

Language
and learning

Inclusive
education

Global
engagement

Multiple
programme schools

Learning stories from the IB continuum share examples of good practice from IB World Schools in order to promote inquiry, action and reflection by educators and school learning communities. School samples in this series represent a range of development and application of IB programme standards and practices.

“An International Baccalaureate education for all”

Background information

This learning story describes, through a student case study, how the school fostered inclusion for a student in the Diploma Programme who had been diagnosed with Asperger’s syndrome and attention deficit disorder.

Sturgis Charter Public School located in Massachusetts, USA is a tuition-free, public high school that accepts students through public lottery regardless of past academic records or individual challenges. It is dedicated to an “International Baccalaureate for All” philosophy, preparing high school students for higher education in a supportive learning environment. It aims to provide each student with a rigorous, world-class educational experience, encouraging academic achievement, intellectual confidence and personal growth. While achieving high marks on assessments is a primary goal, Sturgis sees the inclusion of many students who would have never had access or self-confidence to attempt the IB Diploma in other settings as critical. The school was authorized to offer the Diploma Programme in 2004.

Cultural context

Ensuring college readiness is the ultimate goal as students take a minimum of six IB courses in grade 11 and in grade 12. 100% of the class of 2013 attempted at least three IB courses with an average of 5.9 IB courses per student, 73% of scores were 4 and above, and 44 out of 68 students earned the full IB Diploma.

Knowledge and skills are developed through peer tutoring, study groups and support from a multidisciplinary team of educators (speech and language pathologist, psychologist, social skills instructor, reading and math tutors, therapy and guidance counsellors and a special education teacher) and administrators during and beyond regular school hours. Sturgis also supports students academically and socially through an advisory programme that involves each teacher in the school working twice weekly with a small group of students. With small class sizes, advisory and community service involvement and focus on supportive relationships, students experience a physically and intellectually safe environment encouraging each student to take risks to reach his or her potential and maximize future opportunities.



US public charter schools

Charter schools are independent public schools allowed freedom to be more innovative, while being held accountable for improved student achievement. Charter schools are public schools because, while they operate independently of the school district, they are:

- tuition-free and open to every student who wishes to enroll
- non-sectarian, and do not discriminate on any basis
- publicly funded by local, state and federal tax dollars based on enrollment, like other public schools
- held accountable to state and federal academic standards

(National Alliance for Public Charter Schools website <http://www.publiccharters.org/> Accessed 10 September 2013)

Inquiry, action, reflection

Inquiry/challenge

An International Baccalaureate for All!

The challenge for the school is to create a culture of high expectations for all students and provide inclusive, rigorous academic instruction in the Diploma Programme for all of its students.

Action/solution

All students are provided with a collaborative and supportive learning environment, where high but realistic expectations are coupled with appropriate encouragement and belief in their ability. Multimodal communication—the ongoing communication between administration, teachers, student, parents, and support staff—is considered crucial in building this environment. Students are supported in making meaningful connections by forming relationships with staff members and peers. Through developing habits of mind students learn how to listen intently, think about their thinking (metacognition), question and pose problems.

Reflection/next steps

The following questions ensure the multidisciplinary learning support team stays focused during the decision-making process of fostering inclusion for individual students.

- What do we know about the student—academically, socially and emotionally?
- What are the student's strengths and preferred ways of learning?
- What strategies have been successful/unsuccessful in the past?
- Does the student self-advocate, has the student been taught to self-advocate?
- What are the challenges/disabilities that the student experiences?
- What accommodations are needed?

Standard A: Philosophy

9. The school supports access for students to the IB programme(s) and philosophy.
- a. The school provides for the full Diploma Programme and requires some of its student body to attempt the full diploma and not only individual subject certificates.

Sturgis has an “IB for all” policy. IB is the only curriculum offered in 11th and 12th grade. Irrespective of grades or individual abilities students decide in 10th grade if they will complete the full Diploma Programme or sit for certain certificates.

- 9b. The school promotes access to the diploma and certificates for all students who can benefit from the educational experience they provide.

