

International Baccalaureate programs expand in Michigan

Shawn D. Lewis, *The Detroit News* 12:12 a.m. EST November 26, 2014

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- The program costs districts to implement but the only charges to parents are for senior exam fees
- Exam fees are waived for students eligible for free and reduced lunch
- An IB program diploma is appealing to colleges

Farmington Hills — The number of International Baccalaureate programs in Michigan has nearly tripled in five years as parents and school districts scramble for challenging curricula to help boost student college applications and prepare students to compete globally.

Schools in Livonia, Fenton and Clinton Township are among those that have pushed the total number offering the program last year to 83, up from 27 in 2009. Another 30 schools are waiting to be certified to teach the rigorous courses with a world view.

Michigan had just five IB programs in 2005 and has vaulted to be among the leaders in the country in the number of schools applying to offer the curriculum. There are programs in every major city in the state except for Grand Rapids, according to Colleen Duffy, communications and marketing associate manager for the International Baccalaureate Organization in Bethesda, Maryland.

"As we become more globally independent, we need people who can truly understand and think critically about world affairs," said Polly Bachrouche, IB program coordinator for Farmington Public Schools. "It's definitely a higher level of thinking than what was viewed as traditional, and is the best possible preparation for college."

That's what attracted Dominic Mularoni to the program at Farmington's Harrison High School. He really likes art, but in IB courses, he discusses art and ethics rather than textures and brush strokes.

"I'm interested in the ethical interpretation of how society views the Heidelberg art project compared to the graffiti art by Banksy," he said, referring to the pseudonymous English graffiti artist and activist, whose real name reportedly is Paul Horner.

Dominic studies that question in his theory of knowledge class.

"Banksy does a lot of graffiti and a lot of people want to keep them as treasures," the 17-year-old senior said. "Because it is graffiti, it's illegal, but nobody really is trying to track him down."

On the other hand, Dominic said, the Heidelberg project also is art, "but it's viewed as a good thing because it's helping to clean up the neighborhood. So how come Banksy's art is treated with the same respect as Heidelberg art, which is legal?"

The IB foundation began the program in 1968 and has developed into a full continuum of education for students, spanning the years from kindergarten to pre-university around the globe.



Schools use courses developed by IB's academic department, and a school's implementation of the course is evaluated every few years.

It is a rigorous curriculum emphasizing math, sciences, world literature, history, foreign languages and fine arts. The courses focus on international mindedness, and analytical and writing skills, IB officials say.

"Any student can enroll, but we suggest they take Honors classes in their ninth- and 10th-grade year as preparation, but if they choose not to, they can still enroll," said Patrick Adams, DeLaSalle Collegiate High School principal.

High school students also are required to take a course in the theory of knowledge, which focuses on critical thinking. They also must complete a series of creative, action and service projects, and must finish a college-level, 4,000-word extended essay.

The program can cost in the six figures for districts to implement, but the costs to parents are minimal and, according to Associate Principal Christopher Smith of the International Academy in Bloomfield Hills, fees can be waived.

"We are a public school so the only fee a student must pay is \$900 to take the test as a senior, which includes shipping and grading by examiners all over the world," Smith said. "But as with advanced placement tests, which students also must pay for, those fees are waived if students qualify for free and reduced lunch."

The four IB programs are available to students ages 3-19 from a range of cultural, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. There are 3,954 IB schools worldwide, up from 2,555 five years ago.

Education expert Kenneth Wong, chairman of the Education Department at Brown University, says admissions to top universities have become highly selective because of global competition among high-performing students.

"Expanding learning opportunities for students in Michigan with rigorous 21st century standards, through IB and other accelerated programs" are necessary to respond to global competition, he said.

But, he added, the challenge is to "ensure teacher quality in these rigorous programs so that graduates from these programs are indeed meeting the international academic goals." Wong said districts must make sure the push to expand advanced placement and IB classes does not hurt other students.

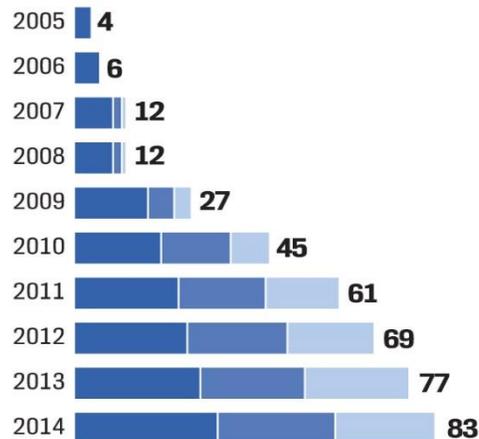
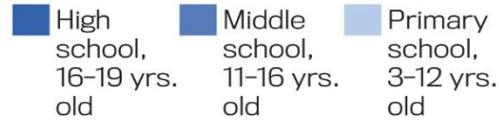
"The challenge for Michigan districts, given their fiscal reality, is to find ways to ensure educational quality for students who are not ready to engage in accelerated programs. Schools need to continue to serve as an equalizer in our society," he said.

Linda Whitaker is principal of Mark Twain Elementary School in Detroit, one of two Detroit Public Schools that are IB certified, along with Cass Technical High. She adds it's important to begin the program early. Her school has been certified in the primary years K-4 for about the past four years. She said the majority of students receive free and reduced lunch.

IB programs on rise

Dozens of new International Baccalaureate programs have opened in Michigan schools over the past decade.

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Source: International Baccalaureate Organization
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"I'm really proud of these babies and our staff," she said. "It's not perfect, but we've come a long way."

Among the newest schools to be certified include Cass Tech and De La Salle Collegiate High School, a private boys Catholic School in Warren.

Cass Tech IB coordinator Sherise Hedgespeth said the IB application process takes time. Cass Tech became a candidate school in July 2012.

She said the school sent teachers for training and brought in experts to help the school get ready for the program. They then were helped by a consultant provided by the IB to complete an application.

"We were authorized in August 2014," Hedgespeth said.

It's not cheap to become an IB school. It cost more than \$100,000 to begin the Cass Tech program.

"This fee included the yearly IB fees; costs for teacher training workshops (including travel); books and technology fees and other related costs," she said. "We have not yet reached our goal, but we had donations from UAW-Ford and (the Skillman Foundation)."

There are 30-50 students taking classes. "We will see what happens in January if these students decide to

become full IB diploma students," Hedgespeth said.

The process to pursue an IB program began four years ago at De La Salle.

"Many of our students indicated they were interested in schools offering the IB curriculum, but were conflicted because they wanted to stay at De La Salle," Adams said. Their program begins in the junior year.

Abhijay Kumar, 17, a senior at Harrison High School, said he enjoys being in the IB program.

"It has an international flair and is not just focused on American culture and how we view the world perspective, but how we try to empathize with other cultures and communities to find common ground," he said.