

International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program (MYP) Information and FAQs

What is the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO)?

The International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) is an international non-profit educational foundation. The chief executive office (director general) and his staff are based in Geneva, Switzerland, while the curriculum and assessment activities and the business and financial operations are based in Cardiff, Wales in the United Kingdom, while the research activities are in Bath, England (UK). Additionally, there is a network of regional offices servicing IB schools around the world. The regional office for our area is in New York City, NY, (IBNA, IB North America).

The IBO grew out of the efforts of a group of individuals who began working towards their vision back as far as 1924. They had two main goals: to establish a common curriculum and university entry credential for geographically mobile students; and to build a climate of acceptance through intercultural awareness that would stretch around the world. The beginning was a two year curriculum that provided university entry credentials for students across many countries (Diploma Program).

The IBO has evolved from that beginning to where it now offers three different programs that are found in schools across a wide variety of settings and around the world. As of November 2004, the IBO had 1,700 authorized schools in 117 different countries: 1,222 Diploma Programs, 296 Middle Years Programs and 182 Primary Years Programs.

The IBO regularly reviews its schools to monitor the integrity of the programs. Each school has a certain amount of freedom in how the program is presented, with elementary schools having the most flexibility and the Diploma Programme offering the least. The idea is to provide students a model of learning that involves an appreciation of the global community and the skills to grow and participate in increasingly focused educational opportunities.

What is the IB Philosophy?

The IB philosophy is to foster tolerance and inter-cultural understanding among young people. IB attempts to accomplish this through a curricular framework that incorporates critical thinking, problem solving, and exposure to a variety of viewpoints. The IB philosophy emphasizes:

- ✓ Awareness of the similarities and differences among many cultures, understanding issues on an international scale, and responsible citizenship.
- ✓ The inter-relatedness of various disciplines and issues.
- ✓ A “Socratic” (question and answer) form of achieving knowledge in the classroom.
- ✓ Student-centered inquiry and communication.

What is the Middle Years Program (MYP)?

The MYP is a structure or a way of organizing instruction which allows students to develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to participate effectively in life in the twenty-first century. The concept of “balance” is fundamental to the program in a number of ways. The MYP provides learning in a broad base of disciplines to ensure that students acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to prepare for the future. The course objectives include skills and processes as well as a framework of concepts; the aim is to ensure that students are not only knowledgeable about a subject area, but also develop a genuine understanding of principles and an ability to apply these in new contexts, in preparation for further learning. The MYP promotes the principle of concurrent learning, whereby students deal with a balanced curriculum each year. As the students mature and develop thinking skills, they explore the disciplines with increasing depth and realize how they are not only linked to each other, but also to global issues. The program encourages the use of a variety of teaching and learning methodologies to produce a climate where students discover how they learn best in different contexts. The MYP emphasizes the development of the whole child: affective, cognitive, creative and physical; its effective implementation depends on the school’s concern for the whole educational experience, including what children learn outside the classroom. The program also encourages a balance between formative and summative assessment, using a range of activities within units to allow students to use and demonstrate a full range of thinking skills. Assessment strategies include teacher-led assessment, group and/or peer evaluation, and student self-assessment.

The “Fundamental Concepts” of the MYP are:

- ✓ **Intercultural Awareness** – This concept is concerned with developing students’ attitudes, knowledge and skills as they learn about their own and others’ social and national cultures. It not only fosters tolerance and respect, but also leads to empathy and understanding.
- ✓ **Holistic Education** – The MYP requires an approach to teaching and learning which includes and extends traditional school subjects. The program emphasizes the disciplined study of traditional subject groups. However, the areas of interaction provide the MYP’s main focus for developing links between the disciplines, so that students will learn to see knowledge as a whole. Through the application of the areas of interaction, students realize that most real-world problems require insights gained from a variety of disciplines, they develop the skills of inquiry and understand the similarities and differences between different approaches to human knowledge.
- ✓ **Communication** -- They MYP stresses the central importance of communication (verbal and non-verbal) as a vehicle to realize the aims of the program. A good command of expression in all of its forms is fundamental to learning. In most MYP subject groups, communication is a key objective and assessment criterion, as it supports understanding and allows student reflection and expression.

The MYP uses five common themes (**Areas of Interaction**) to intertwine eight MYP **Subject Groups**.

What are the “Areas of Interaction”?

