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## How Parents Like You Can Make a Difference

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As a parent, you play a critical role in making the IB experience as rewarding as it can be for your IB student.

- **Know your school's support systems.**

Every school is different, but every school that's made the serious commitment and investment necessary to become an authorized IB World School is also deeply committed and invested in keeping the programme successful. This means that, regardless of the socio-economic demographics of your particular school district, there will be a support infrastructure for your child. Support includes counseling, tutoring, group-study sessions, and other important services. Make sure you and your child capitalize on these resources. And consider contributing some of your time to these efforts (see below).

- **Get involved—community service coordination.**

Dr. Melissa Sheppard, executive director of academics for the Beaufort County School District in South Carolina, stresses the importance of her district's IB Parent Advisory Councils. Parents in Beaufort take a leading role in organizing their kids' community service activities and help individual students choose service commitments that suit their particular interests and gifts.

- **Motivation—recognize achievement.**

Rather like Little League and other children's athletic organizations, the Beaufort district IB Parent Advisory Councils organize award ceremonies and banquets, making sure scholastic achievements are encouraged through formal acknowledgment: trophies, events, and other celebrations of IB community esteem.

- **Coach them with study, essay writing, and personal project support**

Students in the IB Diploma Programme must write extended essays. The effort is significant and requires self-discipline and focus. Parents in Beaufort make themselves available to review work in progress in consultation with teachers to make sure writing projects stay on plan and on schedule.

In North Carolina's Wake County public school system, parents team up with the IB coordinator to provide support to Middle Years Programme students as they work on their final year personal projects. Borrowing an idea from the Apple Store, parents set up "genius tables" in the lunchroom once a week. The Middle Years Programme final year project is a largely independent effort requiring a great deal of self-discipline, and the genius table initiative gives students the benefit of ongoing informal project feedback and mentoring from parents.

- **Study Hall**

One of the simplest, yet most effective ways a parent can volunteer is to supervise after-school group study sessions. Just being there shows you appreciate the effort kids are bringing to their self-realization. Of course, parents with curriculum subject expertise are always welcome and appreciated, but expertise isn't necessary. Commitment to help your student and his or her fellow pupils succeed is all that's required to make a big difference in the life of your child and his or her peers.

- **Advocacy**

Once parents understand the IB vision and understand that their voices are highly valued in the culture of respect that is IB, they often become the IB's most effective advocates. Even after their kids have graduated, we find IB parents helping incoming parents and students get their heads around the myriad benefits of an IB education. Our parents also play a key role in connecting the IB to the community at large: college presidents, local businesses, non-profits, and outreach centers. And come budget appropriations time, no one makes a more compelling case that every local public and private dollar directed towards maintaining an IB programme is a dollar well invested.