

**An Alternate Perspective in Answer to Three Primary Questions
Formulated by Dr. James D. Lombardo**

- 1. Is the IB program as offered in the Upper St. Clair School District a valuable and rigorous educational program for our students?**

Diploma Program

The Diploma Program (DP) as offered in the Upper St. Clair School District (USCD) has been proven to be valuable and rigorous. Based on comments received from colleges and universities, from Upper St. Clair (USC) alumnae who have completed only the DP, and from the many more USC alumnae and alumni who have completed individual International Baccalaureate (IB) classes, it appears to offer excellent preparation for post high school education. However, the key to answering question #1 lies within the terms "as offered in the Upper St. Clair School District (USCSD)." As the IB program exists today in the Upper St. Clair District, at all the educational levels but most especially at the DP level, it is not as specified in the IBO guidelines. The IB program is designed *specifically* to be a Charter School concept. The USCSD has chosen to mesh the IB curriculum at the high school level with an already successful Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) curriculum.

The committee has discussed at length how this arrangement has created a logistical and tactical scheduling dilemma for potential DP students. This scheduling difficulty is at least in part responsible for the low number of students willing to commit to the two-year junior and senior IB Diploma Program. Therefore, in Upper St. Clair at the high school level the IB program is largely an individual certificate program in which students enroll in a subset of IB courses. Surveys have shown the above statement to be true as a large number of students participate in the IB program not as DP students but as certificate students most notably in the area of foreign languages. These students are looking for a higher level foreign language course but without becoming a DP student. Historically, the IB language enrollment may have been inflated due to the lack of an AP alternative. It is unclear why allowing students to take individual IB certificate courses is more valuable than having them enroll in AP or Honors classes, as they miss the value of the unified IB curriculum. (See Appendix A-Exhibit I- Class Enrollment Data)

It must be emphasized that at the 11th and 12th levels the IB Diploma Program does not operate as intended; it does not accurately reflect the concept as written by the IBO. This is confirmed by Dr. Ralph Cline, Deputy Regional Director of International Baccalaureate North America. He qualifies his evaluation of the Upper St. Clair Diploma Program by stating "if there is simply a collection of courses to be offered, I myself have to ask-why in the world would you want to do that?" (See Appendix 2)

Primary Years Program/Middle Years Program

The committee has documented that the core curricula and text books in the Primary Years Program (PYP) and the Middle Years Program (MYP) are the same as in the traditional curriculum. Differences exist simply in the manner the material is presented and taught at the PYP and MYP levels. At both the PYP and MYP levels, teachers volunteered to spend three days taking the initial Level 1-IBO training with continuing training occurring as needed. They received planners which are not designed to provide course or class content but rather the necessary methods of teaching the subject. According to Dr. Cline, "it (the planner) is the framework and lens through which the curriculum is viewed" that makes a PYP or MYP classroom different from a traditional classroom. An example of the teacher's planner at the PYP level was exhibited during a committee meeting. It was organized, specific, and detailed in nature. A comparison of the same material from a traditional classroom was not presented. It has also been discussed that the PYP and MYP are not being administered as Charter School programs.

This causes difficulties from two perspectives as confirmed by teacher surveys at the elementary and middle school levels. First, having the PYP and MYP run alongside the traditional classrooms in the same building contradicts the school concept explicitly detailed by the IBO. Secondly, it has been confirmed that having the IB and traditional together does create an "elitist" perception of the IB program and a less than cohesive bond among the staff and student bodies. Additionally, the IB instructors feel at times constrained because they are unable to actively and openly display IB student accomplishments or methodologies within the school. Because it is "a school within a school", the administration has difficulty internally marketing the IB programs. The IB programs are seen to compete with the traditional programs because they are running beside one another. There is currently no criterion for entrance into either the PYP or MYP. There is no conclusive testing data that accurately compares the performance of PYP or MYP students to their traditional classmates. There is no convincing evidence of increased "value or rigor" of either program at the elementary or middle school levels when comparing IB with the traditional program.

2. Does the value of the program justify the extra expenditures and resource allocations?

Diploma Program

It is agreed that the cost of the IB program for all levels, **as it exists today** in the USCSD when calculated as a percentage of the total school budget is insignificant on a per student basis. A commitment to operate the DP, MYP, and PYP in accordance with IBO guidelines will result in increased costs to support added coordinators. The value of the IB Diploma Program is sufficient to justify the cost *IF* there are enough IB DP candidates (NOT certificate students) to keep enrollment in all classes at a fiscally responsible level.

However, from an opportunity cost perspective, our students are not committed to the DP program and are moving among courses and discipline levels; AP, Honors and IB. As Dr. Klein has stated "if you're scheduling three separate programs (and the case can be made that USC has four due to MYP Honors) you're going to be knee deep in scheduling". IB Science and Math courses because of their small size are combined with AP or Honors Classes. The class becomes neutralized and the teacher must meet the specific needs regarding testing outside of class lecture. Appendix A-Exhibit IA identifies the class enrollment currently assigned to a merged class environment.

Primary Years Program/Middle Years Program

It is, again, necessary to answer the question as to whether the USCSD wants to commit to the future of the IB program and its related additional program costs, whatever they may be at all levels, to **properly** run the program according to IBO guidelines. The parents of the PYP/MYP students will most surely be disappointed if they have enrolled their children for 9 years of IB training only to learn that what awaits is a limited commitment to the program at levels 11 and 12.

- 3. Should the USC School District offer the program as it currently exists, modify the program in some way, or drop the program altogether?**

Diploma Program

The DP should be expanded and operated as intended under the guidelines of the IBO. We believe it does not make sense to combine AP and IB students within the same class as is happening currently. Teachers are constrained in the classroom and lab by having to simultaneously meet the curricula goals of both AP and IB.

The Diploma Program should operate as a "Charter School within a High School." Under this scenario, the IB program could then be marketed to students in surrounding districts. A marketable DP would allow for the USCSD to recover a portion of the additional expenses associated with the program. With retention and expansion of the DP, benchmarks for the success of the program going forward should be identified and used to ensure community members that the program is progressing and worthy of retention. These should include the number of students completing the Diploma Program and the test scores achieved by USC students. Subsequently, if the program does not meet these benchmarks, the elimination of IB should be evident. The committee has been advised by the IBO to focus on the IB DP and support certificates on a very limited scale. The USCSD has not accomplished this. Dr. Ralph Cline concurs that if the DP enrollment is not expanded then elimination should be considered. If the program cannot be offered correctly, i.e., as a proper Diploma Program then the greatest benefits will not be reaped by the students.