

Rationale for the Potential Adoption of the International Baccalaureate Program*

Northville Public Schools

The Northville Public Schools (NPS) constantly strive to improve the educational product that is offered to our students and to keep up with the changes in the national and international educational landscape. In order to assure that our students continue to achieve at the highest levels, it is sometimes necessary to enact new initiatives or programs. While the NPS already offer a comprehensive and quite successful college-prep curriculum for students in grades 9-12, increasingly competitive university admissions and intensified competition among school districts to attract and retain new students/ families/ home buyers necessitates innovation and renovation of our existing offerings. The adoption of the International Baccalaureate Program will positively influence the economic and demographic challenges facing NPS. At the same time the IB Program would address the fundamental curricular changes and modifications that will ultimately decide the viability and desirability of our schools.

Northville is a highly mobile community of mostly college graduates that continues to attract new residents, including many people from higher socio-economic groups, and a significant number from East Asia and South Asia. Essential to the process of choosing a residential community is an inquiry about the quality of the school and increasingly about the availability of IB programs. Given that Asia has seen the largest growth rate of IB schools worldwide in recent years, prospective residents frequently decide to reside elsewhere or to place their children in private schools when they learn the IB Programs are not available in Northville. The question Northville has to ask itself is not, "Can we afford to offer IB?" but rather, "Can we afford not to offer IB?" In this competitive market where families can move around and "shop" districts, Northville needs to offer an educational program that is attractive to our present and to our prospective students. The establishment of IB certified schools in Northville would transmit a signal that is understood around the world: curricular rigor and professional dedication combine to deliver an educational product that assures the success of our students and our schools in an increasingly complex and globalizing world.

The implementation of the IB Middle Years Program (MYP) curriculum in our middle schools and in the lower grades of the high school (and eventually the Diploma Program (DP) for grades 11 and 12) offers unique opportunities for NPS. We know that the middle school years represent a critical time for young teens and middle schools have been blamed for the increase in student behavior problems and cited as the cause of teens' alienation, disengagement from school, and low achievement. The best educational program, the most innovative curriculum to fight the malaise that afflicts both middle schools and high schools in the United States is

- theme based,
- is interdisciplinary,
- fosters student self-direction and independence,
- promotes self-understanding,
- is relevant to the learner and thus based on study of significant problems,
- is student-centered,
- values group interaction
- encourages critical and creative exploration of ideas.

The study committee contends that the IB curriculum encourages and fosters precisely these skills. Furthermore, IB is instrumental in (1) creating small communities of learning within larger school settings, (2) teaching a solid academic core, (3) enabling educators closest to students to make important

decisions about teaching and learning, (4) training teachers to work effectively with early adolescents and (5) connecting schools more closely with their communities (Carnegie Task Force on the Education of Young Adolescents, 1989).

The research of the IB committee determined that the MYP and DP IB Programs would deliver an educational packet that will best address the cognitive and affective welfare of adolescent learners. It will take into account the great variability in the academic, social, emotional, and physical development of adolescent groups and assure that all middle and high school students will take part in challenging learning experiences.

The IB committee felt strongly that the Middle Years Program (MYP) addresses the district's evolving ideas concerning the middle school philosophy and embraces the rigor and challenges that our parents as well as our students expect of the learning process. The committee was particularly impressed by the IB's high standards with regards to professional development. The International Baccalaureate Program is committed to supporting the ongoing development of a worldwide professional learning community comprising internationally minded teachers, school leaders and school administrators. To that end, all regional offices conduct comprehensive annual programs of workshops and conferences designed to help teachers and schools to better understand and deliver the IB programs. Through the provision of a wide variety of resources and development opportunities IB educators are challenged to constantly reflect upon and improve their practices. IB offers a web based and supported teacher development center where teachers can interact and learn from each other. The IB Program feedback loop will assure that students and teachers will continuously reevaluate their own practices. The combination of these factors will assure that we are able to deliver an exceptional educational product that will do justice to our own, our students' and our community's aspirations. The committee believes that the IB Program is the best school improvement and teacher development program that is currently available for implementation. It would ensure that all teachers use the same vocabulary, have the same vision and the same process for helping students learn.

The IB committee determined that the IB program is highly valued by university admissions committees, by parents, students and teachers worldwide. Implementation of the IB program would address the increasing disadvantage students from traditional high schools experience in the face of the increasingly competitive college/university admissions process at both elite private and public universities. The IB program would provide an unique opportunity to enhance our educational offerings for our high achieving students and to maintain and increase the desirability, value and competitiveness of our community.

*Note: A funding source has not yet been identified to support the implementation of an IB program.