



International Baccalaureate®
Baccalauréat International
Bachillerato Internacional

International Baccalaureate Educator Network: Success case study

Research summary

Summary developed by IB Research, based on a report prepared by:
Kristine Chadwick, Michael Thier and Jandee Todd, Inflexion.
January 2019

Background

What is the International Baccalaureate Educator Network (IBEN)?

The International Baccalaureate Educator Network (IBEN) trains educators to support the development and implementation of IB programmes by serving in a variety of critical roles. IB educators (IBE^s)¹ – most of whom are classroom teachers, coordinators or administrators based in IB schools – perform an array of tasks, such as:

- facilitating professional development workshops to train educators in the IB's four programmes
- examining end-of-course assessments or other work products from students in the Middle Years Programme (MYP), Diploma Programme (DP) or Career-related Programme (CP)
- visiting interested, candidate, and/or authorized schools to evaluate and/or verify a school's adherence to the IB programme standards and practices
- reviewing curriculum or developing course content.

This study examines the benefits of IBEN participation that accrue to educators and their schools. Findings from the study can be used by IB World Schools to maximize the benefits of IBEN participation and can inform the IB's decisions about possible improvements to the IB Educator Network.

Research design

Success Case Method

This mixed method study design is based on Brinkerhoff's (2002) Success Case Method, which enables evaluators to discover what is working well in a program as well as the factors that facilitate or inhibit success. The method includes five steps: focus and plan the study; create an impact model to define success; design and implement a survey to elicit best cases; interview and document cases; and communicate findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Drawing on a worldwide survey of IBEs ($n = 1,014$), seven case study schools were selected to explore the benefits of IBEN as well as factors that support successful IBEN outcomes. The case study schools included one in Europe, four in the Americas (two in North America, one in Central America and one in South America), and two in Asia. The schools varied in size, governance (state-funded versus private), number of IB subjects offered and length of involvement with the IB. At each case study site, interviews were conducted with members of IBEN, other IB teachers, coordinators and heads of school.

¹The IB refers to IBEN both as the network and the individuals comprised within it. To aid with clarity, the researchers distinguish IBEN (the network) from IBEs (educators who perform IBEN-assigned duties).

Findings

Benefits to IB educators

Despite the amount of time required to serve in an IBEN role, IBEs generally value IBEN participation because it heightens their knowledge, builds their confidence as highly skilled educators and benefits their students. IBEs accrue several benefits from IBEN participation, and many of these benefits ripple out to students and colleagues.

Assessment

Across sites and roles, interviewees were remarkably consistent and effusive about the benefits of participation for understanding the IB assessment process. There was consensus that IBEs become more confident about effectively preparing students for IB examinations and assessments.

Professional and pedagogical skills

IBEN imparts subject-specific knowledge and skills and deepens understanding of the diverse contexts of IB World Schools. IBEs believe strongly that their IBEN participation hones their craft as professionals and further develops their pedagogical skills. Due to their IBEN participation, IBEs felt they were better teachers of IB curriculum and had deeper pedagogical skills and a firmer grasp of content knowledge. Improving their andragogy skills was also a valued benefit of IBEN participation for workshop leaders. Regarding professional development, interviewees called IBEN training *“the best PD I’ve ever done”*, a source of *“rapid professional growth”*, and a reason to *“feel like I’m a professional”*.

Up-to-date resources

Acquiring updated resources—new course guides especially—was a further positive benefit identified by interviewees. IBEs often learn about changes at “inception”, enabling them to have time to consider how their own, and their colleagues’, teaching practices need to pivot to accommodate IB changes as they go into effect.

Mastery of core IB concepts

IBEs describe that, due to their IBEN participation, they gained: increased levels of respect for multiple perspectives; the ability to communicate the IB mission; and a deeper understanding of international-mindedness, the learner profile and the IB programme standards and practices. They were also better able to transmit this understanding to students and parents.

