



School-wide Adoption of DP Courses

Shortridge High School

- Middle Years Programme
- Diploma Programme
- Career-related Programme

Principal:
Dennis Thomas

First offered the DP:
2014

Total number of students:
1,077

IB Middle Years Programme (MYP)
coordinator:
Chloe Richardson

IB Diploma Programme (DP)
coordinator:
Jessica Carlson

IB Career-Related Program (CP)
coordinator:
Rebecca Huehls

SCHOOL-WIDE ADOPTION OF THE IB INCREASES STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

A spirit built on a legacy of innovation

Originally known as Indianapolis High School, the state of Indiana's first free public high school was opened in 1864 and led by Abram C. Shortridge, a progressive superintendent who started a high school for city pupils, and admitted the first African American student to secondary education in Indiana.* It's been a long and chequered history, but the pioneering spirit has continued and the school's decision to embed the Indiana state curriculum English class in the IB model for all its 1,077 students is a distinctive example of that ethos.

Shortridge's current Principal Dennis Thomas said: "Introducing the Language and Literature IB course for all students not only gives every learner the opportunity to experience the IB framework, but it also allows them to comprehensively explore a much wider range of literary forms and non-literary texts."

It is an approach that fits perfectly with the school's mission to *Educate young adults to think freely, demonstrate intellectual vitality and address needs and realities greater than themselves.* The school has been offering IB programmes since 2012, with the first Middle Years Programme (MYP) cohort of students in grade 9. This same group was the first to start the Diploma Programme (DP) in 2014. Five years later, the Career Programme (CP) was added and currently students in grades 11 and 12 complete the studies of either the Diploma or the Career Programme with the IB Language and Literature course taken by all students, a shared experience which has improved the learning of a diverse student community with a wide range of learning needs.

The flexibility to grow and adapt

Shortridge really stands by the IB learner profile characteristics. Students are centrally placed and are invited to be critical thinkers, to contribute with their ideas and objections to the concepts explained in the classroom. Melody Coryell was the Diploma Program Coordinator from 2014 to 2021 at Shortridge High School

and currently works for the school district office as Director of Academies and Pathways. Melody is also a trained IB workshop leader and President of the Indiana Association of IB World Schools. When asked about the introduction of the IB English course for all students she is keen to emphasize that the flexibility in the selection of the course's material has been an important factor in reducing the achievement gap and improving student performance and engagement in the classroom. "The texts selected need to be culturally relevant, a choice of books that reflect the diversity of the students. These texts are maintained for approximately five years so they can be funded and be available for both faculty and students during this time."

It is not only the students who benefit from the varied selection of course material, as Melody points out "it requires teachers to be risk-takers and to be open to teach texts which they may not necessarily be familiar with."

To facilitate this process, IB coordinators offer guidance and collaborate with educators in the selection of the curricula and the assessments. Faculty appreciate the benefit of this collaboration, as they gain valuable insights into how their learning is aligned with the mission and vision of the school. As an IB school in a larger school district with many other schools not yet offering the IB, Shortridge administrators are committed to ensure that the IB meets and exceeds the state's requirements.

The diverse curricula are just one aspect that has been well received and accepted for its high standards, a positive example that the district is looking to implement in other schools. Some other benefits recognized by the district include the accessibility and flexibility of the IB Language and Literature course. This enables faculty to teach students with different reading levels or English as their second language.

Cultural competence that leads to a caring community

Melody Coryell appreciates how "the IB course offers an inclusive range of literature tailored for a diverse population of students. It has an approach to teaching and learning that comes from a student-centered place, where the stories and heritage of learners are culturally relevant and included in the class discussions." This has been an essential component of the program's success. As students are invited to give



feedback on the content used, occasionally changes to the curriculum are needed before the five-year period, and this is possible thanks to the flexibility and the different alternatives that the course curricula offer. An example of this can be found in the selection of the documentary *13th* by Ava DuVernay, to be watched alongside the reading of the book *Sing Unburied Sing* by Jesmyn Ward. Containing relevant but sometimes distressing content, viewing the film during the Black Lives Matter movement, meant sections of the material were overwhelming for some students. Teachers were empowered to make the decision to remove the documentary from the curriculum based on the students' response. "We have to listen to our students, and we have to provide room for them to give feedback. We must be willing to respond to what they have to say about our texts," says Melody, who is an English teacher herself.

The IB learner profile to educate students to be open-minded and caring has been the drive to allow integration and support to new students within the school community, including a cohort of students from Afghanistan who joined Shortridge in January 2022.

Principal Thomas points out that "this has also been possible due to the mindset of the teachers, a vital factor that allowed the inclusion of all students to happen." Additional support has also been available, including Cultural Competence lessons, the opportunity to pair new students with existing students and the participation of the newcomers in extra-curricular activities with the support of teachers and coaches. One other distinctive element of the IB, is the partnership with the Peace Learning Center

that the IB recommends, and which has allowed the school to support students and give teachers the tools to address transition and uncertainty. Once again, a program recognized by the district that it's properly documented in the resources offered to teachers. Even more important, the IB offers the school social emotional learning documents with resources that help educators cover key topics in the classroom.

The IB Educator – a key asset

Jessica Carlson is the current DP Coordinator at Shortridge High School and believes that effective implementation comes down to recruiting teachers who embrace the IB philosophy. She believes that “what is recognizable is the good number of teacher leaders in the school and it all starts at the hiring process. We apply the inquiry-based model in our decision-making process.” Shortridge is an *IB for All* school in an urban setting within the Indianapolis public school system where students are not tracked, and they are sharing classrooms with peers of all abilities. Teachers who decide to be part of the faculty team know there's no playbook for this setting.

As Jessica explains, “we give teachers freedom in their classrooms and ask them to solve problems and be part of the solution, and this is one of the main reasons I decided to teach here. Shortridge is a school where teachers work together to solve issues and are not isolated.”

This approach has led the pedagogical leadership team (PLT) to implement the IB Excellence and Equity Framework, with as much faculty buy-in as possible. Even as an established *IB for All* school, students at Shortridge continue to grapple with systemic barriers that teachers must address through daily practices.

To that end, teachers were asked to develop their vision for what their *IB for All* school should look like and come up with the essential agreements for the 2022-23 school year, which the PLT used to design the Professional Development training for all the faculty.

The IB Excellence and Equity Framework, designed to support school leaders and faculty in their work to remove barriers for under-represented students, is intended to empower school equity teams to evaluate and identify school-specific equity goals. A project that aims to provide a more equitable experience for all IB students.

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Melody Coryell, Director of Academies and Pathways at Indianapolis Public Schools