Access is supported through a range of approaches and flexibility is crucial. The library hosts extended essay nights where students can work on their extended essay and receive advice from librarians and their extended essay advisors. Extended essay workshops are provided for advisors and students. Research and writing time is given during theory of knowledge (TOK) class. Less homework is given in standard level (SL) classes. Grades and progress reports are reviewed regularly. Students are supported with assessment strategies and learner profile development. Students are counselled by the creativity, action, service (CAS) advisors throughout their IB journey.

Standard B: Organization

B2: Resources and support

8. The school provides support for its students learning and/or special education needs and support for their teachers.

Students experiencing learning challenges receive an individual student support plan, individual tutoring where necessary, have access to appropriate services to aid learning progress, and teachers collaborate and work with specialists. Guidance counsellors and the student support team support the whole community when students are experiencing academic, social or emotional difficulties.

Standard C: Curriculum

C1: Collaborative planning

6. Collaborative planning and reflection incorporates differentiation for students’ learning needs and styles.

Content teachers, special education teachers and specialists communicate, collaborate and plan together to differentiate student instruction. Throughout the school year all teachers participate in professional development and reflective activities together on various topics addressing learning styles and needs.

C3: Teaching and learning

10. Teaching and learning differentiates instruction to meet students' learning needs and styles.

Teacher observation provides the evidence that teachers use a range of interventions and tiered instructions that take into account student learning needs. Teachers adapt their teaching with the use of technology to incorporate visual and auditory teaching approaches. Additional approaches include student collaborative and cooperative group work and hands-on projects. Students participate in activities with guidance counsellors to learn about their learning needs and styles, take various self-inventories and self-assessments to identifying personality types and preferred modes of learning.

C4: Assessment

3. The school uses a range of strategies and tools to assess student learning.

Assessment data is analysed to inform the evaluation and subsequent modification of teaching and learning strategies. Student learning is regularly assessed against past objectives and assessment criteria specific to each subject.

Highlights

Derek's success—a case study

Recognition of learning strengths contributed to Derek's success where his strengths were identified as a willingness to keep trying, to continue to question to clarify understanding, to listen to advice and be motivated by small successes. Derek experienced organization, planning, follow-through and time management skills as significant challenges and he reported to having struggled academically, emotionally and socially throughout his school years.

Daily support was designed to increase independence and as independence increased supports were removed. A collaborative approach, which included Derek, his teachers, administration and his parents, was recognized as being essential in developing his independence.

Organizational skills

The following strategies supported the development of organizational skills.

- Emptying and cleaning out his backpack
- Organizing binders with coloured sections
- Organizing current work into a single folder
- Sending work to the special education teacher to print out (This strategy doubled up as a way for Derek to share his work with his teacher.)

Developing independence

Developing independent learning involved two stages with Derek: first attempting work independently. Verbal prompting by the teacher to request help was given only when needed. The second stage involved Derek attempting work independently and requesting help without verbal prompting.

Increased independence in and around the school was fostered by the creation of maps of the local community and businesses around the school. Maps also featured the school address and phone number in case Derek lost his way.

Communication

Good communication channels and collaborative work practices were developed through using email to keep Derek, his teachers and family in the communication loop and when frustrations were experienced good communication supported common solutions. Parental interaction decreased as Derek's communication and organizational skills developed.

Derek needed guidance in how to communicate issues with his teachers and the special education teacher would role-play scenarios that Derek experienced as difficult. The social skills instructor prompted on the use of tone, eye contact and how to pose questions to clarify if he did not understand a teacher's response. Derek is now able to set these teacher appointments independently and navigate the discussions on his own.

A key to Derek's success was through the development of communication channels with his teachers. A "four quick questions template" was designed to help Derek stay on task and prompt follow-up and completion of missing work and was emailed to teachers on a weekly basis. The template questions were: How am I doing in your class? Am I missing any work? What accommodations or strategies should I focus on for the next week? Do I need to see you for extra help?

Subject-specific strategies

There were times when Derek needed more guidance and structure in a class and strategies included the provision of:

- outlines
- clear and explicit directions
- models
- visuals.

