



# PUTTING A Global Twist ON LEARNING

The Green Lake School District and others have bought into a program that promotes international learning, would it work for your district?

*Shelby Anderson*

Six years ago, the Green Lake School District was challenged by its school board to reinvigorate student learning.

“Students were getting kind of complacent,” Green Lake Principal Mary Allen said. “And we weren’t really keeping up with 21st century learning like we should have.”

The school administration team and educators researched options and came across the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. IB is an international, non-profit organization that offers three programs for students from 3 to 19 years old that, according to the IB website, “help develop the intellectual, personal, emotional and social skills to live, learn and work in a rapidly globalizing world.”

The Green Lake School Board supported the idea to pursue IB certification and by the start of the

2011-12 school year, the district was a certified IB school.

In Wisconsin, about 16 public schools, including Green Lake, have active IB programs. There are three programs within the IB structure. Schools can be certified for the Primary Years Program (grades 4k-6), the Middle Years Program (grades 7-10), or the Diploma Program (grades 11 and 12). There is also a Career-related Certificate for students in grades 11 and 12. Most schools offer one or two of the programs, the Green Lake School District is currently the only district in the state to have all students eligible to participate.

However, getting certified isn't an easy process. It lasts several years, involves a lot of teacher training, and culminates in a rigorous authorization process that brings authorizers from all over world into your school. The authorizers spend several days in the school interviewing teachers and taking detailed documentation.

Although the Green Lake School District is an authorized IB school, its IB journey is far from over. Teachers and administrators are continually required to seek professional development opportunities related to the school's IB programs, and the district must reauthorize every four years.

## ■ IB at Green Lake

There are many elements to each of the IB programs, yet the programs — Primary Years, Middle Years, and Diploma — allow the district to teach its own curriculum.

"IB is kind of like the backbone and then the district can build upon it how they want," Green Lake Superintendent Ken Bates said. "Some people think IB is the whole house, but it's really just the foundation and the structure, and then you can decorate it how you want."

At Green Lake, the IB program begins in kindergarten when students start their education in the district and begin participation in the Primary Years Program. According to the IB website, the Primary Years Program: "encourages students to develop independence and to take responsibility for their own learning; supports students' efforts to gain understanding of the world and to function comfortably within it; and helps students establish personal values as a foundation upon which international-mindedness will develop and flourish."

When kindergarten students come into the district, Allen said, they are taught about who they are, where they come from, and they learn about their community. Once they have an understanding of these

elements, they begin to learn about the bigger world.

The district also works to get students, even kindergarten students, to direct their learning. Bates is proud of a project in which kindergarten students plan and organize their own field trip. The students do everything from scheduling buses,



## Wisconsin International Baccalaureate Schools

Here is a list of Wisconsin public schools that have authorized International Baccalaureate (IB) programs. Worldwide, there are more than 1,139,000 students at 3,678 schools in 146 countries.

**PYP** = Primary Years Program  
**MYP** = Middle Years Program  
**DP** = Diploma Program

### ■ Green Bay Area Public Schools:

Bay Port High School (DP)  
Chappell Elementary School (PYP)  
Franklin Middle School (MYP)  
Green Bay West High School (DP)

### ■ Green Lake School District:

Green Lake School (PYP) (MYP) (DP)

### ■ Manitowoc School District:

Lincoln High School (DP)

### ■ Milwaukee Public Schools:

Academy of Accelerated Learning (PYP)  
MacDowell Montessori School (DP)  
Ronald Wilson Reagan College Preparatory High School (MYP) (DP)  
Rufus King International School (MYP) (DP)  
Wedgewood Park International School (MYP)

### ■ Oconomowoc School District:

Oconomowoc High School (DP) (IBCC)

### ■ Racine Unified School District:

Jefferson Lighthouse Elementary School (PYP)  
Jerome I. Case High School (DP)  
McKinley Middle School (MYP)

### ■ Wausau School District:

Wausau East High School (DP)

For more information, visit [ibo.org](http://ibo.org).



creating the trip itinerary, to discussing program features with staff at the destination site. Bates says this exercise gets students to own their learning, but also gets the young students to use critical thinking and problem-solving and enable them to negotiate the world around them.

At the end of the Primary Years Program, when students are in sixth-grade, they participate in a culmi-

inating project. This project varies each year. Bates talked about a recent culminating project in which students worked in small groups and investigated a social issue. The project involved a research paper, a class presentation and then, ultimately, a presentation to the community.

“We open the gym and our students present their projects to parents and community members,” Bates said.



## INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE PROGRAMS

### ● PRIMARY YEARS PROGRAM Grades 4K-6 ●

- Encourages students to develop independence and to take responsibility for their own learning.
- Supports students' efforts to gain understanding of the world and to function comfortably within it.
- Helps students establish personal values as a foundation upon which international-mindedness will develop and flourish.

