



# EVOLVING TOGETHER

At Atlantic Community High School, the Diploma Programme was selected as the tool of choice for improvement. More than 20 years later, it has transformed the school in unexpected ways.

In 1992, Atlantic Community High School in Delray Beach, Florida, US, began offering the IB Diploma Programme (DP). The goal, says assistant principal and DP coordinator David Youngman, was to improve academic performance at this inner-city school. (Atlantic is a Title I school, which means that the percentage of low-income students is at a level where the US government provides the school with financial support.) Of the 36 DP students that first year, most were white. These days, "more and more come from the communities we serve," he says. While Atlantic's DP students come from many different backgrounds, they have one goal in common: to go to university. These students want to be in a program with others who share that goal and are committed to preparing for it.

At Atlantic, the definition of success has changed, but the attainment of success has continued. The attraction of the DP has also continued for students: This past school year, about 150 students sat for the diploma in the May exam session. The main reason the number has grown is the programme's success at the school, Youngman says. "Once you build a reputation, students will follow." They see DP alumni going to the universities they choose—including Ivy League schools—and being successful in life after winning academic awards and doing well on DP exams, he explains.

As soon as students begin the DP at Atlantic, educators make sure that they know the assumption is they will graduate and thrive in university. A counselor specifically focuses on students who would be the first in their family to go to university, since they may need extra support. That kind of attention and support has helped increase the number of DP students that Atlantic can serve, Youngman says. While the school district limits the number of students at Atlantic who can come to the school from outside its geographical zone to 750 students, 730 of them are in the DP or the Middle Years Programme (MYP). Some of them are so committed to being part of the programme, they catch their bus at 5:55 am; others travel over an hour to get to Atlantic. In fact, the need to travel a distance to attend Atlantic keeps some students from applying to the DP there, Youngman says.

**Atlantic Community High School (public, Title 1) grades 9-12**

**First offered the Diploma Programme: 1992**

**Total number of students: 2,263**

**DP coordinator: David Youngman**

**Head of school: Tara Ocampo**



“  
*The Diploma Programme... has transformed our school.*  
”

— DAVID YOUNGMAN,  
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL AND  
DP COORDINATOR, ATLANTIC  
COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL

Atlantic's criteria for acceptance into the MYP and eventually the DP are simple: students must have at least a B average from the last half of grade seven and the first half of grade eight. There are no requirements for classes that must be taken, and there is no test.

Interested students and their parents get many opportunities to learn more about the programme. There are parent nights, school fairs, open houses and morning tours, as well as videos posted online. The question that Youngman hears most often from students is whether they will have a life if they enroll in the DP or whether all their energy will go into classes and homework. "We couldn't run our school without IB students," Youngman says. "We need them on the football team and student government, for example."

In fact, he says, he tells students that if all they have time to do is academic work, then the DP is not a good fit for them. The programme is designed to help them be well-rounded.

Among the benefits of the programme at Atlantic is that it offers a wide range of courses, including further mathematics, anthropology and philosophy. Having the further math class—which is not offered by a lot of schools—on their transcript helps make students more appealing to well-reputed technology-oriented universities like Stanford and MIT, Youngman says.

Offering such a range of subjects provides benefits to both the school and students who are not even taking the classes, he says. When Atlantic students talk to students at other schools about the classes they are taking, mentioning unusual courses like anthropology can interest the other students in attending Atlantic. In addition, students bring the perspectives they learn in anthropology or philosophy to other classes and share them with their peers.

Unlike many students who feel they can get away with not turning in homework because their school will not give them a failing grade, DP students are invested, "they have skin in the game," Youngman says. Youngman says. "There is a chance they won't make it, and they are willing to take that risk of not getting the Diploma." The purpose of the programme is to let students stretch themselves, he explains. "They appreciate what they work so hard for."

"I think the Diploma Programme has been great for the school. It has transformed our school," Youngman says. "It has given a lot of opportunity to students."

---

The state of Florida encourages students to take accelerated programmes and values the Diploma Programme greatly. That's why it waives several requirements that non-DP students must fulfill for graduation. Even better, it offers them what it calls Bright Futures scholarships if they attend Florida universities. The scholarships cover roughly three-fourths of the students' costs. The scholarships' goal is to help keep some of Florida's brightest students in the state.

