

**Gifted Learners and
International Baccalaureate[©]
Primary Years, Middle Years, and Diploma Programmes**

Developed for the **Texas Association for Gifted and Talented**

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Introduction

International Baccalaureate[®] (IB) offers avenues of inquiry, appropriate assessment measures, and opportunities to meet the affective needs and strengths for gifted students. The IB Primary Years, Middle Years, and Diploma Programme supply sound pedagogical and instructional components that facilitate learning for the gifted and provide instructional strategies for educators.

The position of Texas Association for Gifted and Talented (TAGT) is that

1. International Baccalaureate (IB) provides instructional strategies that meet the cognitive abilities and affective of gifted learners;
2. International Baccalaureate (IB) provides content and assessment measures that gifted learners may access to work toward the Texas Performance Standards Project (TPSP); and
3. International Baccalaureate (IB) offers professional development appropriate for teachers of the gifted.

1. International Baccalaureate[®] (IB) provides instructional strategies that meet the cognitive abilities and affective needs and strengths of gifted learners.

International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) Mission Statement²

The International Baccalaureate Organization 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 IBO works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment....²

This mission statement parallels the “Texas State Goal for the Education of Gifted Students”⁶ which states the following:

Students who participate in services designed for gifted students will demonstrate skills in self-directed learning, thinking, research, and communication as evidenced by the development of innovative products and performances that reflect individuality and creativity and are advanced in relation to students of similar age, experience, or environment.

High school graduates who have participated in services for gifted students will have produced products and performances of professional quality as part of their program services.⁶

While IB approaches learning through a global lens that aims students toward international understanding and caring, the TPSP focuses on students' products that reflect rigorous and individual learning. The parallel occurs in the gifted students' expressions of learning that communicates personal interest in their world and the world around them. As their affective nature and needs are met, they contribute to the world at large. TPSP meets their needs in a concrete and personal way while IB offers an opportunity for the gifted to express themselves in a global venue.

Depth, Complexity, Pacing

The IB continuum offers depth and complexity in curriculum, appropriate program design, and assessment measures that are commensurate with the Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented (State Plan)⁶ and the Texas Performance Standards Project (TPSP).⁵

*The International Baccalaureate North America Orientation Seminar*³ describes the elements of their program design and curriculum in their "IB Continuum."³ This table defines each level of the continuum:

LEVEL	CURRIULUM	Criterion Referenced ASSESSMENT
PYP*	Transdisciplinary Programme of Inquiry Action	Languages Exhibition
MYP*	Integration Areas of Interaction Community Service	Languages Personal Project
DP*	Concurrency of Learning Theory of Knowledge (TOK) Creativity Action Service (CAS)	Languages Extended Essay

*PYP - Primary Years Programme

*MYP - Middle Years Programme

*DP - Diploma Programme

Its pedagogy also includes features that correspond to those accepted in gifted education, e.g., constructivism, student-centered curriculum, inquiry-based instruction, experiential learning, and differentiation. Shared features of the continuum of all IB programmes emphasize the application of learning, development of learning skills, individual as well as team work, and action or community service. These elements are at the core of curriculum and accepted instructional strategies for gifted learners.

Cognitive and Affective Characteristics

The *Learner Profile*² that describes what all IB learners strive towards and ways of measuring growth of IB learners is analogous to characteristics that describe the gifted learner in both cognitive abilities and affective needs and strengths.

Karen Phillips of Texas International Baccalaureate Schools (TIBS) and Ann Wink, International Baccalaureate North America (IBNA), present “Flexible Pathways for Gifted Students in International Baccalaureate” (Texas Association for Gifted Talented State Conference in Austin, Texas, November, 2006.)⁴ In their presentation they describe attributes of the learner that contribute to the *Learner Profile* used to guide and evaluate students. Attributes include appreciation, confidence, creativity, curiosity, empathy, enthusiasm, independence, integrity, respect, and tolerance. These attributes are found in the IB learner profile booklet, “Nature of the IB Learner Profile.”² This *Learner Profile* is the IBO mission statement translated into a set of learning outcomes for the 21st century.

Terms from the Learner Profile include these:

Inquirers	Knowledgeable	Thinkers
Communicators	Principled	Open-minded
Caring	Risk-takers	Reflective

(A full description of each characteristic is available from www.ibo.org.)

Characteristics of the gifted that are commonly accepted include curiosity, task commitment, metacognition, self-direction, risk-taking, and empathy. While the two lists are not totally analogous, they offer commonality. The similarity between descriptors of each adds insight into appropriateness of IB for the gifted.

2. International Baccalaureate[®] (IB) provides content and assessment measures that gifted learners may access to work toward the Texas Performance Standards Project (TPSP)

This position statement adds to the discussion of content and assessment that meets the nature and needs of the gifted.

Content

In a discussion of the Diploma Programme (DP), Phillips of TIBS and Wink, IBNA, ask, “What makes DP different?” Their response illustrates how IB combines breadth and depth, emphasizes critical, compassionate thinking, and promotes global vision. Breadth, depth, and critical thinking are a part of curriculum for gifted (State Plan).⁶ The ideal of a global vision may be chosen as a part of a study through the TPSP.

