

Access for All: Langston Hughes Middle School Implements a Whole School Middle Years Programme

Rena Berlin

“All children deserve a Gifted and Talented education.”

- *Dr. Daniel Domenech, Superintendent of Schools, Fairfax County, Virginia*

All students, regardless of need or ability, participate in the Middle Years Programme at Langston Hughes Middle School. The decision to implement the MYP as a whole school programme stems from an intrinsic belief that all students can succeed, given the right circumstances. We realize that all students do not produce work on the same level yet we also know that through this programme, every student moves from where they began to nearer their potential.

Upon deciding to implement a whole school programme, we embraced the changes within the school by engaging students and the community in the authorization process. We also encouraged innovative methods that take advantage of the new educational opportunities presented by the programme and established the unwavering direction and essential support from the leadership of the district and the school administration.

The Authorization Process

In 2000, Fairfax County decided to implement the Middle Years Programme in three middle schools. In order to learn more about how to implement the programme, Fairfax County officials invited an experienced MYP Coordinator to address a group of high level administrators. School principals, guidance directors, potential MYP Coordinators and interested teachers were also invited to hear the presentation. As a potential leader of the MYP pilot team, I was invited to the presentation and listened to the discussion on whether to implement MYP as a school wide programme or as a magnet pro-

gramme. During the discussion, the visiting coordinator made it very clear that a whole school programme would entail a lot of work and many problems. Limiting the programme to a small, select group of students would have the advantages of much less record keeping and fewer teachers to train.

The authorization process was an interesting experience that involved all of the administrators and teachers in the middle school, as well as the level four and five teachers and administrators in our partner schools. The MYP Coordinator was from a middle school, while a staff member from the South Lakes High School was called the MYP Liaison. The Liaison, the current Coordinator and the former Coordinator, who is now retired, wrote the application as one document with a section for the high school and one for the middle school. Course outlines, written through vertical articulation events, allowed teachers in all levels of the programme to get to know each other - personally and educationally. Training, for the most part, was done vertically, breaking down many of the barriers between middle school and high school. Although we implemented a four-year programme, the sixth grade teachers from our feeder elementary schools were also introduced to

Access to the IB Programme

the MYP through staff training. This vertical and horizontal approach to authorization and planning brought the schools and the community together. Administrators edited; teachers “in-putted”; students gave their opinions; parents discussed and we all listened.

We held many community meetings and informational meetings, listening as the community and parents debated our coming authorization. Not all of the comments were positive comments, as some parents were concerned about how our programme would be impacted by inclusion. Some believed that the programme should only be for gifted students. However, as the majority of the community began to understand the Middle Years Programme, these voices faded over time.

On the day of the authorization visit I worried about the school walls. There were so many pieces of work hanging on them I was concerned about them crumbling. We believed that our MYP school should look and feel different, because we were different. Our school looked beautiful, global and full of Areas of Interaction. One school board member talked about the visit on our morning news programme. The teachers were ready for visitors. It was a wonderful day for Langston Hughes because it is not very often that a school has an opportunity to show off all of their students, their teachers and all of the knowledge that it has accumulated. Our authorization team was amazing. They asked insightful questions, complemented teachers on their hard work and dedication, answered questions and expressed appreciation towards our students. The experience was repeated at South Lakes High School. When the team finished their visit we looked around and realized how much we had grown - teachers, administrators, students, and parents - our community of learners.

After implementing the Middle Years programme for three years, Hughes was authorized as an IB Middle Years Programme in February 2003. From the perspective of a teacher who became the coordinator in 2000, whole school implies the children as well as the entire Hughes community. The visiting coordinator was right about the many problems, including the additional record keeping and the expense of teacher training. However, the burdens of coordination and administration are small compared to the amazing pride in having the entire school participate in the Middle Years Programme.

The Students

“What are you passionate about?” I ask the group of 50 students. My first, second,

and third answer . . . “Nothing.” Looking at a girl wearing makeup, I ask, “Did you know that some cosmetic companies test eye makeup on animals, and sometimes it makes the animals blind?” A flicker of their passion arises. “Do you know those parental warning labels on some CD’s? Legislators have discussed a law that would require parents to approve purchase of those CDs by someone under 18.” Their passion stirs.

Who says 8th graders aren’t passionate? We find passion in the need for high school athletes to maintain a specific grade point average, in the laws governing immigration, in clothing kids can and cannot wear. Who says that this passion is limited to only the smartest students, the gifted and talented?

One particular class with a student named David* demonstrates this passion, while also conveying the significance of the whole school programme at Hughes. As the history teacher among a team of 7th grade pilot teachers, I was relating *Homo Faber*, an Area of Interaction, to the Westward Movement and the transcontinental railroad. The class was one of my teamed classes, including approximately ten special education students and a special education teacher. David, who rarely asked a question or made a comment, raised his hand, as I was pontificating on the glory of the railroad.

