

# Q&A

## About IB and the International Program at Sycamore Elementary

The International School at Sycamore Elementary School is an authorized school for the Primary Years Programme\*. These are schools that share a common philosophy—a commitment to high quality, challenging, international education that the International School at Sycamore Elementary School believes is important for our students.

\*Only schools authorized by the IB organization can offer any of its three academic programmes: the Primary Years Programme (PYP), the Middle Years Programme (MYP), or the Diploma Programme.

For further information about the IB and its programmes, visit <http://www.ibo.org>.

### **What is the International Baccalaureate Organization?**

It is a non-profit educational and non-governmental (NGO) organization of UNESCO. The IB's alliance with UNESCO encourages the integration of its educational goals into the IB curriculum.

- It was established in 1968 in Geneva, Switzerland.
- It is governed by a 16-member council and is funded by fees from IB World Schools.
- The IBO offers three programs of international education for students aged 3-19 years old:
- The Diploma Program at the high school level (grades 9-12).
- The Middle Years Program (MYP) (students 11-16 years old).
- The Primary Years Program (PYP) (for students 3-12 years old).
- There are 651,000 IB students and 2,390 authorized IB schools in 129 countries.

### **What's the story behind the IBO?**

Marie Therese Maurette created the framework for what would eventually become the IB Diploma Program, in 1948, when she wrote "Is There a Way of Teaching for Peace?" a handbook for UNESCO. In the mid-1960's, a group of teachers from the International School of Geneva (Ecolint) created the International Schools Examinations Syndicate (ISES), which would later become the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO). The IB headquarters were officially established in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1968, for the development and maintenance of the Diploma Program, which provided an internationally acceptable university admissions qualifications for young people whose parents worked as diplomats or with international and multi-national companies.

### **What is an IB PYP School?**

Regardless of location, size, or make-up, an IB PYP school strives to develop an internationally minded person.

The mission of the IBO:

- ✓ To develop inquiring, knowledgeable, and caring young people.
- ✓ To create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.
- ✓ To work with schools, governments, and international organizations to develop challenging programs of international education and rigorous assessment.
- ✓ To encourage students worldwide to become active, compassionate, and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.

### **What does that mean at Sycamore Elementary?**

It means our students are taught WHY they should know something and how it connects to other subjects and the world around them. It means high quality teaching and learning—challenging instruction and worldwide knowledge "at home" (so to speak, in whichever country where you live and go to school). It also means great opportunities to study abroad in middle school, as well as opportunities to make friends with other students at IB schools around the world.

## **How does the IB PYP teach students to be internationally minded?**

Through teaching and modeling the “Learner Profile.” Regardless of the IB school your child may visit, these characteristics or “Learner Profile” remain the same—foundational to the IB PYP learning experience.

### **But, really, what does it mean to be “internationally minded” and why is it important?**

It is a thoughtful, critical perspective that applies to who we are and what we do. It includes how we communicate, our political awareness, cultural understanding, celebrating diversity, global awareness of global issues, and a reflection on how knowledge is constructed and applied. At Sycamore, we focus on moving students toward becoming people who reflect the characteristics of the “Learner Profile.”

- Inquirers—I am curious and know how to discover answers to many of my questions. I love to learn!
- Thinkers—I use my thinking skills to make good choices and solve problems.
- Communicators—I understand and share ideas in more than one language.
- Risk Takers—I try new things, love to explore, and confidently share my experiences.
- Knowledgeable—I explore big ideas that are important. I know and can do a lot of important things.
- Principled—I am fair and honest. I can make good decisions about what is right and wrong for me.
- Caring—I am concerned about other people’s needs and feelings. I believe it is important to help others.
- Open-Minded—I am comfortable with differences. I welcome and respect other people’s points of views and ways of doing things.
- Balanced—To be healthy, it is important for me to balance the needs of my mind and body.
- Reflective—I think about and discuss my learning, skills, and products.

### **What are the IB “Attitudes”?**

The “Attitudes” are the daily expressions of the “Learner Profile” used by teachers in teaching and by students in their learning.

1. **Appreciation**—Seeing and being thankful for the wonder and beauty of our world.
2. **Commitment**—Being responsible for my learning, showing self-discipline, and perseverance. Sticking with a difficult task until it is completed.
3. **Confidence**—Knowing I can do it! Having courage to take risks, using what I have learned, and making good choices.
4. **Cooperation**—Working with others and being willing to lead or follow as needed.
5. **Creativity**—Using my imagination while thinking and doing things.
6. **Empathy**—Being able to put myself in someone else’s place in order to understand her or him.
7. **Enthusiasm**—Being excited about learning and life.
8. **Independence**—Thinking and acting on my own.
9. **Integrity**—Being fair and honest.
10. **Respect**—Showing that I can for others, our world, and myself.
11. **Tolerance**—Understanding, appreciating, and celebrating differences in each other.

## **What will my child be learning at Sycamore?**

With the PYP at Sycamore, we are committed to structured inquiry as the vehicle for learning. Six trans-disciplinary themes provide the framework for exploration and construction of knowledge. Teachers and students are guided by these trans-disciplinary themes—as the design units of inquiry for exploration and study. Through this process, students develop an understanding of important concepts, acquire essential skills and knowledge, develop particular attitudes and learn to take socially responsible action.

