Frequently asked questions about the Primary Years Programme

What is the Primary Years Programme?

The Primary Years Programme (PYP) is a curriculum framework for young learners aged 3–12 designed by the International Baccalaureate (IB). Founded on a philosophy that recognizes a child’s natural curiosity, creativity and ability to reflect, the PYP generates a stimulating, challenging learning environment to nurture those assets and foster a lifelong love of learning in every child. The PYP, like all IB programmes, is transdisciplinary, meaning students learn across subject areas while investigating big ideas.

Does the PYP have a specific set of standards?

In the PYP, students learn about significant concepts through units of inquiry. The six transdisciplinary themes that guide units of inquiry and compose a year of study are:

- Who we are
- Where we are in place and time
- How we express ourselves
- How the world works
- How we organize ourselves
- Sharing the planet.

Units of inquiry interweave subject areas such as mathematics, language arts, science and social studies. This approach encourages students to make their own connections between what they learn in core subject areas and how it relates to the world around them.

The school outlines its specific knowledge content and academic curriculum, guided by the following five essential elements:

- The knowledge content is organized under the transdisciplinary themes. Each school decides which specific topics to study under each theme.
- The learning skills aim to help students become independent, well-functioning, self-motivated learners.
- The learning attitudes aim to develop a lifelong love of learning and nurture a child’s curiosity and confidence.
- The action component emphasizes the need to connect the student with his or her own potential and responsibility for using what was learned.
- The rigorous guidelines for classroom practices to match the educational philosophy and values of the IB are communicated through professional development and a school’s internal reflection process.
What are the advantages of an IB education?

- IB World Schools (the only schools authorized to offer IB programmes) are subject to a strict accreditation process monitored by the IB, ensuring that schools provide a high-quality education.
- IB teaching methods and curriculums are research-based and draw from the best educational practices from systems around the world.
- IB teachers are required to participate in many professional development opportunities to continually promote their awareness of current educational practices and new thinking.
- IB students develop a sense of the world around them and their responsibility to it. (See "What is an IB Education?")
- IB programmes are recognized internationally and ease the educational transitions of mobile students so that their education is not adversely affected if their families relocate.

Do IB teachers receive special training?

All PYP teachers receive professional development in IB’s approaches to teaching and approaches to learning from certified IB workshop leaders. This is a requirement for IB World Schools implementing the PYP.

Are IB programmes considered “gifted” programmes?

The PYP is implemented schoolwide and adapted by teachers to meet the learning needs of all students. In most cases, the Middle Years Programme (MYP) is also a schoolwide program. All PYP teachers are required to participate in collaborative planning and reflection to make their teaching practices consistent and to foster a holistic approach to education. A growing body of evidence suggests a positive relationship between teacher collaboration and student achievement.

Does implementing an IB programme mean my child’s school will not teach local or national standards such as the Common Core?

The IB is committed to making sure that students in IB programmes meet and exceed local or national standards. With the implementation of any IB programme, schools are required to examine their curriculum carefully to ensure that there is alignment with local, state or national standards. More information on the IB and the Common Core is available at www.ibo.org.

Have studies been done on the impact of the PYP?

The IB places great value on external validation of its programmes, curriculums and professional development. A recent Global International Schools’ Assessment study found that PYP students outperformed non-IB students in mathematics, reading and writing. Additional studies on programme impact, quality assurance, programme development and assessment research are available at www.ibo.org/research.

When do students start and finish the PYP? When do they transition to the MYP?

The PYP is designed for students aged 3–12 (preschool and primary grades). The MYP spans students aged 11–16, and the Diploma Programme (DP) and Career-related Programme (CP) is for the last two years of high school, students aged 16–19.

How can I learn more about the IB and PYP?

- Visit the IB website at www.ibo.org
- Attend school meetings and events
- Speak with your school’s PYP coordinator
- Speak with your child’s PYP classroom teacher.
IB’s mission and philosophy

At the centre of an International Baccalaureate (IB) education are students aged 3 to 19 with unique learning styles, strengths and challenges. The IB focuses on each student as a whole person. Thus, IB programmes address not only cognitive development but social, emotional and physical well-being. The aim is to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people with adaptable skills to tackle society’s complex challenges and who will help to make it a better, more peaceful world.

Validating the efficacy of the IB’s four programmes are research and more than 45 years of practical experience. IB programmes emphasize learning how to learn and teaching students to value learning as an essential, integral part of their everyday lives. The IB promotes the development of schools that:
- inspire students to ask questions, pursue personal aspirations, set challenging goals and develop the persistence to achieve those goals
- develop knowledgeable students who make reasoned ethical judgments and acquire the flexibility, perseverance and confidence they need in order to bring about meaningful change
- encourage healthy relationships, individual and shared responsibility and effective teamwork.

