

David Starr Jordan High School's Diploma Programme Rises From the Ashes

Steve Rockenbach

David Starr Jordan High School became an official part of the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme in the fall of 1993. The first IB exams were offered in May 1995. The school is located in North Long Beach, California, a working class community. Our program has been faced with many challenges over the years, including tepid administrative and staff support, limited academic support, limited exam fee assistance for students and inadequate staff training.

With the support of the IB family, improved campus leadership, renewed commitment to the IB and an inclusive access policy, we have overcome many of the challenges in order to offer a successful program for all students.

Background

In becoming authorized to offer the Diploma Programme, David Starr Jordan High School was searching for a way to hold on to students who were transferring to high schools with stronger academic programs. We were extremely honored to be part of the wonderful global community of the IB. However, despite this early excitement, our program languished for many years. We were neither meeting the needs of our students nor fulfilling the requirements of IB. There were no diploma candidates until the spring of 1999. Our school was caught up in the prestige of being an IB school, but we were not committed to the core ideals of the Diploma Programme.

In the fall of 1999, we were expecting a visit from IB North America representative in order to determine whether or not David Starr Jordan High School could sustain the program. Fortunately, by the time the IB representative visited our school in the fall of 1999, we had already begun laying the groundwork for improvement. A change in leadership, including a new principal and a new IB coordinator, led to a renewed commitment to the mission of IB.

Elements of Success

There are five key elements to our current success:

- Our program philosophy
- An open access policy
- Improved marketing and recruitment efforts
- A strong student support program
- Teacher training

Program Philosophy

Our staff is committed to the belief that the success of IB at David Starr Jordan High School is measured by the quality of the journey, rather than the ultimate destination. We do not get caught up in how many kids go to Ivy League schools or how many students in our class receive a perfect score on an IB exam. Instead, we focus on the quality of the learning environment and the individual growth of each student. We believe that the IB program is for all types of students, not only the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) students. Furthermore, students will carry their IB experience with them the rest of their lives, regardless of where they attend college. We are eager to guide students willing to take on the challenge of IB, pushing everyone towards excellence.

Access

IB is a magnet program at David Starr Jordan High School. In order to participate in the program, students

must complete a district magnet application, have a B average in middle school and be at grade level in their academic skills. With these basic requirements, we bring together a group of students from a broad range of backgrounds.

Long Beach Unified School District is a very diverse system. (See Table A.) This diversity translates into a wealth of cultural and ethnic learning opportunities for the students and for David Starr Jordan High School. Teachers are able to tap into the different cultural perspectives of their students, as they guide classroom discussions and work groups. The interaction among students of various cultures opens their eyes to new perspectives.

As an inner city school, more than 70% of our students are eligible for the state free-and-reduced lunch program. Additionally, more than half of our students live at or below the poverty line. The socio-economic breakdown in our IB program is very similar. We are fortunate to have access to both state and federal grant programs that provide exam fee assistance to our low-income students. (See Figure A.)

By providing access to IB, we allow our economically disadvantaged students access to opportunities, such

as an excellent secondary education. Since 1999, students completing at least one IB course have a college acceptance rate of 93%. This compares to about 15% average for the school as a whole. In the past school year alone (2003-2004), IB graduates received more than \$500,000 dollars in scholarship money. Although we do not have detailed alumni research at this time, anecdotal data suggests that our IB students continue to excel at their respective colleges. Without access to IB, most of these students would not be reaching the same level of achievement.

