



International Baccalaureate®  
Baccalauréat International  
Bachillerato Internacional



**District 13**  
**Public schools**  
**New York**

Primary Years Programme  
Middle Years Programme

**IB WORLD SCHOOLS SINCE**  
**2024**

**TOTAL NUMBER OF**  
**IB WORLD SCHOOLS**  
**7**

**COUNTRY**  
**United States**  
**of America**

# How a group of USA public schools are driving equitable education through the International Baccalaureate

## Executive summary

District 13 in New York, USA, comprises 28 schools and nearly 18,000 students. Since 2021, it has been partnering with the International Baccalaureate (IB) to implement the IB's Primary Years Programme (PYP) and its Middle Years Programme (MYP) in seven of its elementary and middle schools. Following their authorization as IB World Schools in 2024, the group of schools within District 13 has noted positive changes in student outcomes, classroom behaviour, teacher job satisfaction and parent engagement.

## Why District 13 chose the IB

District 13 serves a diverse community of students and is committed to fostering an inclusive, equitable and supportive environment to ensure that they are college and career-ready. Kamar Samuels, Superintendent of District 13 between 2019 and 2022, was the driving force behind the

introduction of the IB at schools within the district. He explains that he wanted to combat the "deep disparities amongst learners within the district". Meghan Dunn, District 13's current Superintendent, who worked with Kamar as Deputy Superintendent, explains that they wanted to ensure that schools reflect the diversity of District 13 and provide rigorous and internationally minded learning experiences for students that centre on the "lived experiences of our district's families and communities".

After a review of the impact of the existing Gifted and Talented programme in the district, it was clear to them that a new approach was needed to ensure truly equitable access to learning for students. Kamar believes that "curriculum frameworks that emphasize critical thinking, inquiry-based learning and creative problem-solving are the most impactful and effective in transforming educational outcomes". Kamar was familiar with

the IB and its four internationally recognized education programmes for students aged 3 to 19 years old through his work in the country of Jamaica. “The value of an internationally minded education is vital to young learners and particularly important in New York City”, he clarifies.



“We are impacted by globalization daily and live in a global microcosm, where more than 800 languages are spoken by students of more than 200 nationalities”.

### **Kamar Samuels**

Former District 13 Superintendent

To ensure District 13 could deliver an equitable learning experience for students including those from diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds or with special education needs, it required a unified approach to learning that would meet the wide range of needs of its individual schools. The IB’s pedagogical approach to education is rooted in developing students who are inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people and building intercultural understanding and respect. As such, Kamar advocated and obtained funding to implement the PYP and MYP. Thus, the collaborative journey with the IB began.

However, the district team acknowledges that adopting a new educational framework across a network of public schools is not without its challenges, citing resources and mandated learning requirements as the key hurdles. Relationships, trust and tailored

support from the IB were crucial to address these challenges and achieve the successful authorization of the District 13 schools as IB World Schools.

### **Implementing the IB at a district level**

Tracey Scronic was appointed as District 13’s District Level PYP and MYP Coordinator - Instructional/ Curriculum Lead and oversees IB teaching, learning and progress monitoring for IB students across all of the IB World Schools in District 13. As an advocate for thematic, project-based learning, she quickly realized that the “opportunities presented by the IB were enormous”, particularly in a public school setting.

Tracey credits building relationships and trust between the IB and the district’s schools for the success of the PYP and MYP within her group of schools. Each school was assigned its own IB consultant whose role was to provide tailored support, mentoring and advice during the candidacy phase as it prepared to submit its application for authorization. Consultants also guide the school in planning for ongoing development and improvement beyond authorization. While each school had a dedicated consultant, all of the consultants worked collaboratively to provide cohesive support based on a shared understanding of the district’s implementation goals. “Our consultants were incredibly helpful and they developed strong relationships with the coordinators in individual schools”, shares Tracey. “The genuine emphasis on growth and sharing is something that people talk about but rarely do you see it so authentically in practice.

“There has been such an understanding of our unique challenges in New York City and public schools, which the IB has

helped us to develop creative solutions to”, she continues. “Many of the IB team working with District 13 are deeply familiar with the New York public school system, which has been invaluable.” Meghan also commends the IB for its help during the authorization process, noting its team’s “wealth of knowledge and experience”.