“Mrs. Berlin,” he said, “you have the wrong Area of Interaction. It should be environment because the railroad changed the environment of the American Indian.” The class looked at David, thought a minute, and backed him up. I, with hidden grin, agreed to consider the change if David and the class could support their statement. The class gave rise to two major events: David’s “box” was broken, and I went from “Sage on the stage” to “Teacher as Learner”.

If Hughes Middle School had chosen to implement the MYP as a magnet programme with academic qualifiers, the events in class might not have occurred in the same way. It is unlikely that David and many of his history classmates would have been in the class. David’s grades in elementary school were poor. His self-esteem was very low. Without the grades or the confidence, he might not have found his way into a magnet programme.

Just how varied is our school population? There are approximately 900 students enrolled in the 7th and 8th grades at Hughes Middle School and 850 students enrolled in the 9th and 10th grades at South Lakes High

**Not his real name.*

Access to the IB Programme

School. Of the 900 students enrolled at Hughes, approximately 125 children attend our school from outside the attendance area. Approximately 10% of the students at Hughes Middle School are in a special education class while a similar percentage is enrolled in an ESOL class. There is also wide diversity in terms of socioeconomic backgrounds, with a quarter of the students receiving either free or reduced lunch. (Tables A and B).

Innovative Methods

In response to the challenges and changes that a full school implementation of the MYP entails, teachers have had to learn, practice, and discuss new ways of teaching. We created curriculum tools to unify our content and Areas of Interaction and found ways to reinforce total student body participation in the programme.

Table A

South Lakes High School Data	
9th and 10th grade Enrollment	850
NCES Data on South Lakes High School	
Total Students Enrolled	1660
9th grade Students	437
10th grade Students	444
11th grade Students	424
12th grade Students	346
Reduced Lunch Eligible	129
Free Lunch Eligible	285
American Indian	3
Asian	192
Hispanic	264
Black	305
White	896
Magnet	Yes
Title 1	No
Fairfax County Data on South Lakes High School	
General Education Enrollment	1395
Special Education Enrollment	230
Total Enrollment	1625
English for Speakers of Other Languages	145
Special Education Resource Assistance	261

Table B

Hughes Middle School Data	
Total Students Enrolled	900
Students from Outside Attendance Area	125
Students in Special Education Classes	10%
Students in ESOL Classes	10%
Students Receiving Free/Reduced Lunch	25%
NCES Data on Hughes Middle School	
Total Students Enrolled	921
7th grade Students	461
8th grade Students	460
Reduced Lunch Eligible	54
Free Lunch Eligible	160
American Indian	2
Asian	113
Hispanic	142
Black	155
White	509
Magnet	Yes
Title 1	No
Fairfax County Data on Hughes Middle School	
General Education Enrollment	629
Special Education Enrollment	109
Gifted Center Enrollment	184
Total Enrollment	922
English for Speakers of Other Languages	83
Gifted and Talented School-Based	153
Special Education Resource Assistance	145

Access to the IB Programme

A teacher's desire to be part of the programme and their willingness to learn are essential to their success in the Middle Years Programme at Hughes. Lesson plans were reformatted using the Areas of Interaction and the Guiding Questions of the Middle Years Programme. Teachers turn in MYP lesson plans on a regular basis and often ask for assistance when writing these plans. We have had several whole staff workshops on using an Area of Interaction and Guiding Question to focus a lesson. We offer one-on-one help for new teachers planning MYP lessons.

Our county asks teachers to plan "with the end in mind." Therefore, our lesson plans begin with assessment. Teachers use MYP rubrics as an assessment tool at least two times each quarter. In addition, teachers can use their own rubrics. All teachers understand the need to focus students through Areas of Interaction. A simple tool that has allowed both teachers and students to understand the Areas of Interaction is a chart that is adapted from the MYP Areas of Interaction Guide (Table C). Our teachers use the chart when planning their lessons. The students like it also.

Experienced teachers were able to reformat their lesson plans to meet the framework of the Middle Years Programme. One of the tools that assisted teachers in this task is Table D. The chart allows teachers to link their existing lesson plans and curriculum to the Areas of Interaction. Created during our pilot year, the chart is used by individual teachers developing their lessons. It helps teachers fully understand how to implement the MYP in their classes. In addition, it is a tool for developing the vertical articulation of the subjects. Any tool

that breaks down specific curriculum into the Areas of Interaction will work for this purpose.

Our special education students are an integral part of our school, and, therefore, of our Middle Years Programme. Students in the special education programme are taught in self-contained classes and in teamed classes like the history class that David attended. One of our special education teachers took the lead in demonstrating Areas of Interaction. She and her students personify the meaning in the IBO Mission Statement, "understand that other people with their differences can also be right." She volunteered to participate in the IB Online Global Conference with her students. She saw this project as a perfect vehicle to integrate writing, technology, and inquiry learning. For the conference, her students created presentations that explored the Area of Interaction, Community and Service.