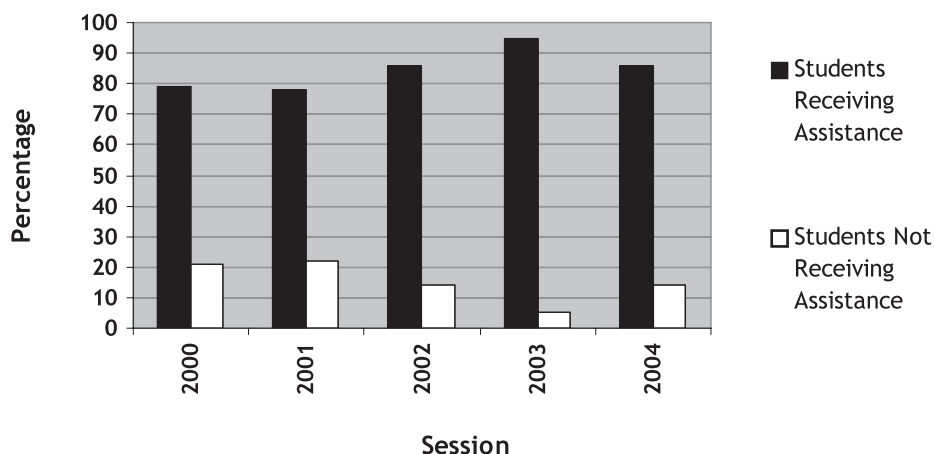
Recruitment

We found that providing an open door to all is not enough. Despite our open enrollment policies and willingness to provide challenges to those eager and ready, we have to convince students and parents to accept the challenge. In promoting the program, we encourage students to focus on the future benefits. For many in the community, getting by day to day is a monumental task. Convincing families to invest time and energy in an education that will have its true payoff down the road after graduation can be tough.

Table A. David Starr Jordan High School Diploma Programme Ethnic Distribution

	American Indian	Asian	Black	Filipino	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	White
IB Diploma Programme	0	21%	21%	2%	49%	2.2%	7%
David Starr Jordan High School	.2%	8.1%	30%	1.7%	50.7%	5.1%	4.1%
Long Beach Unified School District	.3%	10.2%	18.8%	3.3%	48.1%	2.1%	17.1%

Figure A IB Exam Statistics



Although the Diploma Programme begins in eleventh grade, we focus most of our recruiting efforts on incoming ninth graders. There were two primary reasons behind our decision. First, we felt very strongly that providing ninth and tenth graders with a solid academic foundation helps to create a seamless transition into the Diploma Programme. Second, because the other magnets in the district recruit students in the ninth grade, we did not want students to lose out on the opportunity to explore IB because they were committed to other programs.

Through extensive marketing efforts, including community information evenings, prospective ninth graders are beginning to realize the many benefits of the Diploma Programme. Parents are realizing that David Starr Jordan High School is a great place to send their child. As shown in Table B, our enrollment numbers are on the rise. For the current school year our pre-IB enrollment increased by 28% from the previous year.

As our pre-IB numbers grow, we are beginning to see a significant increase in the number of students sitting for IB exams and completing the IB diploma requirements. Currently, we have 25 anticipated candidates with an additional seven slated to take all six exams next year. In addition, we project 40 to 50 juniors sitting for their first exam in May 2006. Although we encourage all students to pursue the full Diploma Programme, some students and families choose to take individual exams in specific subject areas.

Student Support

In order to foster a learning environment that leads to academic growth and that provides students the opportunity to achieve success, we must augment our students' support system. This becomes a daunting task when you consider the following facts.

- More than 65% of our students come from families whose primary language is not English. (See Figure B.)
- Only 25% of our students have parents with college experience and the percentage with college degrees is even smaller.
- More than 20% of our parents did not complete high school.

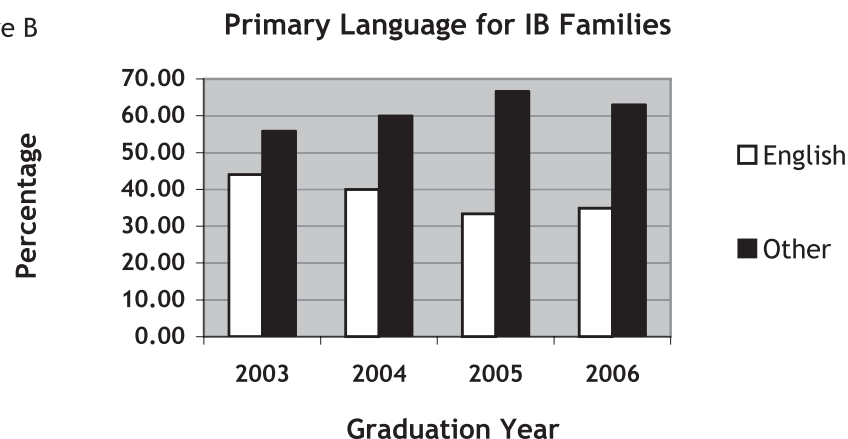
We have developed four key support mechanisms that help us provide the necessary assistance for our students, dedicated counseling, senior weekend, academic monitoring and mentoring.

Dedicated Counseling

Our IB students have an IB trained counselor, designated to meet their specific guidance requirements and can receive sound advice and direction. This focus has allowed our program to create a counseling curriculum dedicated specifically to the needs of IB students. Our students have a counselor who is well versed in the program, has a close working relationship with the IB teachers and believes in the goals of IB.

