The International Baccalaureate Program at Anderson High School: A Success Story

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In 1990, Anderson High School became the first high school in Austin, Texas to implement the International Baccalaureate (IB) program to raise the level of excellence in the school.[1] At that time, Europe and in Canada were familiar with the international program, but it had not yet made inroads into the United States. Thirteen years later, Anderson is the only high school in the Austin Independent School District to offer the IB diploma and certificate programs. This paper will examine the International Baccalaureate program, the obstacles and successes of its history at Anderson High School, as well as the future of the program.

Background

In the fall of 1989, the assistant principal of Anderson High School read an article on the International Baccalaureate Organization in a professional trade journal. Finding the article interesting, the assistant principal showed the article to the principal, Ron Buford.[2] At that time, Anderson High School was proud of their academic record, but was looking for a way to raise the level of excellence in the school. Hoping that this might be a means to achieve that end, Ron Buford and his assistant principal traveled to Canada to investigate this unknown program that had received rave reviews. Invigorated by the new program that the educators witnessed, they returned to Anderson High School with the goal of being the first school in Austin to offer the International Baccalaureate programs. First, they had to convince the faculty that this was a program worthy of the training and time required for implementation.

The International Baccalaureate Program

The International Baccalaureate program, created in 1968 at the International School in Geneva, is designed for students in the final two years of high school and culminates in a series of international examinations.[3] The program, which is criterion referenced, has earned international reputation for academic rigor. While the IB program incorporates the best of national educational standards, it is not based on any one national curriculum.[4] Offered in English, French, and Spanish, the IB program is active in public, private, and parochial schools throughout the world.[5]

In 1990, the IB program had approximately thirteen thousand, five hundred candidates. In 2003, the number of candidates for IB diplomas had almost quadrupled, reaching a high of over fifty one thousand.[6] Within the United States, over three hundred and fifty schools offer the IB diploma. In Texas, twenty-one schools currently offer an International Baccalaureate diploma program at the high school level.[7] Within the Austin Independent School District only one high school offers the IB program, Anderson High School in north Austin.

The IB curriculum centers on the humanities and the sciences, with six distinctive areas from which all students must take courses. Required courses include the student's native language and literature, a second language, experimental sciences, mathematics, individuals and societies, and arts and electives.[8] Diploma students must complete one subject from each of the six subject groups, with at least three, but not more than four taken at the higher level. Students complete other courses at the standard level. Higher level courses require two hundred and forty teaching hours, while the standard level courses represent one hundred and fifty hours of teaching time.[9]

Three additional requirements unite all of the learning areas. The Theory of Knowledge course "challenges students and their teachers to reflect critically on diverse ways of learning and areas of knowledge, and to consider the role which knowledge plays in a global society."[10] Teachers who have participated in the Theory of Knowledge course have expressed a desire that all students be exposed to such an eye opening class.[11] In addition to the Theory of Knowledge course, students also must complete an extended essay of approximately four thousand words on a topic of their choice. The final requirement, the Creativity, Action, Service (CAS) requirement, consists of one hundred and fifty hours of student work divided between the three areas.

In addition to the IB diploma program, students may choose to participate in the IB certificate program, which allows them to select various IB courses without committing to the entire diploma program. The IBO also offers a Middle Years Program for students in the sixth through tenth grades and an Elementary Years program for students in grades one through five. In the Austin Independent School District, only Murchison Middle School has implemented the Middle Years Program and no elementary schools currently operate an Elementary Years Program.[12]

Implementation of the IB Program at Anderson High School

When principal Ron Buford and his assistant principal returned to Anderson High School in 1989 after a visit to Canadian schools offering the IB diploma program, they believed they had found a

program that would not only bring recognition to the school, but would raise the level of academic excellence school-wide. Their first task was to explain the benefits of such a rigorous program to the faculty. Buford tapped the talents of Lynn Crawford to serve as the first IB program coordinator and convinced approximately thirty teachers to commit to the training necessary to implement the program at Anderson.[13] The next hurdle the school faced was to secure the funding to send the thirty teachers for training. In order to be certified as an IB school, teachers must be trained by the International Baccalaureate Organization in an intense three day course which initiates teachers to the IB methodology. The closest training site at that time was located in Montezuma, New Mexico. The Austin Independent School District allotted Anderson funds in the neighborhood of twenty-four thousand dollars to help initiate the program. Funds were also utilized from the talented and gifted program allotment, distributed by the Texas Education Agency.[14] In the fall of 1990, five diploma candidates and seven certificate candidates enrolled in IB courses. Two years later, these brave, pioneering students were the first to earn International Baccalaureate diplomas and certificates at Anderson High School.

