



RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

INTERIM REPORT: Study of IB students' high school and post-secondary experiences: US public schools serving students from low-income households

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Background

This research snapshot highlights interim findings from a longer-term study that is currently underway (2015–2019). The study examines the high school and post-secondary experiences of International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme (DP) students in US public schools serving students from predominantly low-income households with little or no history of college-going¹.

Research design

This study employs a mixed-methods case study approach, focusing on three large high schools in California with a substantial proportion of low-income students. The study includes three main components: surveys of current DP and non-DP students ($n = 1,063$), interviews with current DP students ($n = 36$) and interviews with DP alumni ($n = 8$) enrolled in higher education.

Findings

Preliminary student survey findings²

Learning

Compared to non-IB students, full DP students were significantly more likely to have higher-quality learning experiences.

Classroom rigour

The results showed that both full DP and partial DP students were significantly more likely to perceive their classrooms as rigorous compared to their non-IB peers.

Terminology

With regard to IB status, the researchers identified four groups for comparison in this study: **full DP students**, **partial DP students**, **other DP students** and **non-IB students**. “**Non-IB students**” were those who were not enrolled in an IB programme; these students were used as a reference group to examine the impact of IB programmes on students’ educational experiences. “**Full DP students**” were those who planned to complete the full DP. “**Partial DP students**” included those who were taking DP courses and planned to take DP exams (including those taking selected DP courses or Career-related Programme (CP) students). Finally, “**other DP students**” were those who were taking DP courses but did not plan to take DP exams.

Classroom engagement

Compared to non-IB students, both full DP and partial DP groups were significantly more likely to have better classroom engagement experiences.

School engagement

Students taking DP courses tended to participate in more extra-curricular school activities than non-IB students. The most noticeable difference emerged for full DP students.

¹ “College-going” in this context means attending a higher education institution.

² For each variable in this section, the researchers statistically controlled for student demographic characteristics so they would not influence the results.

Teacher–student relationships

The regression analysis did not identify any noticeable differences in these schools across the different student groups.

College-going culture

Both full DP and partial DP students tended to perceive their high schools' college-going culture in a more positive way than did their non-IB counterparts. The difference was more apparent for full DP students than for partial DP students.

College advising

Full DP students and partial DP students were more likely to have college advising support from their high schools than were non-IB students.

College aspirations

The results demonstrated that students in IB programmes were more likely to have higher educational attainment goals compared to their non-IB counterparts. The difference was substantial for full DP students in particular.

Preliminary student interview findings

Sense of community

IB students characterized their IB peers as being both diverse and familial. Use of the terms “home” and “family” suggest that students are very comfortable at school and that their academic environment is marked by collaboration rather than competition. As one student explains:

“My peers. We work together. It’s like a small family, kind of, or a small community. We support each other. We hold each other up. We know if someone’s feeling down and say, ‘Hey, what’s wrong?’ ... you know? ‘If you need any help, we’re here’”.

Teachers

Students reported that their teachers and counsellors are both encouraging and demanding. Students appreciated their teachers' high expectations of them, both academically and personally. It also appears that teachers are willing to spend time outside of the school day to provide extra help to their students. Students also shared that their teachers work hard to keep them motivated.

Extra-curricular activities

DP students participate in a wide variety of sports and extra-curricular activities. These activities seemed to provide

students with additional support structures, and gave students a sense of positive self-worth. Students also made connections between their involvement in extra-curricular activities and performing better in their coursework.

Higher education and career aspirations

The survey findings suggest that students' aspirations for college and career are motivated by their personal struggles, and their families' and teachers' expectations. The interview data supported the survey data, indicating that the schools have solid college-going cultures.

Preliminary alumni interview findings

Educational resilience of first-generation college students

For many first-generation college students, the transition to college can be difficult, but this does not seem to be the case for the students who participated in the DP. All students felt that the rigour and challenge of the DP helped them make the transition to college smoothly. Students reported already knowing how to study, and linked this directly to their high school DP experience; they shared positive academic experiences in college and clear career aspirations in relation to majors. Students explained how their DP experience contributed to a positive academic self-concept and self-efficacy, college identity and career and life goals.

Students also explained how their IB coursework helped them to earn college credit or placed them in a higher-level college course. Given the credit some students received from their DP courses, some students planned to take additional courses related to their major or to study abroad.

Conclusion

Overall, the survey data suggests that DP students have a qualitatively different high school experience from their non-DP peers. The survey analysis found statistically significant differences, in favour of DP students, in seven out of the eight outcome variables examined in this study. DP students described feeling a strong sense of belonging in their school that they attributed to their teachers and peers, and to their involvement in the DP. Lastly, the interview data indicates that both DP students and alumni demonstrate many qualities of academic resilience.

This snapshot was developed by the IB Research department. For more information on this study or other IB research, please email research@ibo.org.