it’s been around for more than 40 years, not every family is familiar with IB. Ashley Monroe, the science department chair at Westlane Middle School, described IB as “a lens to teach kids through.”

Helene Achgill, head librarian at North Central High School, said it was the “overarching philosophy of what we’re trying to do in the classroom.”

There’s a bit of a learning curve for teachers and students. The district will continue to provide training for teachers, redirecting money from traditional training programs to support learning about IB for teachers, Woodson said.

“Veteran teachers give best comments,” Woodson said of the feedback on the training. “They’ve seen a lot of change in education, so to see that group of teachers lit on fire about what we’re doing with IB is very exciting to me. It’s not easy work, but when you put in work like that and you see the payoff (with students), it’s very rewarding.”

Since the Diploma Program began more than 20 years ago, 323 North Central High School students have earned IB diplomas.

“In many ways, we feel the rest of the education community is catching up to what we’ve been doing for decades,” Deutsch said. “It’s a testament to the fact that it’s global school framework that goes around the world and takes best practices from multiple education systems and sets the bar for students around the world.”

Noticing differences with IB learning

Already, Woodson said the district has seen an uptick in its enrollment: at least 1,100 more students in five years. While she said she can’t tie that exclusively to IB, Woodson said it does show that the district is making positive changes that the community is responding to.

And eventually, Deutsch assured the administrators during last week’s training, they’d be able to see differences in their classrooms.

“When you go into (an IB) elementary school that has really embraced (it), you just know it’s working,” Deutsch said. “You go to observe a class taking place, seeing six-year-olds leading instruction, leading one another, and seeing inquiry-based learning in living color.”

While taking questions after his presentation, Deutsch joked with the administrators about another aspect of IB learning that could likely become apparent to students and teachers: problem-solving and critical thinking.

“What do you do when you have a ninth-grader show up reading at a sixth grade reading level, and how do you prepare them to take one or two diploma courses or the full (IB) diploma?” Deutsch asked, restating a question from the audience.

Deutsch responded by playing the part of an IB teacher and expecting the group to think through the problem.

“In an IB way, I’m not going to give you the answer,” he said.

After a few laughs, Deutsch offered some suggestions. Among the ideas: collaborate with other teachers, seek help in the wider IB community, look at solutions from other IB schools.

It was hard to miss the intention of Deutsch’s words: this training wasn’t a beginning or an end, just part of a journey for Washington Township. But as the new school year begins, they’ll have the tools to manage the wide-ranging changes.