

Why We Chose the Advanced Placement Curriculum Over the International Baccalaureate

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Back when we started our first charter school we questioned what curriculum would best prepare our students for not just college, and careers, but also citizenship in this great country of ours. After much debate, and some experimentation, we came to believe that the Advanced Placement (“AP”) curriculum was more aligned with our mission than the International Baccalaureate (“IB”) programme.

If you want to assure your child is truly ready for academic success in college, both the AP and IB offer the very best in college preparatory curriculum. Both AP and IB offer a more challenging college level of course work than non AP and non IB classes. Studies show that students who successfully complete AP or IB courses are significantly more likely to be successful in college and to graduate on time (or early), and with higher grades. Taking AP or IB courses in high school can earn the student many college credits before they even enroll.

The IB programme has a history traced to the International School of Geneva in 1924. Marie-Thérèse Maurette, at the time head of the International School of Geneva, developed the structure for what has evolved as the IB when she wrote [Is There a Way of Teaching for Peace?](#), a handbook for UNESCO. IB was founded under the League of Nations to educate the children of the League of Nations delegates. Currently the IB office is registered in Geneva, Switzerland and both UNESCO, and the United Nations are partners with and influence IB.

In contrast, the Advanced Placement curriculum was developed by the College Board to help U.S. high school students prepare for college. The College Board is an American private nonprofit corporation, currently headquartered in New York City, formed in 1899 to expand access to higher education for students in the United States of America.

Having stated some advantages for both programs, I do have some concerns about the rapid growth of the IB program here in America. Here locally, in both Williamson and Travis County, we have more schools offering the IB programme than ever before. A growing number of parents are enrolling their children in these “IB World Schools”, as they are called. You might want to ask why this is happening, and whether or not this is a positive development here in America.

My biggest concern with this IB growth trend is that, as more American students enroll in IB World Schools, will fewer among our youth share a common understanding and respect for

what are uniquely American values? The International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) that governs IB states its values as: “In developing an awareness of diverse values of different cultures, it is, however, fundamental that students in each IBO programme are exposed to those human values which are recognized as universal; these embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted and proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948”. When you look closely, the IB values and curriculum reflect a more universal, relativistic and even socialist view, while the AP values and curriculum more consistently reflect the founding values of the United States of America such as individual liberty, created equally, and democracy. The IB curriculum de-emphasizes ones nationality, in our case U.S.A. nationality, and emphasizes the values of a new “worldliness”.

Every educational system has a moral goal that it tries to attain and that informs its curriculum. What is taught and emphasized matters. When limited government run education began to take hold here in American in the 1850’s, schools invited students to take their seats in a shared American culture. The public schools mission was, in part, to produce students sufficiently proud and knowledgeable of this country and ready to take care of it. With passage of the Fourteenth Amendment to our Constitution in 1868, the public school movement struggled to welcome every student into this common cause. As a nation we still struggle today to achieve the ideals for which this country was founded, but don’t we want all our American students sufficiently exposed to what those are, and how to live them?

While it is important that your child be familiar with the history and values of the United Nations and, most certainly, to be knowledgeable, appreciative, and respectful of the customs and values of people from other nations, I would caution that an unfiltered exposure to some of the principles in IB could occur at the expense of other uniquely American values, the authors and their writings that created them, and of the institutions that protect and promote those values. I believe the principles behind the forming of the College Board, and the AP curriculum employed at Gateway College Prep, are closer to our Founders view of how to train young minds than the International Baccalaureate Programme.

Finally, IB is expensive to implement (teacher training, program fees, certification, travel, administrative costs, etc) and would increase our current instructional costs by 6%. I am also critical that more of our American education dollars are going to support an organization in Geneva, Switzerland with its own agenda, and whose values in some ways contradict our Constitution. Costly boutique educational programs like IB are effective, but so is AP. With full adoption of the American College Board Advanced Placement curriculum, schools like Gateway College Prep do provide an exceptional academic foundation for college readiness, and preparation for success in a global world.