A look at the “Theory of Knowledge,”² a course in the DP, adds to their description. “Theory of Knowledge” stimulates critical reflection on knowledge and experience, allows students the opportunity to examine the grounds for moral, political and aesthetic judgments, challenges students to question the bases of knowledge, alerts them to subjective and ideological biases, and develops their ability to analyze evidence. Texas Performance Standards Project encourages Exit level students to do the same.

Research of Hutchinson & Stronge (2004)¹ ask the question, “Why is IB recommended as an advanced academic option for gifted and advanced students?”

Their research finds the following recommended practices that answer their question in the affirmative:

Acceleration	Student Choice	Real World Problems
Prior Knowledge	Product & Process	Interdisciplinary
Conceptual	Depth, Breadth, & Complexity	
Differentiation	High Expectations	Higher Level Thinking

Metacognitive skills

Open-Ended

Authentic

The conclusions of their research assert that an analysis of IB program and curricular goals finds that IB program design aligns with 21 recommended research-based practices for teaching and learning in gifted and general education. This research indicates that IB program and curricular goals by design is a viable advanced academic option for gifted students. For further insight into their comparative analysis of IB program design and recommended educational practices that references many researchers well-known and respected in the field of gifted education, request the study from lhutchinson@ibo.hamptonk12.va.us¹

Assessment

Phillips and Wink (2006)⁴ “describe what form assessment takes in all IB programmes. All require a culminating product. The PYP exhibition at end of 5th grade may take many forms but is required of all students. Community service is a must for all students in MYP. The personal project at the end of grade ten (MYP) may be written or may take other forms. The Diploma Programme asks for an extended essay, a 4,000 word piece of written independent research. The essay offers an opportunity to investigate a topic of special interest, a way to add breadth, and a way to deepen studies by selecting a topic in one of his or her courses, all aspects of appropriate curriculum and evaluation for the gifted.

In addition to the extended essay, students must complete a minimum of 150 hours over two years in CAS (Creativity, Action, Service). Creativity may not only apply to the arts, but also may be shown in designing and implementing service projects. The service element involves community and social service activities.

All levels of IB assessment measures required of IB students may be infused with TPSP to meet the requirements of the Texas standards suggested for gifted students.

IB includes languages as a part of their assessment. Gifted education makes no requirements for students to read, write, and speak a language other than English.

Gifted students could, however, create a TPSP that incorporates a foreign language or could access AP language courses that have been differentiated.

The focus of IB is not the gifted learner. Even without this focus, their program design, curriculum, and assessment may facilitate the gifted learner as a student and as a person. Curriculum and Instruction requirements of the State Plan and TPSP may be infused into curriculum and assessment designed for IB students.

3. International Baccalaureate® (IB) offers professional development appropriate for teachers of the gifted.

In Hutchinson and Stronge (2004)¹ “Effective Teaching for International Baccalaureate Teachers” qualities of effective teachers, both prerequisite knowledge and experience, and the teacher as a person are defined as the following:

EFFECTIVE TEACHING: Qualities of Effective Teachers

Prerequisites

Verbal ability
Knowledge of teaching and learning
Certification status
Content knowledge
Teaching experience

The Teacher as a Person

Caring
Fairness & Respect
Interaction with Students
Enthusiasm & Motivation
Attitude Toward Teaching
Reflective Practice
(teacher efficacy)

This comparative analysis asks the question, “Do IB teachers exhibit characteristics of effective teachers?” They look at three areas: Instructional Skills, Assessment Practices, and Teacher Efficacy-Beliefs (Teacher as a Person). Their findings reveal, “The teaching practices of the teachers who are responsible for leading students to high levels of achievement align with the best practices for effective teaching for gifted and general education students in advanced academics.”¹

Their conclusions are based on best practices found in the literature of noted researchers in gifted education, e.g. Callahan, Feldhusen, VanTassel-Baska, Johnsen & Ryser, along a variety of other names well-known and respected in field.

IB requires professional development for the full campus staff. Their professional development is rigorous and requires all teachers follow guides and guidelines developed by IBO for each level of IB. While the professional development may be specific to IB, it incorporates a point of view espoused by gifted researchers and educators. Teachers of the gifted who are provided six hour update professional development with the IB model may easily translate their learning into curriculum, instruction, and assessment for gifted learners.

Conclusion

While not designed for gifted learners, International Baccalaureate[®] Primary years, Middle Years, and Diploma Programmes provide an avenue to accommodate many of their learning needs and strengths. Concept-based curriculum and instruction and development of authentic, audience-specific assessments are examples of the parallels between gifted education and IB. The combination of differentiation that recognizes the nature and needs of the gifted with International Baccalaureate that provides rigorous and relevant curriculum and demanding professional development offers one option for educators, parents, and gifted students who seek appropriate learning opportunities.

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