



**The International  
School of San Francisco**  
Middle Years Programme  
Diploma Programme

HEAD OF SCHOOL

**Dr. Melinda  
Bihn**

IB WORLD SCHOOL SINCE  
**1979**

NUMBER OF STUDENTS  
**1,077**

COUNTRY  
**United States**

## Language, culture and international mindedness: developing global citizens with the IB

Founded in 1962, The International School of San Francisco was the first bilingual school in San Francisco, the fourth IB school in the United States, and the first International Baccalaureate (IB) school in the American west.

Today, the school serves a learning community of almost 1,100 students from PK2 to Grade 12, comprised of more than 60 nationalities. More than 20% of the student body are French nationals. Students in preschool to Grade 8 benefit from a bilingual immersion environment, with the blended American and French curricula delivered in both English and French. Since being authorized to offer the IB in 1979, students in Grades 11 and 12 choose to study either the French Baccalauréat or the IB Diploma Programme (DP) to culminate their pre-university studies.

In 2024, the school became a candidate school for the Middle

Years Programme (MYP), which will be offered in Grades 6 through 10 in both French and English.

Head of School, Melinda Bihn notes that the IB programmes complement the school's mission and French programme. "Bilingual education has always been at the heart of our school's mission, and the IB only strengthens our students' experience of French education, making explicit our goal of educating collaborative global citizens with compassionate hearts and inquisitive minds."

This emphasis on bilingual education is reflected in the school's decision to offer the IB's Advanced Bilingual Diploma, one of just 23 IB World Schools across the globe to do so. The Advanced Bilingual Diploma is awarded to IB students who complete and receive a grade 4 or higher in both French A and English A in subject group one and at least one subject taught and assessed in English and assessed



International Baccalaureate®  
Baccalauréat International  
Bachillerato Internacional

in French between groups three, four, five or six. At The International School of San Francisco, students complete their Advanced Bilingual Diploma in French and English.

Assistant Head of School for Teaching and Learning, Julie Strong, explains that “the IB always felt like a good match with the French programme. There is no better way to learn more about a culture than to become fluent in its language. The international emphasis of the IB provides a lens for our students to learn more about French culture and the Francophone world.



“The French educational system is focused on developing citizenship, and the IB enables us to expand this to encompass global citizenship beyond the local and regional areas, where we already have strong connections.”

**Dr. Julie Strong**

Assistant Head of School for Teaching and Learning

## Developing global citizens

International mindedness is at the heart of the IB’s mission to ‘develop young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding’, and has been since its establishment in 1968.

Language acquisition is fundamental to the IB programmes, to deepen students’ understanding of another culture through the study of its language. Strong notes that “one of the wonderful things about the IB is the emphasis on high-level language learning. Language acquisition is a lens into different cultures and components of our global community. Because of this, our school community attracts students and families from all over the world who feel that a multilingual environment is going to be positive for their development.”

A bilingual diploma is available to DP candidates, and The International School of San Francisco teaches at least one science and one humanities subject in English and French to support this. One of the benefits of this, Strong explains, is “it enables our students to look at source materials from the Francophone world in a way that would never happen in a monolingual environment.

“However, it is not just language learning that encourages us to look at culture. The IB’s Global Politics class asks students to take a global perspective. This understanding of other cultures and perspectives is embedded into the IB programmes.”

Strong also highlights the school’s extensive global travel programme that encompasses more than 20 destinations including Senegal, Tahiti, Hapa, South Africa and, of course, Paris, offering the students the opportunity to put their learning into practice across the world.

## Preparing for success at University

Offering a choice of six subjects and a ‘core’ of three required components, the DP effectively prepares students for the rigor of higher education. “Our students tell us that the transition is easy for them. The extended essay prepares them to research and write, it fosters the skills they need to tackle the big projects they complete at university”, notes Strong.

Helping students to navigate the world with confidence and command, empathy and joy is at the heart of The International School of San Francisco’s mission and Strong observes this in the school’s IB students : “our students feel confident navigating a variety of environments and they go on to study at the best American universities including the Ivies and West Coast standouts such as Stanford and the University of California schools.

“We have also seen a surge in international applications to universities recently, including to prestigious UK universities. This is a product of the environment and the international and multilingual programs we have here at the school,” expands Strong, “our students can move across cultures and communicate across borders with ease, because they have been practicing for their whole education.”

## Expanding IB education at the school

Research-based and drawn from the best educational practices globally, the IB programmes can be delivered as either a continuum, with each



one building on the one before, or as individual programmes. Strong shares that “one of the wonderful things about the IB is that it is research-based. As our understanding of student needs and how students learn is changing, so is the IB.”

Following the success of the DP over the past five decades, the school is pursuing candidacy to offer the MYP to expand the IB philosophy to a younger cohort. The MYP provides a rigorous and flexible framework that integrates with local educational requirements. “There is synergy between the MYP and the French curriculum, we get to a similar outcome in two different ways. For instance, we might look at the French revolution and then compare that, using the global context of the IB framework, to other historic revolutionary conflicts and in doing so encourage our students to draw parallels between different scenarios across the world.

“We always knew that we wanted our students’ middle school experience to be cohesive to avoid multiple pathways. Both the French curriculum and MYP integrate effectively and the structure of the MYP framework enables us to offer a cohesive experience for students so they become knowledgeable global citizens”, comments Strong.

Reflecting on the impact of the IB at The International School of San Francisco, Strong remarks that “our school has long been a leader in innovative, international education, and the IB is a natural fit for us. It integrates fully with our French programme while still providing a path for students who join us for high school to experience that rich approach. More schools are now looking to offer the IB, and I certainly encourage them to do that.”