Measuring Outcomes

To measure what students have learned and to monitor their progress, IB teachers use a range of assessment strategies including formative assessments that provide ongoing feedback that can be used by instructors to develop their teaching and by students to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and target areas that need improvement. Teachers use summative assessments which are internationally benchmarked for older students, and are criterion-referenced. This means students are measured against a set of agreed upon learning outcomes rather than graded on a “bell curve” as in norm-referenced assessments.

The IB’s four programmes

**Primary Years Programme**

In the Primary Years Programme (PYP), the IB’s youngest students learn about and use knowledge, concepts and skills from a variety of subjects to explore six transdisciplinary themes and begin to develop the attributes of the learner profile.

**Middle Years Programme**

The Middle Years Programme (MYP) is a challenging framework that encourages students to make practical connections between their studies and the real world and culminates in a personal project. Students who complete the MYP are well-prepared to undertake the IB Diploma Programme.

**Diploma Programme**

In the final two years of high school, students can choose to enter either:
- the Diploma Programme (DP), a curriculum which emphasizes both breadth and depth of knowledge. The DP is made up of six subject groups and a core, comprising theory of knowledge (TOK), creativity, activity, service (CAS) and a research paper of up to 4,000 words, the extended essay (EE); or,
- the Career-related Programme (CP). The CP combines two IB diploma courses with school-based, career-related study. It equips students to pursue further education or to enter their chosen career path immediately.
IB and the Common Core State Standards

Over 40 states have adopted and are currently implementing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). International Baccalaureate (IB) programmes and the CCSS share certain aspects in common. This fact sheet was developed in response to frequently asked questions from IB parents.

In what respects are the IB and the CCSS similar?

- The IB and the CCSS are both focused on setting high standards that seek to challenge and engage students, promote deeper learning and develop critical-thinking skills. In fact, the IB standards were one of five international benchmarks used to compare against the CCSS in an influential study conducted by the Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC).
- CCSS and the IB share a mutual emphasis on career and college readiness.
  Neither the IB nor the CCSS is a curriculum. A curriculum is the detailed plan for day-to-day teaching. Curriculum decisions, including which textbooks and programmes to use, are made by the school or district, not by the IB or the CCSS.

How do the IB programmes and the CCSS differ?

- The effectiveness of IB programmes has been validated by research and by over 40 years of practical experience teaching and assessing student work.
- IB standards and practices are not learning outcomes; they provide a set of criteria that set out specific approaches to teaching and learning. They focus on how learning occurs.
- The CCSS are learning outcomes that specify skills and knowledge that must be acquired by grade level. The CCSS focus on what outcomes should be reached.
- IB emphasizes student-centred learning, focusing on the social, emotional and academic needs of the whole child.
- An IB education incorporates an understanding and appreciation of other cultures and points of view, and a world language competency—precisely the skills in demand by the current global economy.

Will IB programmes change at all in states that have adopted the CCSS?

- IB programmes are taught in schools in over 140 countries in a wide variety of national and state education systems. They are flexible enough to allow for local adaptations in order to meet all US federal, state and local requirements.

I heard that the CCSS is a federal programme. What about the IB?

- The nation’s governors and education commissioners, through their representative organizations, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), led the development of the CCSS.
- The IB in the US is brought on by schools and increasingly by school districts at the behest of local boards of education. The CCSS was brought on by governors of states and adopted via a legislative process.
  - CCSS is not a federal program; however, for states to become eligible for a share of the US$4.35 billion Race to the Top (RTTT) funds, states had to promise that they would fully adopt a set of common college- and career-ready standards supplemented with only 15% of their own standards.
Will my child’s IB school have difficulty implementing the CCSS because of the IB programme?

- Feedback from teachers tells us that IB World Schools have an advantage when implementing the CCSS. CCSS represents a shift in teaching from covering a wide breadth of content to a greater focus on depth of understanding and interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and learning. These very characteristics define what makes an IB education so effective.
- IB teachers receive specialized training to teach in IB classrooms that prepares them to incorporate the CCSS into their instruction.

Will students in IB programmes still have to take CCSS tests?

- Yes, if the school is part of a district that is committed to undertake the CCSS assessments.
- Most students in US public school systems already take state-mandated tests. IB students will continue to take IB exams and state-mandated exams, the same as in the past.

Additional resources

For more information about IB and the CCSS:

To learn more about an IB education in-depth go to this link:
What is an IB education?
You can find samples of IB examinations here:

The Common Core State Standards Initiative:
www.corestandards.org/

Common Core State Assessments: Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC):
http://www.parcconline.org/about-parcc
www.smarterbalanced.org/

If your questions aren’t answered here, please contact us at: https://ibanswers.ibo.org/ or call us on 301-202-3025.