IB community engagement

IBEs view their connection to the IB as a major benefit of their IBEN participation, one that contributes to outcomes for them personally and for their schools. They also deepen their own learnings by networking with other educators. IBEs consistently report benefiting from the IBEN community, using a variety of digital means to ask questions that generate immediate answers from a global community of helpful colleagues. For example, as one educator noted:

“A forum in which people are sharing resources [is] through Basecamp ... I have direct access to the most knowledgeable people around the world right now, and that’s the easiest way and it’s a forum. People can just ask questions and we’re sharing resources ... I can get an answer within six minutes and it’s coming from all over the world”.

Benefits to schools

The study indicated a number of possible benefits for schools of IBEN participation, which are summarized below.

Systemic approaches and collaboration

The benefits to schools of having IBEN members as faculty include developing or strengthening systematic and systemic approaches to sharing and collaboration. IBEs in schools that benefit from IBEN involvement use multiple methods to share their learnings with colleagues, including informal sharing, new teacher mentoring and formal professional learning communities (PLCs). Having IBEs on staff also benefits the school if they encourage other faculty to apply to become members of the network. A critical mass of IBEs serving in a variety of roles appears to help schools realize different types of benefits – this is especially true when these roles include school leadership and are spread across many departments. Synergistic effects radiate among IBEs who share the knowledge they gain from serving in different IBEN roles. When schools have collaborative cultures and structures, learnings are easily shared with non-IB teachers as well, thus magnifying the effects of IBEN participation. Collaborative cultures are supported by leadership that value IBEN participation and cross-departmental communication in tangible ways, such as creating school schedules that allow for common planning and collaboration time.

Perception of school quality

Schools may benefit from the prestige of having faculty who are IBEN members by more easily recruiting students and families and attracting high-quality faculty members.

Exam performance

Many interviewees were hesitant to ascribe school-level increases in exam scores to IBEN participation. However, some members of the schools that successfully incorporate IBEN learnings believe that their students' exam scores would not be as high were the school not to have IBEN members as faculty.

IB community engagement

Through an increased number of IBEs and meaningful interactions with other IB schools, interviewees at each site described how IBEs had deepened their school's engagement with the broader IB community. For example, one non-IBE explained that her IBE colleagues' networking resulted in a site visit from an educator from a different school who taught her *"a lot of techniques, new things, new ways to see the mathematics"* and with whom she has stayed in contact.

Factors that enable or impede positive outcomes

The benefits of IBEN participation may be affected by the centrality of the IB to the core mission of the school. IBEs are more successful at sharing their learnings school-wide when they feel supported by school leaders who have and champion strong communication skills, shared leadership philosophies and familiarity with the IB. Schools that were able to achieve positive IBEN outcomes generally had school leaders who offered tangible logistical and financial supports to help IBEs disseminate and apply their learnings throughout the school. Additionally, the saturation and distribution of IBEs affect a school's ability to realize the benefits of IBEN participation.

Other factors that impacted IBEN benefits included governance (state-funded or private), teacher collaboration time, and spread of the IB programme (selective or school-wide). Specifically, state-funded schools may struggle with less funding, restrictive district or government policies, and competing district or government initiatives. Sharing learnings from IBEN participation was more challenging at large schools that offered several instructional program options. At these schools, there were both IB and non-IB teachers, creating more of a challenge for IBEN learnings to have school-wide effects. Notably, however, even in these large schools with several instructional programs, the benefits of IBEN were magnified when IBEN members were dispersed across departments.

Promising practices for schools

A major goal of the study was to identify key practices used by schools to maximize the benefits of IBEN

participation so that these can be shared with other IB World Schools. The school-level promising practices that emerged from the study are summarized below.