Trials and Triumphs

One of the first difficulties the school faced was educating the student body, the parents, and the community about the IB program.[15] Lynn Crawford utilized a variety of approaches to inform students and parents of the IB program and its benefits. Parents meetings were held and articles were published in the school newspaper and the Austin American Statesman regarding the new program. Coffees were hosted at the school and in parent homes, with the education blitz continuing into the middle schools to whet the appetites of younger students. Lynn Crawford stated that the biggest hurdle the IB program faced was from the parents of students enrolled in the honors and advanced placement courses. Parents were concerned that the IB courses would eliminate the popular advanced placement courses and that their students would be at a disadvantage.[16] To alleviate this fear, International Baccalaureate courses and Advanced Placement courses were taught together with the exception of unique IB courses such as the Theory of Knowledge. Students were encouraged to sit for IB and AP exams. Fees for the IB exams were comparable to those of AP exams, with parents bearing the responsibility for exam fees in both programs.

Another fear of the parent community was that the grade point average of students would be affected if they enrolled in the IB program. The school eased the parents' angst by weighting IB courses equally with AP courses. Rather than the four point scale utilized in the regular curriculum, IB and AP courses were weighted for a five point scale.[17] This action elevated the International Baccalaureate courses to the level of the honors and advanced placement courses already offered at the school.

The third major hurdle that the program coordinator had to overcome was the perception that students in the IB program had no time for other elective courses or athletic pursuits. While the International Baccalaureate diploma students participate in a rigorous academic program, many students enroll in courses such as band, choir, photography, newspaper, and a variety of athletic activities. Some students also hold outside jobs that require a sizeable time commitment.[18] Students that desire to participate in IB courses, but do not want to complete the entire program, may enroll in the certificate program at Anderson, which requires successful completion of IB exams in at least two subject areas. Students may enroll for and complete exams in up to six courses under the certificate program.[19]

While the first class of IB students consisted of a meager twelve students, subsequent classes have ranged as high as thirty-three. One high school in each of two surrounding districts has implemented the International Baccalaureate diploma program. In each case, the Anderson High School IB coordinator acted as a mentor for the new school to offer advice and encouragement to the fledgling programs. The schools all participate in the Texas International Baccalaureate School organization, which recently hired an executive director to inform universities of the rigors of the IB program and encourage them to look favorably on graduates for their critical thinking skills.[20]

An ongoing challenge for the school has been the cost of training for teachers. After the initial training class of thirty, up to twenty additional teachers were trained each year. The International Baccalaureate Organization revises the curriculum of the content areas on a five year rotation. Each time a revision occurs in a subject area, additional training is required.[21] In some states, such as Florida, the state provides financial incentives for schools to offer the IB diploma and certificate programs.[22] This funding alleviates the financial burden on local schools and parents and encourages the schools to promote the program among qualified students.

The International Baccalaureate Program at Anderson High School today

In 2003, thirty-two diploma candidates and forty-two certificate candidates graduated from Anderson High School in the IB program. Over the past five years, the number of diploma candidates has remained relatively stable, with between twenty and thirty students each year. In addition to the diploma students, forty to forty-five students have been enrolled in the certificate program yearly.[23] Several of

these students attend Anderson on intra-district transfers. Transfer students are encouraged to attend Anderson beginning in the ninth grade to enroll in honors courses so that the school may ascertain if the students are qualified for the program.

In district and transfer students alike enroll in honors classes during their freshman and sophomore years. In the spring of the sophomore year, students submit applications for the IB program, complete with faculty recommendations. The majority of the students that enroll in the diploma and certificate programs complete their requirements for graduation from the IB program. According to Ann Cowan, most of the students who leave the IB program do so through self selection. Very few students have been asked to leave the IB course of study. Ann attributed a low attrition rate to accurate marketing with students "knowing what they were getting into."[24] After thirteen years, Anderson High School has also become adept at recognizing qualified students when considering applicants for admission to the program.

Anderson's current IB coordinator, Ann Cowan, visits middle schools throughout the Austin Independent School District to talk to students about the opportunities available in the International Baccalaureate Program.[25] With the inception of the Middle Years Program at Murchison Middle School, a feeder school for Anderson, Ann expects the number of students to grow over the coming years.[26] While other middle schools, such as Martin and Fillmore, have expressed an interest in the Middle Years Program, there are no high schools to which the students may advance. While these students would be welcome at Anderson, many of the students live in south Austin and would have difficulty with transportation, as the district does not provide transportation to students with intra-district transfers.