The five MYP Areas of Interaction are intended to help the student see the “whole picture,” not just a single subject. They are:

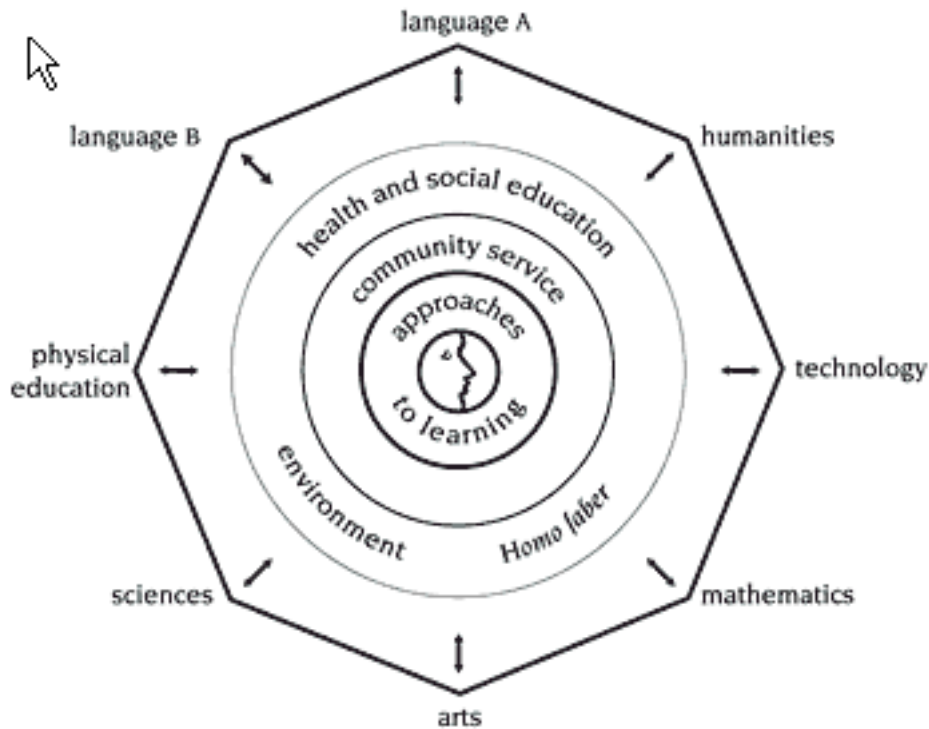
- ✓ **Approaches to Learning** – is concerned with developing the intellectual discipline, attitudes, strategies and skills that will result in critical, coherent and independent thought and the capacity for problem-solving and decision-making. Central to this is “learning how to learn” and developing an awareness of thought processes and their strategic use.
- ✓ **Community and Service** – extends beyond the classroom, requiring students to participate in the communities in which they live. The emphasis is on developing community awareness and concern, a sense of responsibility, and the skills needed to make an effective contribution to society.
- ✓ **Health and Social Education** – aims to educate the whole person and should prepare students for a physically and mentally healthy life, aware of potential hazards and able to make informed choices. It should also develop in students a sense of responsibility for their own well-being and for the physical and social environment.
- ✓ **Environment** – aims to develop students’ awareness of their interdependence with the environment so that they accept responsibility for maintaining an environment fit for the future. Each day students are confronted with global environmental issues – political and economic – which require balanced understanding. Students also face environmental situations at home and at school which require decision-making.
- ✓ **Homo Faber** (Man the Maker) – is concerned with the products of the creative genius of people and their impact on society and on the human mind. Students learn to appreciate the human capacity to influence, transform, enjoy and improve the quality of life. This area of interaction therefore encourages students to see the relationships between science, aesthetics, technology, and ethics.

What are the eight MYP Subject Groups?

- ✓ Language A (English)
- ✓ Humanities (includes both history and geography)
- ✓ Mathematics
- ✓ Physical Education
- ✓ Language B (World Language)
- ✓ Sciences
- ✓ Arts
- ✓ Technology

How are the five Areas of Interaction and the Eight Subject Groups related?

IB uses the following model to illustrate this relationship:



The student is at the center of the MYP curriculum model. At this age, students are making the transition from early puberty to mid-adolescence; this is a crucial period of personal, social and intellectual development, of uncertainty and questioning. The MYP is designed to guide students in their search for a sense of place in the natural and social environment.

In the curriculum model, the five areas of interaction surround the student. The areas of interaction are common interactive themes embedded in the subject groups and developed naturally through them. They are also embedded in special activities and projects, but they are not subjects in their own right.