- Saturate schools with a **critical mass** of IBEs. The positive benefits of IBEN participation are heightened when 20–30% of staff are IBEN members.
- **Distribute** IBEN participants across subjects, groups, departments and grades.
- Develop a **matrix of IBEN members** by the type(s) of expertise they have. Data about IBEN members within a school can inform reports to governing agencies, promotional campaigns, and recruiting and hiring.
- **Intentionally hire and track** based on IBEN expertise. By intentionally hiring and tracking IBEs, schools could identify IBEs to head relevant departments, lead PLCs and support mentoring of other teachers.
- Establish and support **PLCs** and **collaboration**. School leaders can build professional learning days into calendars and protect dedicated collaborative time as sacrosanct.
- Discuss with IBEN members local needs, **devise a policy and follow it** to fully support IBEN participation and the dissemination of learnings from those engagements.
- Create and communicate procedures and **guidelines for sharing IBEN learnings**. Some examples of ways to share learning include: a standing agenda item at leadership team meetings, offering full or abridged versions of IBEN workshops, having a round-table sharing session or communicating information via newsletters or blogs. Regardless of the sharing mechanism, school leaders should monitor progress of what is learned and ensure dissemination.
- Intentionally and repeatedly **make teachers aware of the IBEN resources** in their midst. In many of the case study schools, staff had no idea which, if any, of their colleagues were IBEs. Schools should intentionally share who their IBEs are and what expertise they have.
- **Share resources and strategies digitally**. Within schools and across the network, IBEs described using various online platforms to share ideas and resources, facilitating collaboration and reducing informational silos.
- Employ **standardization exercises** led by IBEN members to ensure all IB teachers are able to apply



new learnings. Some examples include: “cross marking”, in which teachers in a subject mark the same examination and compare results; having open-door policies for classroom observation; and fostering collaboration with other IB World Schools, for example, for creativity, activity, service.

- Collaboratively review the **quality assurance feedback** that IBEN members receive. Reflective sessions and meaningful conversations between IBEN, school leaders and colleagues can support professional development and help leaders to understand the value of IBEs.

Recommendations for the IB

This section summarizes some of the main recommendations for the IB based on the study’s findings. For a complete list of recommendations, see the full report.

An important recommendation for the IB is to focus on **strengthening the IBEN “brand”**. One of the clearest takeaways from the study is that few people outside IBEN, and only some inside, know about the network. The “IB Educator Network” does not resonate with many IB faculty, though IBEN roles do (for example, workshop leader or examiner). There was also confusion among both IBEN members and other IB faculty about what constitutes the “network”. Examiners, in particular, feel isolated and are not certain whether they are members of IBEN. Even workshop leaders saw the main activity of being in the network as individualistic. Once conceptualized, the IB could pitch its redefined brand at workshops and enlist “champions” or high-achieving members of the network to raise awareness of IBEN.

IBEN could also function more like a network if the IB **planned meet-ups** among members and provided more frequent and relevant **communications** to members. Communications could include tips for maximizing school-wide benefits based on IBEN participation.

Members of the network recommended creating meetings with job-alike IBEN colleagues, increasing the possibility to lead workshops across regions, increasing personal communications from subject leaders and developing an **IBEN career progression** or “ladder”. Codified roles, standardized evaluations and a comprehensible scoring system would engage IBEs in meaningful feedback loops that foster coherence and growth within and between IBEN roles. Establishing an explicit IBEN career progression may also support efforts to create networking opportunities and maintain IBE engagement.

Summary

This study was designed to examine the benefits of IBEN participation as well as factors that may support or hinder successful dissemination of IBEN learnings within a school. Among the benefits that IBEs reported included: better understanding and preparation for IB assessments, improved subject knowledge and pedagogical skills, access to the latest resources, mastery of IB concepts, and connection to the IB and other IBEs. Schools also noted a number of benefits of staff IBEN participation, such as developing systematic approaches to collaboration, increased school prestige, possible improvements to student exam performance, and greater engagement with the IB community.

Schools that were able to implement IBEN learnings ensured there was adequate planning time, a range of meeting types to bring different groups together and regular professional development. Successful schools effectively and quickly disseminated information from IBEN. School leadership also appeared to be an important factor influencing the ability to achieve benefits from IBEN participation generally. Lastly, schools with cross-disciplinary collaborative cultures were able to share and process the myriad types of information and new skills that IBEs cultivate.

Reference

Brinkerhoff, RO. 2002. *The Success Case Method*. San Francisco, CA. Berrett-Koehler.

This summary was developed by the IB Research department. A copy of the full report is available at: www.ibo.org/en/research/. For more information on this study or other IB research, please email research@ibo.org.

To cite the full report, please use the following: Chadwick, K, Thier, M and Todd, J. 2019. *International Baccalaureate Educator Network: Success case study*. Bethesda, MD, USA. International Baccalaureate Organization.