Social skills

Weekly support with a social skills therapist was put in place to develop social skills and included group therapy with students with similar needs. Throughout high school, he took part in theatre and other social clubs and groups geared to his interests and sporting talents.

Active participant support was put into place and on a daily basis he would initiate saying hello and asking how his classmate was doing; this practice was supported by the adults around him. In his senior year he was a peer role model for the younger boys in this group. He participated in summer enrichment programmes designed to help generalize skills outside of the school setting.

The following “accommodations” were put into place and these were communicated with the IB according to the stated procedures in *Candidates with assessment access requirements* (formerly *Candidates with special assessment needs*) when IB assessments were involved.

- Extra time given to complete work, quizzes and assessments
- Examples and/or models given when a new concept is introduced
- All assessments to be taken in a small, quiet area (used in IB examinations)
- The use of a word processor in class to take notes and to work on any written assignments (used in IB assessments)
- Student assessments modified in length as needed
- Clarification of word meaning during assignments and assessments where needed
- A focus on quality of work rather than quantity of work

Excerpt from an interview with Derek

How did your diagnosis of autism and ADHD affect you in school, what supports did you require?

I needed help to keep organized and when possible a study guide for a large test.

What are some specific strategies you used?

I would do things as they were assigned and made an effort not to procrastinate. I would always go on a run before I did my homework because for me running allowed me to clear my head and got rid of any excess energy allowing me to focus more intently on just homework.

What were specific strategies or teaching methods that teachers used with you that seemed to work?

Allowing more hands-on activities such as classroom discussions and independent research projects that allowed me to explore a particular part of a subject that I found more interesting.

What helped you to be successful in the IB programme?

Teachers that were genuinely interested in their subjects and the small classroom sizes made it easier to hear and be heard, which is important. I also had teachers, friends, and family that believed I could get the full IB diploma.

How did study skills and social skills support?

Study skills gave me a quiet working environment where I could get a great deal of organizing done that wouldn't necessarily get done at home. I could also get help on projects and get questions answered immediately because I was still in school and not at home. Social skills was helpful in me getting out of my shell to be the person I am now but what really helped was my decision to join theatre. That made me face every social fear at once and overcome them.

What barriers did you overcome with the full diploma and how?

Most people would consider having autism and ADHD combined would result in barely passing normal school, much less getting the full IB diploma. I also had to master the art of researching, getting, and keeping all my notes organized.

Any other information that could inspire teachers, students or parents?

Originally I was going to go to another high school but they said that I couldn't take any advance placement (AP) courses because I had a learning disability. Despite holding honor roll (or close with only one or two C+s) they were not going to even give me a chance. So I attended Sturgis and got a full IB diploma instead.

Teacher comment

“He just needed the confidence in all areas (academics, social) and then he took it and ran with it. He knew what he wanted and he went for it. He set goals for himself and met those goals independently (academically, socially, and sports).”

Parent comment

“My son is thoroughly enjoying Sturgis; I have not even had to remind him about homework; he is involved, happy and thriving. I cannot begin to tell you how much this has improved our relationship and home life!! I wish every parent could say the same!”

Ensuring college readiness: IB for all

High Standards + High Expectations = High Achievements

“With the right supports and determination any student can attempt the full IB and complete it. Communication with the team is a must. A working relationship with parents, student, team, regular education teachers is all a must! If you want to see a student succeed, then there are times you may need to change your approach for the individual student. Flexibility is key!”

Staff member

Additional information

“Inclusive education” and “learning diversity” is the IB’s new terminology, replacing “special education needs” (SEN), which indicates and reflects the IB’s commitment to inclusive approaches to education. To bridge the gap while we wait for document reviews both terms will be used, reflected in updated documents, *Learning diversity in the IB programmes: Special educational needs within the IB programmes* (2010).

IB student learning diversity resources

Programme standards and practices (2010)

Learning diversity in the IB programmes: Special educational needs within the IB programmes (2010)

Meeting student learning diversity in the classroom (2013)

Language and learning in IB programmes (2011, updated August 2012)

What is an IB education? (2013)

Learning stories—Inclusive education