### **Ok, what does “trans-disciplinary” mean?**

Trans-disciplinary is the word that IB uses to describe a discipline that applies across all disciplines—it is interconnected and can be applied across all subjects and applied to real life. A trans-disciplinary concept stretches across math, science, English, geography and ties it all together; it is not isolated to one subject. For example, the idea of change affects math, science, English, geography—the IB PYP strives to demonstrate this through learning, giving understanding to a real life world.

### **The IB curriculum incorporates 5 essential elements:**

1. **CONCEPTS**—there are 8 fundamental concepts expressed as key questions, to propel the process of inquiry. These universal concepts drive the research units—called UNITS OF INQUIRY (have you heard of this before?!)— but they also have relevance within and across all subject areas (trans-disciplinary). The 8 fundamental concepts are

- ✓ Form: What is it like?
- ✓ Function: How does it work?
- ✓ Causation: Why is it like it is?
- ✓ Change: How is it changing?
- ✓ Connection: How is it connected to other things?
- ✓ Perspective: What are the points of view?
- ✓ Reflection: How do we know?

2. **SKILLS**—There are 5 sets of trans-disciplinary skills acquired in the process of structured inquiry. These are:

- ✓ Thinking
- ✓ Communication
- ✓ Social
- ✓ Research
- ✓ Self-Management

3. **ATTITUDES**—The PYP promotes attitudes that we want our students to feel, value, and demonstrate.

4. **ACTION**—Our students are encouraged to reflect, to make informed choices and to take action that will help their peers, school staff, and the wider community. This is how our students demonstrate a deeper sense of learning, by applying their knowledge to service and positive action.

5. **KNOWLEDGE**—The PYP recognizes that it is inappropriate and challenging to dictate what

every child should know in an international environment and community. Rather than provide a fixed syllabus or curriculum, the PYP has identified themes, or areas of knowledge, which are used to organize the 6 Units of Inquiry, taught from early childhood through grade 5. These Units of Inquiry provide the framework (as opposed to a text book curriculum) for a wide variety of resources to be explored in order to accomplish the objectives within each Unit of Inquiry:

- ✓ Who We Are
- ✓ Where We Are in Place and Time
- ✓ How We Express Ourselves
- ✓ How the World Works
- ✓ How We Organize Ourselves
- ✓ Sharing the Planet

**Here is a diagram of how IB learners strive to be inquirers, risk-takers, knowledgeable, principled, open-minded, caring, balanced, and reflective.**



### **So, what actually is a “Unit of Inquiry”?**

A Unit of Inquiry usually lasts for 4-6 weeks and the objective is to cover all 6 themes throughout the year. For example, during the Unit of Inquiry “Sharing the Planet” students may spend 6 weeks looking at the resources we have in the world and how various countries use and share and dispose of these resources. Students will answer questions like: How do these resources connect people around the world? Or, how are these resources changing and what does that mean for people? These concepts and questions move across all school subjects (i.e. math, English, geography, etc.) and apply to real life and the world around us.

### **Explain to me a little more about how my child will be assessed at Sycamore?**

At Sycamore, each Unit of Inquiry allows students opportunities to demonstrate that learning is taking

place—that there are shifts, if you will, in their understanding. This may look different across all subject areas—however, this shift in understanding is not always best demonstrated through a piece of written work or a traditional exam. Students may be asked to put together a final project, draw, act out a performance, do a presentation, or some other way to show what they have learned. The goal is for our students to demonstrate that learning has taken place by showing what they understand and how they are applying that understanding to real life and the world around them. Authentic learning cannot always be demonstrated through traditional tests or exams. At Sycamore, we believe that assessment is the continuation of the learning process. It is NOT assessment of learning, but it is assessment for learning. The point is that our students are able to apply their learning to the world around them. The IB views assessment as needing to be authentic, essential, rich, engaging, and feasible—it should incorporate students in the process of evaluating their learning. “Formative” assessment is interwoven into the daily lessons and learning—this ongoing process of “checking in” between teachers and students, helps both teachers and students find out what they already know, in order to plan for the next stage of learning. “Formative” assessment and teaching are directly linked; effective learning cannot take place without one or the other. “Summative” assessment takes place at the end of the teaching and learning process—this is the time that students have the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding and application of what has been learned.

### **How can you, as a PARENT, get involved?**

Volunteer in your child’s classroom, the library, in the computer lab, at lunch, etc.

- Provide communication between yourself and school that is regular, 2-way, and meaningful.
- Participate as a full partner in decisions that impact your child and family.
- Collaboration with the community, through partnerships, which are mutually beneficial to our school and the community.
- You are always welcome at Sycamore when the students are having special programs or participating in international activities! We need your support and assistance to make our school the great place that it is!

This means that at Sycamore, with the IB PYP, our students in all grades have the opportunity to own their learning. Our teachers do not “cover” a subject or “give” a lesson. At Sycamore, our students take the lesson or learning process—they do it, make it, and experience it. Our students ask questions and learn how to find the answers to those questions and apply to their lives and the world around them. With the IB PYP, Sycamore students see how things are connected in a real way, rather than simply being fragmented into school subjects.

## **So, in the end, what makes the IB PYP so effective at Sycamore?**

We are a truly international community and we are committed to the IB philosophy that students need to be at the center of real life learning by using their natural curiosity. The IB PYP model fits well with our goals, at Sycamore, to guide our students to be internationally minded with a passion for life-long learning.

Sources used in compiling this guide book:

- Making the PYP Happen