The IB Primary Years Programme

Education for a better world
The Primary Years Programme: preparing students to be active participants in a lifelong journey of learning

What is an IB education?
The IB continuum of international education for 3 to 19 year olds is unique because of its academic and personal rigour. We challenge students to excel in their studies and in their personal growth. We aim to inspire a quest for learning throughout life that is marked by enthusiasm and empathy.

The IB aspires to help schools develop well-rounded students with character who respond to challenges with optimism and an open mind, are confident in their own identities, make ethical decisions, join with others in celebrating our common humanity and are prepared to apply what they learn in real-world, complex and unpredictable situations.

The IB offers high-quality programmes of international education that share a powerful vision. Informed by the values described in the learner profile, an IB education:

- focuses on learners - the IB’s student-centred programmes promote healthy relationships, ethical responsibility and personal challenge
- develops effective approaches to teaching and learning - IB programmes help students to develop the attitudes and skills they need for both academic and personal success
- works within global contexts - IB programmes increase understanding of languages and cultures, and explore globally significant ideas and issues
- explores significant content - IB programmes offer a curriculum that is broad and balanced, conceptual and connected.

IB learners strive to become inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced, and reflective. These attributes represent a broad range of human capacities and responsibilities that go beyond intellectual development and academic success.

What is the IB Primary Years Programme (PYP)?
The PYP is designed for students aged 3 to 12. It focuses on the development of the whole child as an inquirer, both in the classroom and in the world outside. It is a framework guided by six transdisciplinary themes of global significance, explored using knowledge and skills derived from six subjects areas, as well as transdisciplinary skills, with a powerful emphasis on inquiry.

The PYP is flexible enough to accommodate the demands of most national or local curriculums and provides the best preparation for students to engage in the IB Middle Years Programme.

The IB Primary Years Programme

- addresses students’ academic, social and emotional well-being
- 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.

The six subject areas identified within the IB Primary Years Programme:

- language
- social studies
- mathematics
- arts
- science
- personal, social and physical education

The most significant and distinctive feature of the IB Primary Years Programme are the six transdisciplinary themes

These themes provide IB World Schools with the opportunity to incorporate local and global issues into the curriculum and effectively allow students to “step up” beyond the confines of learning within subject areas.

- Who we are
  Inquiry into the nature of the self; beliefs and values; person, physical, mental, social and spiritual health; human relationships including families, friends, communities, and cultures; rights and responsibilities; what it means to be human
- Where we are in place and time
  Inquiry into orientation in place and time; personal histories; homes and journeys; the discoveries, explorations and migrations of humankind; the relationship between and the interconnectedness of individuals and civilizations, from local and global perspectives
- How we express ourselves
  Inquiry into the ways in which we discover and express ideas, feelings, nature, culture, beliefs and values; the ways in which we reflect on, extend and enjoy our creativity; our appreciation of the aesthetic
- How the world works
  Inquiry into the natural world and its laws, the interaction between the natural world (physical and biological) and human societies; how humans use their understanding of scientific principles; the impact of scientific and technological advances on society and on the environment.
"The recognition of Seneca Academy as an IB World School delivering the Primary Years Programme, makes me extremely proud of our teachers, staff and parents who have dedicated themselves to helping our students become lifelong learners. By creating an environment where students make connections between what they are learning in the classroom and the world around them, we are creating global citizens who will be well prepared to take leading roles in the world.”

Head of School, Dr. Brooke Carroll, Seneca Academy, USA
The Exhibition

The Exhibition is an important part of the PYP for all students. In the final year of the programme, students undertake a collaborative, transdisciplinary inquiry process that involves them in identifying, investigating and offering solutions to real-life issues or problems. As the culminating experience of the PYP, the Exhibition offers students an exciting opportunity to demonstrate independence and responsibility for their own learning.

Quality assurance and professional development

Any school, or group of schools, wishing to offer one or more IB programmes as an IB World School must first be authorized. The requirements are the same for all schools, and the procedure is designed to ensure that schools are well prepared to implement the programme successfully. All IB World Schools are required to participate in an ongoing process of review and development, using the same programme standards and practices.

As part of its ongoing commitment to the development of a highly skilled global learning community, the IB provides a wide range of high-quality professional development opportunities to help new, experienced and expert school leaders and educators understand, support, and successfully deliver IB programmes reflecting IB standards and practices.

The IB Mission

The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.

To this end, the organization works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment. These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.

• Become an IB student
• Teach at an IB World School
• Become an IB World School
• Volunteer or work for the IB

Support our mission and join the IB community at http://www.ibo.org or contact your IB regional office:

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Key findings from research on the impact of the IB Primary Years Programme

The International Baccalaureate (IB) Global Research Department collaborates with universities and independent research organizations worldwide to produce rigorous studies examining the impact and outcomes of the IB’s four programmes: the Primary Years Programme (PYP), the Middle Years Programme (MYP), the Diploma Programme (DP) and the Career-related Certificate (IBCC). Areas of inquiry include, but are not limited to: standards alignment, programme implementation, student performance and the learner profile. In addition, many researchers—completely independently of the IB—produce quality studies on the effects of IB programmes. The findings below come from a sampling of both independent and IB-commissioned research relating to the PYP.

A global study investigated the performance of 23,575 PYP and MYP students at international schools on the 2007-2009 International Schools’ Assessments (ISA), relative to non-IB students (n=14,317). The ISA assesses four domains: math, reading, narrative writing and expository writing. On the whole, the results indicate that IB students outperformed their non-IB peers on the ISA across all four domains in a majority of grade levels (Tan, Bibby, 2010).