Some of the creative solutions that Tracey reflects on include helping schools to meet the requirements of a mandated English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum while maintaining the integrity of the interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches of the IB’s PYP and MYP frameworks. Another is supporting schools to find solutions that suited their budgets and the requirements for language learning within the IB frameworks. One school outsourced its language learning virtually while another utilized a paraprofessional with the help of a certified teacher. Tracey emphasizes the “willingness of the IB to meet us where we are and have challenging conversations around what was within the district’s budget” and its flexibility in enabling schools to make their own decisions within the framework of the IB’s educational approach.

“From the beginning, the support we received from the IB was strong and this has continued throughout our partnership”, notes Tracey. “I think that the structure is well thought out and well handled”. To become authorized to offer the IB, schools must complete a candidacy phase in which educators deepen their knowledge of the IB. For the PYP and MYP, this stage includes a trial teaching period. As part of the candidacy process, each candidate school receives a two-day verification visit to assess its readiness to become an authorized IB World School. “The team conducting the visits are active or recently retired educators with real understanding and empathy towards what it means to be doing

this work and how challenging it is, which is so helpful”, comments Tracey. Since the schools began their IB journey in 2021, Rosie Cabrera, Programme Relationship Manager, has served as their main IB liaison, working closely with Tracey throughout the process. “We were all working towards the same goal and were eager to find ways to support and assist the district in meaningful ways that connected with and supported their context”, notes Rosie. In addition to Rosie’s support, the district benefited from a wide range of dedicated IB provision. This included a lead consultant and individual school consultants. Teachers also benefited from access to the IB’s Educator Network - a global network of trained IB teachers who share their knowledge and insight with others. Sonya Simpson, MYP Coordinator at Restoration Academy, one of the IB World Schools within District 13, confirms the value of her school’s consultant, sharing that “she was a great thought partner and I could ask her thousands of questions”.

### Creating collective enthusiasm for the IB

“A student-centred approach may seem destabilizing for some teachers who fear losing control of their classrooms. On the contrary, it can be empowering to give them room to be creative and build their own lessons within a flexible curriculum framework provided by the IB,” Kamar explains. “As a superintendent, I started by asking questions such as: Why a transdisciplinary approach? Why now? Why our kids? By preparing answers to those questions in advance of announcing curriculum changes, we have been able to successfully explain our goals for educational transformation in a way that empowers school leaders and teachers as co-collaborators of change.”

A multi-faceted approach was used to develop support for the proposed innovation within the district. Communication played an important role in creating enthusiasm for the change. Tracey gathered representatives from all the candidate schools and led them in a collaborative planning workshop focused on ‘Sharing the Planet’, one of the PYP’s six transdisciplinary themes that student learning is planned around. “The mini unit was an opportunity for some of our sceptical teachers to experience the learning as the learners, which changed their mindset”, advises Tracey. The workshop was delivered in February, and, in that spring, evaluative observations were suspended to allow IB candidate school teachers to focus on teaching the mini unit. “This was the turning point in bringing people on board,” notes Tracey.

While the IB worked closely with Tracey at a district level, each school also had its own dedicated IB coordinator who liaised with the IB and the district coordinator to support their school’s pedagogical and administrative implementation of the IB during the authorization process. The onsite coordinators are permanent school-based positions that continue to support their schools with the planning, administration and teaching of the IB.

At Lewis H. Latimer School, the coordinator provides its teachers with tools and guides to help them plan and write their units of inquiry—a framework that guides a student’s exploration of a central idea over several weeks—to promote teacher autonomy and ownership over their curriculum planning. Weekly or bi-weekly meetings are scheduled within grade teams and an IB committee formed of specialist teachers has been established to promote collaborative planning and

peer support. Partnership and cooperation are at the heart of effectively implementing the IB. At Restoration Academy, teachers’ periods are planned so that they have time to spend together in reflective and collaborative meetings to plan and develop student learning opportunities.

### Supporting teachers’ continuous professional development

Kamar believes that “educators must be exposed to high-quality professional learning experiences on an ongoing basis. This will ensure that these practices that explore inquiry-based learning, critical thinking, multilingualism, problem-solving, multicultural dialogue and conflict resolution become sustainable and are embedded in the culture of our schools and classrooms”. Meghan concurs, noting that “all teachers have the ability to be great teachers if they are given the right training framework and support”. Through the partnership with the IB, District 13’s IB educators enjoy access to a robust programme of training and development opportunities to manage the delivery of the IB and strengthen their leadership abilities. After winning a series of diversity grants, District 13 funded its schools’ initial IB teacher training and continues to contribute towards some training for its schools; the majority of schools self-fund their ongoing training requirements. As part of its partnership with District 13, the IB has offered discounts on training and fees to facilitate the implementation of its programmes and develop collective capacity.