School Year	Ninth Grade	Tenth Grade	Total Enrollment
2002 - 2003	65	61	126
2003 - 2004	68	76	144
2004 - 2005	93	92	185

Figure B



Senior Weekend

The second support program is our Senior Weekend. Each September we take the IB seniors up to the local mountains to help them prepare for the rigorous senior year. In addition to tackling the most demanding year in the program, they are also faced with the added stress of applying to college, graduating from high school and preparing for the next stage of their lives. By leaving the city for the retreat, we create a calm, peaceful environment in which they can develop coping strategies and action plans for their senior year and beyond. This weekend has been such a success we have recently completed a weekend for our pre-IB freshman.

Mentoring

Mentoring is the fourth key support mechanism. We are fortunate to have partnered with our local university, California State University Long Beach (CSULB), over the past six years. They run the Community Scholars program that provides mentoring to our pre-IB sophomores. We target sophomores because many were opting out of IB during this year. They did not see the long-term payoff for the sacrifices they were making now.

Students from the CSULB Community Scholars were paired with tenth graders during the last half of fall semester and all of spring semester. The college students led small group discussions designed to help students see concrete examples

Table C. IB Exam Participation Growth Log

Exam Year	Diploma Candidates	Certificate Candidates	Anticipated Candidates	Number of Diplomas	Number of Exams Taken
May-95	0	15	0	0	15
May-96	0	6	0	0	7
May-97	0	12	0	0	19
May-98	0	8	6	0	16
May-99+	7	1	16	1	71
May-00	10	0	19	0	94
May-01	17	3	17	7	150
May-02	12	5	25	5	121
May-03	18	6	16	6	159
May-04	20	6	17	2	169
May 05 #	16	7	*25	?	163

+ Community Scholars Mentoring Program Began

Projected numbers for May 2005 Session

* Additional seven students will sit for their first exam next year

Academic Monitoring and Tutoring

The third mechanism is intensive academic monitoring and tutoring. Students who have less than a C in any course are required to attend mandatory tutoring sessions until their grades improve. If the grades show no sign of improvement at the end of the semester, the student is placed on academic probation. At the beginning of the probation period, students are required to have individual conferences with each teacher to develop an improvement plan. Students on probation are required to attend tutoring and must complete bimonthly progress reports. They must also return the probation contract with a parent's or guardian's signature. We are not trying to punish the students. We are trying to promote accountability.

that hard work and dedication are rewarded. Since this program has been in place, we have seen a steady growth in the number of students participating in IB courses. (See Table C.)

Teacher Training

Without qualified, passionate teachers no program can survive, regardless of the number of gifted students. While IB is very demanding of the students, it is equally demanding on the teachers. With commitment to the students and to the ideals of IB as the primary motivation, IB educators commit countless additional hours every year.

Teachers cannot expect to prepare their students adequately if the school does not provide professional development opportunities for them. We have three ways in which we support our teachers.

- IB workshops provide a professional atmosphere and our teachers usually return rejuvenated and eager to carry on.
- Teachers have release time for subject vertical teaming. By having our teachers on the same page from ninth grade onwards, we have been able to make great improvements in our test scores.
- A one-day retreat each fall allows teachers to meet and plan out the year. During this time we create a study session calendar, develop an assignment calendar and discuss key concerns for the upcoming year.

All of these practices lead to a cohesive group of teachers open to new ideas and dedicated to the program.

Conclusion

Our journey has been a dynamic one filled with potholes, roadblocks and many rewarding experiences. Our staff truly believes the IB Diploma Programme is the best academic curriculum available. We are proud to provide our students this opportunity. We take great pride in David Starr Jordan High School's growth over the past five years and will continue to raise the bar for students and staff alike.

As we work towards increasing the number of students meeting the demands of the IB Diploma Programme and improving our pass rates, we will not lose sight of the primary purpose of IB. We are here to provide students a first-rate education with an international perspective, push our students to be active participants in the global community and provide access to all those students willing to be part of the challenging yet rewarding world of IB.

The spirit of IB is alive and well at David Starr Jordan High School. Thanks to the guidance the IBNA and IBO staff and the support of the entire IB community, we have risen from the ashes.

Steve Rockenbach is the IB Coordinator at David Starr Jordan High School.