### ● MIDDLE YEARS PROGRAM Grades 7-10 ●

- Enables students to understand and manage the complexities of our world, and provides them with the skills and attitudes they need in order to take responsible action for the future.
- Ensures breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding through the study of eight subject areas.
- Requires the study of at least two languages to support students in understanding their own culture and that of others.
- Provides the opportunity for students to undertake an independent project into an area of interest.

### ● DIPLOMA PROGRAM Grades 11-12 ●

The Diploma Program prepares students for effective participation in a rapidly evolving and increasingly global society as they:

- Acquire breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding, studying courses from six subject groups;
- Develop the skills and a positive attitude toward learning that will prepare them for higher education;
- Study at least two languages and increase understanding of cultures, including their own;
- Make connections across traditional academic disciplines and explore the nature of knowledge through the program's unique theory of knowledge course;
- Undertake in-depth research into an area of interest through the lens of one or more academic disciplines in the extended essay; and
- Enhance their personal and interpersonal development through creativity, action, and service projects.

A tenet of all programs is to help students to develop physically, intellectually, emotionally and ethically.

## ■ Middle Years

The Middle Years Program (grades 7-10) is a continuation of the Primary Years Program but adds new levels of learning and interaction. According to the IB website, the Middle Years Program: “enables students to understand and manage the complexities of our world, and provides them with the skills and attitudes they need in order to take responsible action for the future; ensures breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding through the study of eight subject areas; requires the study of at least two languages to support students in understanding their own culture and that of others; and provides the opportunity for students to undertake an independent project in an area of interest.”

The Middle Years Program culminates in what is called the Personal Project. Students present, in a personal way, their understanding of real-world themes, concepts, and issues. The project, which requires students to interact with the world beyond the school walls, can take various forms such as an essay, a piece of creative writing, an original science experiment, the organization of an event, or any other project approved by the teacher.

Bates said that one student learned Italian and another student wrote an ordinance to have chickens in the city and presented it to the city council (it failed but the student still learned a lot).

“These are projects that are driven by the student's interest,” Bates said. “One of the things that



IB stresses is project-based learning and student-led learning. We use the project to engage students with their interests, have them go out and do the work, and come up with ideas and solutions, delving into a topic deeply.”

### ■ Diploma Program

While all students at Green Lake go through the Primary Years and Middle Years Programs, the Diploma Program (for juniors and seniors) is optional. The program is an intense two-year process in which students take six required subjects; write a 4,000-word extended essay; complete a Theory of Knowledge course; and complete a number of creativity, action, and service (CAS) projects. To earn the IB diploma, students also need to take an exam administered by IB. While the program is intense, it is recognized by the world’s top universities — some colleges offer up to 36 college credits for students who earn an IB diploma.

This school year, out of 26 seniors in the district, five are pursuing the IB diploma.

However, even if students in 11th and 12th grades don’t opt to pursue the full diploma, they can still take the advanced classes that are offered as part of the Diploma Program. These classes include a rigorous class called Theory of Knowledge that develops students into critical thinkers.

According to Bates, Tony Wagner, a renowned education author, has provided his support of IB programs. Wagner argues that IB is even better than Advanced Placement (AP) courses because, while AP classes

teach students what to think, IB programs teach students how to think.

Bates also likes that many of the projects that his students do are public-minded and benefit the entire community, not just the school.

For one of their CAS projects, which are part of the Diploma Program, a student opted to redesign and improve a city park, planting native prairie grasses and improving the park. Another student raised funds to improve a city baseball field.

“These kinds of projects are all part of civic engagement, which is an emerging element of 21st century learning,” Bates said.

### ■ IB for Teachers

Bates and Allen also discussed some of the benefits for teachers in the IB program. IB challenges teachers to collaborate more with other educators in their schools. In fact, educators at authorized IB schools, like Green Lake, have time to collaborate with other teachers on multi-disciplinary projects.

Teachers also participate in statewide and national training opportunities.

“Everyone gets the same training,” Bates said. “So you have teachers from Tennessee, California,

and Wisconsin working together on how to write units. It breaks down those barriers and promotes teacher learning.”

At the time that Bates was interviewed for this article, IB teachers from around the state were meeting at his school discussing IB practices and instruction in their classrooms.

### ■ IB for Beginners

Districts that are interested in IB should know that it is an intense and long application process. As part of a district’s application process, educators have to teach using the IB program for an entire year and then reflect upon the experience before the school can even apply. Also, there is a cost of \$8,000 per-year, per-program.

“It’s not an easy road to go, but it provides focus and a clear direction for our district,” Bates said.

Still, the cost can make it hard for a smaller district like Green Lake to support the program, but in the end Green Lake supports the IB program because it is seeing positive benefits for its students.

“We did it for the students,” Allen said. “We wanted our students to have a top-notch, world-class program.” ■

*Anderson is editor of Wisconsin School News.*

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