The greatest benefit that the teachers have seen since the inception of the IB program is the increased level of excellence throughout the school. The majority of teachers at Anderson who teach IB courses, currently numbering between thirty and thirty-five, also teach classes in the regular program. The training the faculty received for IB courses has carried over into their teaching of other classes. This increased level of instruction has raised the academic level of all students in the school. In the English department, the reading lists cover an international spectrum of authors, rather than only the traditional American writers. In science courses, administrators have witnessed increased lab time, a greater synthesis of ideas in student writing, and more Socratic questioning from faculty members. The current ninth grade class soon will be involved in an interdisciplinary project based on the literary work, *The Hot Zone*. Teachers in science, history, English, and a connections course will plan for a three week unit that will culminate in a research project for students to investigate a modern disease of their choice.[27]

The International Baccalaureate program provides enriching experiences that force students to examine issues from various international viewpoints, as well as to work with other students in a collaborative environment. Students grow in their critical thinking and the quality of discussion within the classroom has grown significantly.[28] Anderson graduate, Will Haven, class of 1997 and a student at Rhodes College, reported that IB gave him a head start in study habits and the hard work necessary for success in college.[29] Whitney Beckett, a class of 2000 student at Duke University, stated that IB was the best college preparation any high school has to offer. She has maintained an A average because the studying and time management skills she learned in the IB program accustomed her to the more strenuous workload required in college.[30] Quarterly, the IBO compiles articles from prominent newspapers and professional journals for dissemination in IB schools. Media such as *New York Times, Washington Post, London Evening Standard, Pittsburgh Post Gazette,* and *NEA Today* have published articles touting the benefits of an IB program. Yet for all the publicity, Ann Cowan reports that the Anderson IB program's best recruiting tool is the rave reviews of former participants and parents.

The Future of the IB Program

The greatest obstacle that the IB program continues to face is funding for student participation fees and faculty training. Each new faculty member that instructs an IB course requires additional training dollars. While the number of training sites in the United States has increased over the past several years, currently no training sites exist in Texas. This factor forces schools to absorb travel costs as well as training fees, which can be costly for a school such as Anderson High School which trains an average of five to ten teachers annually. According to Ann Cowan, the Austin Independent School District has funded a majority of the program, with increased money coming from the state.[31] In the current era of shrinking budgets and fewer tax dollars, Anderson's IB coordinator worries that the budget ax may fall on the IB program.

Another difficulty that Lynn Crawford expressed is the ability of IB to attract minority students to the program in numbers that mirror the general population of the school. While Anderson offers financial assistance to any qualified student who would like to participate in the IB program but may not posses the necessary funds, many fewer minority students have met the stringent math and science requirements of honors classes during the freshman and sophomore years.[32] These courses are considered one of the best indicators of a student's

success within the diploma and certificate programs during the student's junior and senior years.

With the advent of the top ten percent rule in Texas, the IB program offers students another means to enroll in advanced coursework that is weighted on a higher scale than standard academic courses.[33] With students completing IB and AP exams, many graduates enter college with fifteen to thirty semester credit hours. These extra credit hours permit students to graduate early or to have more elective choices in college. The advanced credit often fulfills the general education requirements that result in large classes in many universities. IB graduates are able to move into upper division coursework sooner and experience the interactive learning that occurs in smaller classes.

Conclusion

From an assistant principal read an article in a trade journal in 1989, to a graduating class of thirty-three diploma students in 2003, Anderson High School has been a success story with the International Baccalaureate programs. The success has not come without difficulty and hard work on the part of the faculty and administration. Faculty training, student enrollment and testing fees, and increased texts are but a few of the financial costs that the school has had to absorb in implementing the IB program. In spite of these difficulties, students have risen to the challenge of a rigorous curriculum and in turn, raised the standard of academic excellence throughout the school. In the years ahead, Anderson will continue to face trials, such as maintaining funding and increasing minority participation in the program. The dedication and passion of the faculty and administration will work to overcome these obstacles, just as they have throughout the program's history. Anderson High School is poised to increase IB enrollment as they promote the Middle Years Programs in middle schools throughout the district and to continue the academic excellence begun thirteen years ago.

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[1] Crawford, Lynn, Personal interview conducted on November 20, 2003.
[2] Ibid.
[3] The Diploma Programme, available: www.ibo.org, p. 1.
[4] Ibid, p. 1.
[5] History of the IBO, available: www.ibo.org, p.1.
[6] International Baccalaureate North American Statistical Summary, 2003, p.4.
[7] Ibid, p. 8.
[8] International Baccalaureate Organization, *Chemistry* (Geneva, 2001), p.1.
[9] Ibid, p. 2.
[10] "Special Features of Diploma," *Rewards of Being an Internal Baccalaureate Student* (Anderson High School Information Packet).
[11] Cowan, Ann. Personal interview conducted on November 14, 2003.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Crawford, Lynn, Personal interview conducted on November 20, 2003.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Cowan, Ann. Personal interview conducted on November 14, 2003.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Unlike the magnet high schools, Anderson can only recruit at middle schools when invited into the school.
[26] Cowan, Ann. Personal interview conducted on November 14, 2003.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] *The Value of AN I.B. Diploma,* Anderson High School information packet.
[30] Ibid.
[31] The Texas Education Agency currently pays schools the same $30 stipend for students in an IB program who successfully complete exams as for AP students who score a three or higher on the AP exams.
[32] Crawford, Lynn. Personal interview conducted on November 20, 2003.
[33] Students who rank in the top ten percent of their graduating class are guaranteed automatic admission to the public university of their choice within the state.