



# Oak Park Elementary School District 97

260 Madison Oak Park Illinois 60302 ph: 708.524.3000 fax: 708.524.3030 www.op97.org

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**To:** District 97 Board of Education  
Dr. Carol Kelley, Superintendent of Schools

**From:** Jennifer DeBruin, Julian IB Coordinator  
Christiana Harrington, Brooks IB Coordinator  
Dr. Eboney Lofton, Chief Academic and Accountability Officer  
Dr. Tawanda Lawrence, Senior Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

**Re:** Strengthening Middle School Instruction (Focus on Whole Child) IB Evaluation

**Date:** February 18, 2020

**Type of Report:** Informational

**Purpose of Report:** The purpose of this report is to provide the Board of Education an update on the IB program in District 97 as it relates to the IB Evaluation process and ongoing improvement. This information will focus on Goal 4 "Focus on Whole Child" - IB (Strengthening Middle School Instruction).

In order to provide context for the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program (IB MYP) in District 97, we have provided a summary of the history of the program of Oak Park and the processes surrounding the initial implementation of the program at the middle schools.

Prior to the adoption of the IB philosophy and framework, the middle schools were quite different from one another. In addition, at each school there was variation between classes of the same subject and grade level. In an effort to ensure all children received an equitable and appropriate education, the superintendent, at the time, recommended that board members, teachers, and parents explore the International Baccalaureate (IB) Organization. He believed that the IB program encompassed educational best practices that the community believed in within one organized, supported, research--based program.

Exploration of the IB MYP began with a school visit to an IB school in Shaker Heights, Ohio, in Spring 2012. This school's demographics and size were comparable to District 97 thus allowing the District 97 team to see an IB program in action and the ways in which the program affected the school climate, culture and curriculum. From the conversations that emerged after the site visit and further investigations into the program, the district determined it was beneficial to become IB schools for multiple reasons:

- quality professional development grounded in best practices;
- focus on educational practices that prepare students for the real--world;
- widening of student perspectives beyond the classroom;
- solid unit planning platform to guide curriculum planning in a consistent manner; and
- an all--school philosophy that is inclusive.

On July 17, 2012, the Board of Education endorsed the implementation of the IB MYP program at the middle schools, following a Board Report presented to the Board on [June 26, 2012](#).

*Equity: What are the differential experiences of children by achievement level and by household income? (could be a slightly different set of categories, for example, single parents, households with and without internet access, etc.) What is being done to achieve equity or balance in other ways?*

Teachers are working collaboratively through collective inquiry and action research to answer these four questions for each unit of instruction:

1. What do we want students to know and be able to do?
2. How will know students have learned it?
3. How will we respond when students haven't learned it yet?
4. How will we respond when students have already learned it?

The process requires teachers to work collaboratively rather than in isolation and take collective responsibility for student learning. The teams develop common unit assessments and align grading practices to gather evidence of student learning and use this evidence to inform and improve the collective practice of its members. Each step directly aligns to a section of the unit plan. Carrying out this process ensures that we are engaged in a continuous cycle of improvement. The student groups that are furthest away from the district's learning targets are identified within the School Improvement Plan (SIP). Teacher teams synthesize and analyze this data to guide instruction and decision making. Analyzing and responding to the data in this way also helps teachers think about approaches to learning, intervention and/or acceleration that students may need.

The concept-based approach is the foundation of the pedagogical philosophy of the Middle Years Program. This pedagogical approach relies on experience, transfer of knowledge and understanding as opposed to memorization of information such as facts and dates. Research indicates, "a concept--based curriculum is naturally more equitable than a traditional coverage- centered curriculum." (Stern, Lauriault and Ferraro, 2018) Conceptual understanding allows students to make connections to the content based on their own interests and experiences. This type of learning is meaningful and creates a deeper understanding for students. Students experience rigorous learning objectives and consistent assessment criteria. The assessment criteria are consistent for all subjects and the cognitive demand increases up to year three. Students are aware of the criteria they are held to throughout their middle school experience.

The practice of using rubrics also helps to address equity. The assessment criteria prescribed by the MYP are used in all eight subjects. Teachers use the IB assessment criteria rubrics to grade student work. This practice provides a common language to discuss student achievement and provide clear feedback to students on the areas of strengths and opportunities for growth. The practice of using rubrics "makes grading so much more straightforward and bias-resistant, relieving the teacher of the worry that his/her evaluation of student work won't be objective. Rubrics can protect us from bringing in our own implicit biases about students into our evaluation. The rubric shows exactly what we are using to evaluate students' performance." (Feldman, 189) Once an assessment is given teachers in the same grade level and subject collaborate on calibrating the student work and achievement levels to ensure inter-rater reliability. This practice is a part of the cycle of improvement as explained above.

**Communication with key stakeholders:** *What is being done/has been done to elicit feedback/ideas from teachers, parents, older students, administrators, or other key stakeholders. What are the most common concerns and positive comments received and how are they being addressed?*

Feedback for the program is received and addressed in many ways from stakeholders:

**Parents:** We receive parent input and feedback during meetings, conference reflections via surveys and/or parent emails, parent information nights, curriculum nights, Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) council presentations and district level Parent University sessions.

Below are quotes from parents that were captured during the self-study process:

*"Both of my children have participated in the IB program at Brooks. I've seen first hand the value it brings in their learning to think deeper about their unique lessons and apply that thinking more broadly across tangential world and societal topics."*

*"I've attended several parent IB sessions the school has offered, as well as, read through the many rubrics that accompany their school work. The commitment to communication about the IB curriculum is evident and clear."*

*"I appreciate seeing community resources incorporated into the program, for example: Sarah's Inn, NAMI, Robotics and Spoken Word."*

**Students:** We receive feedback from students through surveys, town hall meetings (Julian) and student advisory board meetings (Brooks).