![Chart showing effect size of difference in performance between IB and non-IB students by grade.](chart)

**Figure 1.** Effect size of difference in performance between IB and non-IB students by grade. Bars to the right of the vertical zero axis indicate higher scores by the IB cohort. On 10 of 12 measures the IB students had higher mean scores.

Phase II of the previous global ISA study included the primary years (grades 5 and 6) “Student Learning and Wellbeing Questionnaire”, focusing on student values and attitudes, perceptions of school life, and social and emotional well-being. A comparison of IB and non-IB students shows that PYP students had a moderately higher proportion of agreement across all four dimensions (Tan, Bibby, 2012).

Investigating the PYP authorization and implementation process, a study in Georgia, USA, combined an online survey of 561 administrators and teachers at 16 schools with in-depth case studies at 3 schools. Successful strategies for implementation were found to include: whole school immersion; collaborative planning; continuous training; availability of resources; existence of a media centre; family and community involvement; support by school leadership and the IB coordinator. Challenges included: limited resources; integration of state standards; the transdisciplinary nature; district and state expectations (Hall, Elder, Thompson, Pollack 2009).

A case study examining a full continuum school in Colombia identified the following elements as critical to the successful PYP to MYP transition: strong planning for teacher collaboration, greater knowledge of the programmes and professional development. These elements “helped students understand and cope with the differences between both programs as well as identify interdisciplinary links among subjects and thus be able to move from a transdisciplinary to an interdisciplinary approach more effectively” (Cowie de Arroyo 2011: 59).

The impact of the PYP and MYP in Texas, USA, was examined by comparing the performance of 43 IB schools on standardized state reading and math exams to a matched non-IB comparison group, and conducting interviews and classroom observations at 8 case study schools. The study concluded that IB schools scored as well as non-IB counterparts on standardized assessments, while also providing students with the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills and an intercultural perspective. Case study schools were very positive about the programmes, and favourable instructional practices, activities and student behaviours were observed more frequently than in similar classrooms. Despite some challenges with implementation, the majority of teachers and administrator cited the positive impact of the following as significant advantages: IB professional development; higher level thinking skills and a broader view of the world among students; the emphasis on global learning and cultural awareness; increased teacher collaboration and student motivation; the focus on all students; authentic assessment (Sillsano et al 2010).

In a study of teacher’s views of the PYP in Turkey, 14 preschool teachers at 4 schools were asked in semi-structured interviews about the strengths and weaknesses of the PYP and their views regarding implementation and improvement. Respondents stated that the biggest strengths of the programme are: children are educated as world citizens with international awareness; the research and inquiry base; the focus on the child; purposeful use of measurement and assessment studies; teachers have flexibility in practice; the allowance for individual creativity (Guler, Yaltirik 2011).
Teachers at a case study school in Europe identified personal, professional and environmental factors which contributed to success in adopting the inquiry-based teaching approach of the PYP. The important personal factors were: valuing children’s contribution to the inquiry process and providing a clear structure/framework, embracing the idea that “we are all learners”, belief of self-efficacy, open-mindedness, flexibility and positive attitude. Professional factors included: training and professional development (PD). The environmental factors were: encouragement of reflection and discussion, time and flexibility for planning, PD opportunities, support of whole school community (including parents) and facilitation of the administrators/coordinator (Veikoso Twigg 2010).

A dissertation examining the impact of the PYP on English language arts test scores of third, fourth and fifth graders at a South Carolina, USA school found that after controlling for gender, ethnicity and an indicator of income level, students had statistically significant higher scores than their peers at 16 district schools that did not offer the PYP (Jordan 2009).

Surveying teachers in a US school district on their views of the effects of IB professional development, a dissertation produced a number of key findings: teachers reported that implementation of the PYP positively impacted their philosophy, influenced their views on international education and of what a students’ education will look like in future years and impacted teacher efficacy. In particular, the survey found positive mean, median and mode scores for the PYP’s impact on teachers’ philosophy of education (Getchell 2010).

Dissertation research in a US school measuring student self-assessment of global citizen attributes indicated that girls (n=30) improved their life skills ratings for all six subtests assessed: cooperating with others, trustworthy and honest, positive attitude, respects individual differences, respects the rights of others and uses kind words, actions. Results also indicated that boys (n=30) improved their life skills ratings for four of the six subtests: trustworthy and honest, positive attitude, respects individual differences and uses kind words, actions. Both sets of results were shown to be statistically significant (Mellinger 2008).

A dissertation examined the role of professional development (PD) in implementing the PYP as a school improvement model at two US elementary schools. The study used interviews, focus groups, survey data and observations to explore the extent to which the schools’ PD activities supported adult learning needs, were targeted to impact classroom practice and encouraged the development of professional learning communities (PLCs). Findings indicated the PD did meet the teachers’ adult learning needs and PLCs were formed (Langston 2012).

Using a case study of a Hong Kong international school undergoing the transition from a national-based curriculum to the PYP, a dissertation examined the extent to which teachers learned and implemented the inquiry approach. Findings indicated that all teachers learned about the PYP and inquiry, how to better create curriculums and how to apply best practices, but to different extents. Data indicated that teachers had varying levels of understanding of the PYP and inquiry, and some perceptions exist of not implementing the approach well enough or not practicing critical reflection as much as they should. Knowledge of, engagement in and attitude towards the PYP and inquiry were found to be salient factors that affected teacher learning (Mok Mcleod 2009).

This sheet aims to provide a brief sampling of findings produced through recent independent studies as well as research conducted or commissioned by the IB. It does not attempt to represent all research on the PYP available in the field. As with all research, findings must be placed within the particular contexts in which the studies took place.

To read summaries or the complete reports of research projects conducted or commissioned by the IB Research Department, please visit http://www.ibo.org/research, or contact research@ibo.org.