### Developing a collaborative approach to teaching

High-quality professional development and a pedagogical approach that encourages curiosity,

critical thinking, self-reflection and student agency have reignited veteran teachers' enthusiasm for their roles, shares Tracey. "Since starting our IB journey, I have watched teachers evolve in the same way that they watch their students evolve and it is beautiful", she highlights, "teaching the IB programmes has reminded them of the reason why they became a teacher, honours their intellect as an educator and empowers them as an individual". At Restoration Academy, weekly professional development sessions are held to consolidate teachers' knowledge and skills. One example Sonya shares is the session on writing a statement of inquiry: "We watched a video on the key concepts, read samples and then practised writing our own. We learned together, guiding and encouraging each other, and it modelled the same collaborative learning we want to emulate in the classroom."

Eric Grande, Principal at the Lewis H. Latimer School, confirms he has seen a shift from a "literacy approach to a more open-ended, student-centred teaching style that gives our teachers autonomy" since implementing the IB at his school.

In addition to teachers' own development, Meghan also adds:



**"The IB has provided a shared vision of instructional leadership and refined principals' ideas of leadership through the IB's common framework".**

**Meghan Dunn**

District 13 Superintendent

## Empowering students to achieve their academic and personal goals

At all of the IB World Schools in the district, the student-centred, inquiry-based approach of the IB has had a significant positive impact on students' academic and personal development. Adele Simon, Principal, Restoration Academy, explains that it is "the first time we have engaged with a curriculum that caters to the academic and social needs of our students", adding that "the IB creates autonomous learners and gives a voice to the voiceless". Under-resourced schools have seen students taking ownership of their learning and demonstrating improved engagement and classroom behaviour. This is no surprise to Tracey, who notes that "IB learners feel engaged and empowered. If a student enjoys what they are doing in the classroom, then their behaviour reflects that".

Through their comprehensive professional development, IB teachers develop their ability to differentiate instruction and create accessible learning environments for all learners, including students with disabilities and culturally and linguistically diverse learners. At Lewis H. Latimer School, the Principal shares that his diverse student population benefits from the inclusive and culturally rich curriculum they deliver through the flexible framework of the PYP.

Adele also highlights the impact of the IB's Approaches to Learning (AtLs)—thinking, communication, research, self-management and social skills development—which are embedded into students' learning. These approaches support students of all ages to become agentic and self-regulated learners. Combined with small group work and open-ended projects, this leads to a more dynamic and engaging learning environment.

In addition to developing the skills students need to take ownership of their learning through the AtLs, the IB learner profile offers a set of 10 attributes and values that students need to succeed beyond the classroom:

**Inquirers, Knowledgeable, Thinkers, Communicators, Principled, Open-minded, Caring, Risk-takers, Balanced and Reflective.**

At Lewis H. Latimer School, an initial survey revealed that being a risk-taker was a challenging area for its students to explicitly demonstrate, so the Principal, Eric, and his team began challenging students to present in class and engage in public speaking roles. Students are also encouraged through questions and prompts to connect the learner profile traits with their reading materials and in daily conversations, fostering a culture of empathy and respect within the school. One Grade 6 student praises that it has helped them to "understand other people's perspectives from all around the world" while another cites being able to communicate with classmates on group projects as one of the skills that the IB has instilled within them.

Reflection is encouraged throughout all IB students' learning and Grade 6 students at Restoration Academy are prompted with questions to reflect on the completion of their projects. Peer review learning is also encouraged, which encourages them to develop their problem solving and collaborative abilities. "The process of having your own ideas and your own time to collaborate with each other, and your teachers, helps your mind to grow more", shares another student at Restoration Academy.

## Evidencing and evaluating student development

Research demonstrates that MYP students score significantly higher than the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's Programme for International Student Assessment mean scores in all three domains (Mathematical, Reading and Scientific literacy). Quantitative findings indicate that IB students have significantly higher levels of critical thinking than their non-IB peers.