The areas of interaction are designed so that the student will become increasingly aware of the connections between subject content and the real world, rather than considering subjects as isolated areas unrelated to each other and to the world. Students will develop an awareness of broader and more complex social issues. The MYP presents knowledge as an integrated whole, emphasizing the acquisition of skills, self-awareness and the development of personal values.

What is this “Technology” subject?

The IB framework defines technology as “the application of human creativity to solving a problem.” MYP technology aims to provide the means and the context to help students become skillful problem solvers, who can appreciate the role of technology in everyday life and society and who can respond critically and resourcefully to real-life changes.

Students are expected to solve problems through the creation of technological products/solutions. Students investigate problems and use the technology design cycle as a tool to design, plan, create and evaluate products/solutions. A product/solution can be defined as a model, prototype, product or system that students have generated independently.

MYP technology is structured into three branches: information, materials and systems.

- ✓ **Information** – MYP technology enables students to identify, access, evaluate and acknowledge a wide range of informational sources.
- ✓ **Materials** – In many cases, creating a product/solution involves using materials. These may be natural or synthetic, and will differ according to geographical location, culture and available resources. Students should be able to identify, combine, experiment with, shape and handle different types of materials, and safely dispose of, or recycle, waste products.
- ✓ **Systems** – Systems-based products/solutions involve a group of interdependent items that interact regularly to perform a task or achieve a purpose. Systems in our environment are very diverse: from a microchip to an aircraft flight-control system; from a ballpoint pen to a plotter; from fire-drill procedures to crowd control; from simple electrical circuits to sophisticated alarm systems.

Why is Portage all of the sudden going to adopt the Middle Years Program?

Portage is not hastily or impulsively going to adopt any program; we are investigating whether or not the MYP is a good fit for us and whether or not it is a useful tool that can help us continue to deliver quality instruction. The IBO seems to understand that sometimes school districts adopt programs and protocols for reasons other than improving student learning and development – programs that are doomed to fail because of lack of support and/or general incompatibility with the goals and philosophy of the school district. The IBO has structured into the application process safeguards against a school adopting one of its programs if the school community does not support participation in the program.

Portage is at this time exploring the benefits and advantages of adopting the Middle Years Program. This exploration or “test drive” is built into the application process, and will continue for several years before any formal relationship exists between Portage Public Schools and the IB Middle Years Program – if indeed that is ultimately a

mutually-agreed-upon decision. During this period, the school community will continue to learn more about how the MYP works, and classroom teachers will attempt MYP curriculum ideas and delivery strategies.

What makes anyone think that the MYP might be a good fit for Portage?

As we explore this question over the next few years, we need to determine how well-matched the standards and principles of the IBO are with those of Portage Public Schools. To that end, individual teachers, faculty groups, school administrators and parents are encouraged to ask themselves: “To what extent do our philosophy, our school structures and systems, our curriculum and units of work enable students, and the adults who implement the program, to develop into the learner described in the [following] IB Learner Profile”:

IB Learners Strive To Be:

- ✓ **Inquirers:** Their natural curiosity has been nurtured. They have acquired the skills necessary to conduct inquiry and research and show independence in learning. They actively enjoy learning and their love of learning will be sustained throughout their lives.
- ✓ **Thinkers:** They exercise initiative in applying thinking skills critically and creatively to make sound decisions and to solve complex problems.
- ✓ **Communicators:** They receive and express ideas and information confidently in more than one language, including the language of mathematical symbols.
- ✓ **Risk Takers:** They approach unfamiliar situations without anxiety and have the confidence and independence of spirit to explore new roles, ideas and strategies. They are courageous and articulate in defending those things in which they believe.
- ✓ **Knowledgeable:** They have spent time in school exploring themes which have global relevance and importance. In doing so, they have acquired a critical mass of significant knowledge.
- ✓ **Principled:** They have a sound grasp of moral reasoning. They have integrity, honesty and a sense of fairness and justice.
- ✓ **Caring:** They show sensitivity towards the needs and feelings of others. They have a sense of personal commitment to action and service.
- ✓ **Open-minded:** They respect the views, values and traditions of individuals and cultures, and they are accustomed to seeking and considering a range of points of view.
- ✓ **Well-balanced:** They understand the importance of physical and mental balance and personal well being.
- ✓ **Reflective:** They give thoughtful consideration to their own learning and analyze their personal strengths and weaknesses in a constructive manner.