**Teachers:** We receive teacher feedback during team leader meetings, department chair meetings, grade level team meetings and surveys at the end of professional learning sessions.

As a result of the feedback gathered, teachers and school administration articulated that they appreciate the framework as a common reference point to organize and develop curriculum. They report that they value the embedded professional learning communities that IB lends itself to as well as the common and intentional planning time.

**Building Administration:** Feedback from building administration is received during administrative leadership meetings, building leadership meetings, open meetings hosted by the administration team and from the union leadership.

A more recent example of capturing and acting on feedback is the workshop that was recently conducted for special education teachers. The middle school special education coordinator shared the need to continue to refine the role of special education teachers within the IB framework. This was addressed initially through collaboration with the middle school special education coordinator, the Senior Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment and the IB coordinators. As a result of this meeting, a professional development workshop was facilitated by the IB coordinators with the objective to discuss and plan IB assessments with the appropriate modifications and accommodations for students receiving special education services.

As an IB school we are required to have four academic policies: Academic Honesty Policy, Assessment Policy, Inclusion Policy and Language Policy. These policies are reviewed by the Building Leadership Team (BLT) for updates on a yearly basis. During this time, we incorporate student and teacher feedback from their experiences.

### **Areas of Opportunity:**

The most common concerns shared are around professional learning as it relates to implementation. How can professional development concerns be addressed consistently and appropriately to accommodate teacher needs and experiences to be the most relevant to their position? Additionally, a concern is common learning and understanding for all stakeholders. How can we build capacity of knowledge and implementation of the program that includes all stakeholders so we are systematically growing the program in the schools and within the community?

*Evaluation and on-going improvement: What are the goals of this particular activity - How do we know if it is successful or not? What is the plan for measurement of how implementation is going? What "hard" data will be captured and what 'soft' data (impressions, opinions, etc.) will be incorporated? What information (not anecdotes) is available at this stage?*

Each IB World School is regularly evaluated to ensure that the standards and practices of the IB programme(s) are being maintained. Evaluation takes place at least once every five years. The overall goal of an IB Evaluation visit is to reflect and evaluate on the IB standards and practices in order to plan for continual improvement. As part of the evaluation, the school engages in a self-study process that is a key element in the school's continual improvement.

*Below is a summary of where the district is in the IB evaluation process:*

**Building Quality Curriculum (BQC):** The BQC process requires a team of expert curriculum reviewers to provide guidance and feedback on MYP unit plans. This involves supporting continuous improvement of written, taught and assessed curriculum.

The district participated in the BQC process during the winter of 2019. Eighteen units were sent to the International Baccalaureate Organization as part of the BQC process. Feedback was received from the IBO on all of these units. This feedback was given to the department chairs and used to set goals around areas of the written curriculum that can be revised and improved. Units will be consistently updated and revised to ensure real-world connections stay relevant in a way that engages our students. In addition, our schools use the mission statement and the IB standards and practices to guide future changes.

**Self-Study** - To prepare for the formal evaluation, the IBO requires that schools participate in an intense self-evaluation of all standards. All stakeholders in some capacity will evaluate our progress based on the practices related to the standards. This was completed over the last two years.

**Application** - In December 2019, the district applied for evaluation. The application for evaluation included extensive documentation related to all standards for which the schools are assessed.

**Evaluation Visit** - During the spring of 2020, three representatives from the International Baccalaureate Organization will visit Oak Park for a total of four days, two days per school, to tour the school and speak with all stakeholders. The dates are April 27th & 28th for Brooks and April 30th and May 1st for Julian. This visit along with all documentation previously submitted will be used for the formal evaluation. A report will then be generated to provide feedback on the alignment with the IB standards and practices. The feedback for each of the standards and practices fall into one of four categories:

<b>Commendation</b>	Praise given for the standard being in place in a creative and/or above and beyond way.
<b>Finding</b>	The standard is evident.
<b>Recommendation</b>	The standard may be evident but not entirely. Improvements will need to be made prior to the next evaluation visit in 5 years.
<b>Matter to be Addressed</b>	The standard is not evident, and this must be addressed prior to IB granting continued IB status.

The district will know if the evaluation visit was successful based on the feedback received from the IB School Visiting Team via a written evaluation report.

*Resource requirements: What resources are involved in this implementation/activity? This should include not just direct dollars, but class time, teacher prep/planning time, parental inputs, school facilities drawn from other purposes, etc. How do we reflect on how well they are being put to use, if greater efficiencies are required, or if more resources could profitably be devoted to the activity?*

The resources involved in the evaluation visit have some budgetary implications for the cost of the self-study and the Building Quality Curriculum process. There is no additional teacher preparation/planning time needed for the evaluation process. Parental input was incorporated during the self-study. Parents were interviewed on their experience relative to specific standards during the self-study reflection process.

The IB Coordinators and Senior Director of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment collaborate with the department chairs to plan professional learning for teachers. Teachers are also sent to professional development provided by the IB organization to build capacity of the IB philosophy and pedagogy.

Based on the written evaluation report from the IB School Visit Team Members some of the feedback may have additional professional learning requirements and/or implications. This might require sending additional teachers to IB training and/or providing release time for teacher collaboration and summer planning.

## Works Cited

Erickson, HL. (2012). *Concept-based teaching and learning*. International Baccalaureate Organization.

Feldman, Joe. (2019). *Grading For Equity*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin.

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