Northern Virginia has a growing English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) population. ESOL students enter Langston Hughes from almost every country around the globe. Our Spanish speaking ESOL students take "Spanish for Fluent Speakers" moving into the IB Diploma language courses in the high school. Several of our ESOL students are becoming parent translators for school meetings in languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, French, Russian, and Bosnian. The inclusion of our ESOL population helps us think globally.

Implementing a whole school programme has opened up other opportunities for students. One of the strategic targets of the Superintendent is to increase minority participation in AP and IB Diploma courses in order to close the achievement gap for African-Ameri-

Table C

Areas of Interaction					
	Approaches to Learning	Environment	Health and Social Education	Homo Faber	Community And Service
Description	How do I learn best? How do I know? How do I communicate my understanding? How do I organize my materials? How do I take notes?	Where do we live? What resources do we have or need? What are my responsibilities to my environment? How does my environment impact my own life – in my home, my class, and my school?	How do I think and act? How am I changing? How can I look after others and myself? How has disease changed the world? How does a healthy body impact me?	Why and how do we create? What are the consequences of our creations? How does technology affect the world? How do art, music, and literature affect the world?	How do we live in relation to each other? How can I contribute to the community and the world? How can I help others? How does one segment of a community interact with other segments of a community?

Adapted from *The Areas of Interaction Guide*, ©IBO 2002

Table D

Subject: Language A	
<p><u>Homo Faber</u></p> <p><i>Warriors Don't Cry</i> Autobiography Constitution Essay writing Point of View Man vs. Technology</p>	<p><u>Environment</u></p> <p><i>The Pearl</i> Geography Environment and its effect on man Man vs. Nature</p>
<p><u>Health and Social Education</u></p> <p><i>The Pearl</i> Physical well being Mental stress Man vs. Man</p>	<p><u>Community</u></p> <p><i>When Things Fall Apart</i> African society Interaction between family members Interaction between individuals and society. Man vs. Society</p>

can and Hispanic students in Fairfax County. In 2003, Hughes piloted a Summer Institute to work towards the Superintendent's target. The Summer Institute, run by two middle school teachers and one elementary school teacher, prepares students for the Diploma Programme. The Institute recruits students who might have low grades, but have demonstrated in other ways that they have the potential to be excellent IB Diploma students. The fourteen students that participated in the Summer Institute have improved not only their grades, but also their attitudes and behavior. We believe that their new success is based equally on the skills that they acquired and on the confidence that they gained through the belief of teachers and administrators in their potential. Based on the success of the programme, we are hoping to increase participation this summer.

The Foundation of Support

A whole school programme is not possible unless there is firmly established network of support by lead-

ers, the local community and the sub-regional IB community. The leadership in the school must understand and believe in the importance of the programme and reinforce this message to staff, students, and parents. The local community must continue to support the leaders after authorization. And the IB sub-regional community should leverage its resources to help all prospective schools through and after authorization.

At Langston Hughes, the foundation of support was present. Dr. Nancy Sprague, the recently deceased Assistant Superintendent, laid the foundation for the final decision to implement a whole school programme. Our Principal and Assistant Principals participate in activities related to IB, such as IB training, in-school training, parent meetings and weekly administrative briefings. The school and district participate in IB events and reinforce the importance to parents, teachers and other community members. Even the guidance director has worked hard to tweak our seven period day so that the eight Middle Years subjects are available to all students. Furthermore, our counselors have learned the ins and outs of the programme so they can speak to parents with assurance.

One of the wonderful aspects of being part of the IBO community is our sub-regional group, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Coalition (MARC). As a sub-group of MARC, the MYP coordinators from Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia meet to discuss MYP issues and concerns. Our group includes MYP Coordinators from all levels of experience and programme types. What is a quagmire to one school is not a problem to another because they have "been there, done that."

The MARC Middle Years sub-committee has decided to offer subject-networking sessions similar to the sessions held by the MARC Diploma sub-committee. This year MARC will offer a networking session for teachers of math and art and our librarians. The assistance from MARC has been essential to our programme.

Conclusion

It has been extremely interesting and exciting to see the Middle Years Programme find its way into the fabric of the school, as it has been a way to provide additional opportunities for our students. Our programme is very new. Our current eighth graders are our first official MYP certificate candidates. We have yet to have Personal Projects in the tenth grade, though they are on their way. As a whole school programme, the costs of MYP training and classroom materials are higher than

Access to the IB Programme

for smaller programmes. Training is impacted by staff turnover due to retirements and relocations. Finding time for planning vertical articulation between the high school and middle is difficult when teachers have so many commitments already. Yet, telling a parent that all children are included and that all children can qualify for a certificate at the end of tenth grade makes our hard work a joy. The community at Hughes Middle School celebrates their differences, leaves no child behind, and provides a gifted and talented education to all students.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." We are making a path in the Reston Community and our trail will be full of children *who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.*

Rena Berlin is the MYP Coordinator at Hughes Middle School.