Assessment of both PYP and MYP students focuses on tasks created and evaluated by classroom teachers who are well-equipped to assess their students' achievement and progression. In the final year, each MYP student will complete a personal project—an independent piece of work that stands as a summative review of the abilities they have developed during their studies—which is externally validated. Evolving from pass or fail metrics to summative assessment was a significant change for parents to understand. Adele, the Principal of Restoration Academy, explains that they had to educate parents on how summative assessments lead to a positive learning experience that fosters stronger student outcomes. "The portfolio shows how each student is building their understanding and demonstrates their learning progression", she elaborates. Enrichment activities such as listening to podcasts are encouraged rather than setting formal homework.

While state examination scores remain important measures, Eric emphasizes that this "must be balanced with authentic instruction". Since introducing the PYP and changing the pedagogical approach at Lewis H. Latimer School, he has seen significant improvements in test scores in English and Mathematics, rising

from 20 to 25 per cent to 55 to 65 per cent proficiency in just two years.

## Engaging with parents

Intentional collaboration has been key to realizing the full impact of the IB within District 13 and this extends to its parent community. While the IB programmes represent a significant change in how the schools approach teaching and learning, the benefits are clear to educators in the district. One of the challenges they faced was communicating these benefits to students' parents and guardians. At Lewis H. Latimer School, this started at the beginning of the journey to implement the IB and focused on detailed conversations with parents to understand their concerns and allay their fears. Identifying the barriers for parents and what needed to be done to help them better understand the programme was also key for Restoration Academy. Schools now use a mix of parent workshops, monthly newsletters and onsite events that showcase students' learning to inform parents of how the IB works and showcase its ongoing impact on students' development.

Collaboration among students is praised by Beatriz Melendez, whose daughter is at Lewis H. Latimer School. "Understanding how an educational approach will translate into my own home can feel difficult to understand but the IB has a collaborative approach, which makes it easy. The units give our family opportunities to understand what our daughter is learning and engage with her. Last year, she did a project on different countries and the whole family got involved – we visited a Japanese village and ate Japanese food to explore the culture together. For me, the real-world application of the IB makes it easy to support unlike other education systems."

Developing inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through education that builds intercultural understanding and respect is the core mission of the IB. Hardy Stecker, whose son is an IB student at the same school, notes that she has seen him develop the IB learner profile traits to become more empathetic. "He uses more language that shows he understands his classmates' different learning styles and accepts them."



"We have always wanted our children to have a good relationship with learning and become people who can contribute to society. To do this, they need to be confident, be inquisitive, understand conflict resolution and the IB is helping my son to become a well-rounded learner."

**Hardy Stecker**

Parent of an IB student

Beatriz and Hardy's experiences are echoed by Jennifer Perrin, parent of a student at Restoration Academy who wants her daughter to continue to study the IB beyond her time at the school because of the way she is learning.

"The IB encourages children to think critically, be creative, develop empathy and connect with the world through their academic studies. While the academic side is important, these are skills they will

carry with them for the rest of their lives.” The emphasis on developing international mindedness is another aspect of the IB programmes that Jennifer appreciates because it helps students to communicate with and learn about other people.

Not only is the IB preparing her daughter for higher education—Jennifer notes that the core skills of research and critical thinking are essential for college—but she has seen improvements in her daughter’s social and emotional skills: “Ann is self-sufficient, more open and confident since starting the IB.”

### A roadmap for successful and sustainable partnerships

The successful implementation of the IB across the seven schools within District 13 has echoed

former Superintendent Kamar’s belief that “transformative education is a goal best achieved through collaboration”. Current Superintendent, Meghan, emphasises that “the IB helps schools to engage and listen to their community and its needs, then have a clear pathway forward.”

The partnership between the IB and District 13 demonstrates that when there is a shared vision and mutual trust, change is not only possible but sustainable. During the project, it was clear that the most meaningful transformation occurred when implementation was guided by thoughtful planning and strategic coordination. With clear roles and structures in place to support the district coordinator, individual coordinators and teachers, District 13 and the IB were able to learn from each other

to navigate the challenges and complexities of implementing a rigorous, yet holistic, approach to teaching and learning that empowers students to become lifelong learners with future-ready skills.

This experience has created a roadmap for future projects. With the support of the IB, an experienced partner in pedagogical leadership, groups of schools can move beyond short-term goals and towards enduring transformation.



Learn more about the IB: [ibo.org](https://ibo.org)