

International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP) Program and Analogies

Choosing the Program That Is Right for Your Child

FairfaxCAPS meeting 1/14/09 Rachel Carson Middle School

Given the recent redistricting in our community from a high school offering the AP program to a high school offering an IB program, I am presenting a comparison of these two academically rigorous high school programs. This presentation is based on information obtained from the IBO website, FCPS and research that was done in preparation for the redistricting. I have tried hard to be objective in this comparison. I have tried to be as accurate as possible but there are always changes in the curriculum and policies occurring. I suggest you research the different websites we will provide you tonight, visit the schools, talk to parents, and do the “priority inventory” to determine what is best for your child.

If you are considering pupil placement/transfer for academic purposes, it may feel much like swimming up stream, with the recent redistricting and change from an AP program to an IB program. If your child chooses to transfer to another high school, out of their base school, there will be a loss of friends, transportation issues, additional paperwork and the requirement to progressively advance in AP courses during the 4 years. Transferring into an IB program from an AP program may also have similar challenges.

The key to a successful transfer from one school to another is to be informed, prepared and unified in your family with the final decision. If your decision does not produce positive results for your child during the first year of change, there are always other options you can pursue.

The comparison chart between the 2 programs includes IB Diploma or IB Certificate Programme and the AP program. **It is essential to understand the difference in the IB Diploma and Certificate programs especially.** Much of the information included in this chart may not be offered by the schools, principal or department heads. The chart will spotlight some of the restrictions, limitations of all programs.

AP and IB are difficult to comparison. They are not even apples and oranges. I have attempted to create analogies (perhaps with fault) that may help to explain the elements of each program.

The IB Diploma and Certificate Programmes: **The Train Analogy**

The IB Diploma program is like a train; all the “cars” or classes are connected together to create one entity. A train is supposed to be connected together with cars full of cargo when it arrives at the station (graduation). In the IB Diploma Programme, the intent is for all subject matters to be studied in an interdisciplinary manner, interconnected, with the foundation of the Theory of Knowledge class. In addition, the 4,000 word extended essay and the 150 hours of Creativity, Action and Service are all part of the train. If all components arrive at the station (in other words graduation) and all the cars are full (meaning test grades, papers and assessments are passing after internal and external reviews) then the student receives an IB **diploma**.

Indeed, the IB Diploma Programme is a rigorous liberal arts program intended to end in a full IB Diploma according to the parent IB Organization. However, our research findings indicate that only 8% of the senior class of IB schools in FCPS receive IB diplomas. The higher rate indicated by FCPS of an approximate 80% rate of success is the percentage of **registered IB diploma CANDIDATES** that receive their diplomas.

(ex .60 students in a class of 400 attempt the diploma and 45 receive it.):

[FCPS News Release: A total of 312 Fairfax County Public Schools \(FCPS\) students—82.3 percent of all candidates—earned the International Baccalaureate \(IB\) diploma in 2008, according to figures released today by FCPS Superintendent Jack D. Dale.](#)

According to our figures, the 312 recipients are from a collective body of approximately 4,000 eligible seniors in all IB high schools leaving 3,700 students with or without certificates but no IB diploma. (See chart on IB high schools).

If the student does not receive the diploma, **certificates** are awarded that simply indicate participation in an IB class (per IBO.) There are no other requirements in receiving certificates. The certificates would be similar to uncoupling the train cars and leaving them along the track. They may have some cargo in them, but they are not seen as delivered. In other words, there may have been some usefulness in exposing the student to college prep classes and their grade or GPA may be enhanced but the whole train did not arrive and the diploma was not earned. According to our research, the top universities are interested in the students taking the highest level of rigor offered by the school; in this case, the diploma. Although each university differs in their college credit requirements, certificates generally do not earn college credits at most of the top universities. In addition, college admissions are most impressed with the diploma since certificates only indicate participation and not a level of achievement.

The AP program is like a group of race cars lined up individually on a race track. The cars race independently of each other. Some can move faster around the track than others. There is no expectation of all the cars arriving together like in the IB program.

(Ex. Students may be stronger in math and science and they are able to complete more math and science courses in high school. But choose to take regular English and SS and only 3 years of a foreign language. The courses aren't contingent on each other.)
The student is acknowledged for each AP class taken and there is no detrimental affect if all six subject areas are not at the same level of achievement at graduation. All the race cars do not have to be the same speed or take the same number of laps. Each car is recognized individually.

The Athletic Analogy:

Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps swam all competitive strokes well enough to receive gold medals in all strokes. At the Olympics, the intent is to perform well in as many of the strokes as possible to result in gold medals. Most people do not remember the name of the 2nd place or silver medalist. Like IB, the diploma is like getting the gold. However, if all requirements are not met, there is still recognition and the participant is acknowledged but it is not considered the gold standard expected at the Olympics.

The AP program is like Peyton Manning playing his best as a quarterback and being recognized for that achievement inside of football. Whether his team goes, to the Super Bowl or not, this quarterback is recognized for his individual accomplishments and strengths. This is like AP. Going to the Super Bowl does not affect how Peyton Manning is acknowledged. His individual strengths in the area of quarterback are rewarded.

I have a handout that will provide some of the comparisons in the 2 programs. Study the information and research both programs on your own to understand which is best for your child.