

Maggie

FYC 13100

Professor Clauss

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I B Supporting IB

Situation: As a former member of the International Baccalaureate program at Cathedral High School, I am writing a letter to the Cathedral Staff and Administration, who are considering entirely removing the IB program from the high school. Currently, the school has a budget that determines the amount of money that is dedicated to the program; however, due to the difficult economic times, the Administration and Staff are contemplating the removal of the IB program in hopes of saving money. In my argument, I would like to help them realize the benefits of the program and, ultimately, persuade them to uphold the funding that supports the IB program at Cathedral.

Dear Administration and Staff of Cathedral High School,

I am writing to you to as a former member of the Cathedral International Baccalaureate program with the hopes of contributing my thoughts to the current discussion regarding the removal of the IB program from the school. The topic of IB is near and dear to my heart, as my experience in IB was one of my favorites in high school. Because my experiences were so beneficial, I would like to believe that future Cathedral students will be offered the same opportunity that I was. While I realize the difficulty that accompanies the allocation of the school's budget during difficult economic times, I believe that the benefits that the IB program offers outweigh the financial concern.

One valuable aspect of the International Baccalaureate program is that it gives Cathedral an enrollment advantage over the other high schools in the area that do not offer the program. For example Cathedral High School is one of only three private schools in Indianapolis that offers the IB program ("Find"). As a result, Cathedral attracts many students who are interested in attending a private school that offers the IB program. In fact, journalist David Savage asked

high school associate superintendent William Kritzmire about the effects that the IB program had on his school. Among other positive reviews, Kritzmire said, “[The IB program] has created great interest among parents and has given the school a certain added prestige” (602). Savage’s citation of Kritzmire demonstrates the positive effects that the IB program has on a school’s reputation, and as Cathedral currently offers the program, these benefits probably apply not only to Kritzmire’s school, but also to Cathedral. Conversely, the effects of the removal of the IB program would probably have a negative effect on Cathedral. If the school were to remove the IB program from the available curriculum, students in the Indianapolis area who are interested in attending an IB school would no longer consider Cathedral as an option. Thus, fewer students would be applying and getting accepted, and consequently, the overall influx of tuition would decrease because there would be fewer students attending the school. So although some may say that the IB program has a negative effect on Cathedral’s financial situation, they should keep in mind that by removing the program, money would be lost as a result of a lower student enrollment.

In addition to giving Cathedral an advantage over other schools in the area, the IB program offers a better education for students who are more interested in developing their writing and analytical skills, because the International Baccalaureate program emphasizes the importance of these particular aspects of learning. For example, in each IB course, students are required to complete at least one internal assessment. (If you are unaware, the internal assessments are creative projects graded by the teacher that require a certain amount of writing and analysis.) For example, for my one of my internal assessments in IB Math, the students were given the task of developing a formula based on various mathematically related situations. After students developed and tested their formulas, they were required to write an essay of at least

1500 words describing and analyzing their processes. Similarly, for my internal assessment in my IB Biology class, students had to create their own experiment using any of the topics discussed over the course of the class. After the experiment was created and conducted, students not only had to write a lab report, but they also had to write a separate paper describing their reasoning and method behind the experiment. These assessments not only encouraged students to be systematic in their work, but also required them to use their writing skills in traditionally writing-free subjects. As demonstrated by my Math and Biology internal assessments, many of the IB classes are geared towards improving students' analytical and writing skills. Conversely, in the opinion of UCLA Professor, Paul Von Blum, AP classes focus more on students' ability to memorize facts. So AP classes may be more beneficial students who excel in learning through memorization, but students who prefer to learn through writing and analysis will probably have more success in the IB program. Therefore, the removal of the IB program from Cathedral would deprive some students the opportunity to learn in the style that best fits their strengths.

Besides the development of writing and analytical skills, the IB program provides better options for students who may have a different type of testing style than that which AP classes offer. For instance, with AP, the scores a student receives on one test at the end of his or her senior year will be the only assessment of his or her knowledge. However, with IB testing, a student has two to three tests over a two-year time period. With this system, students receive multiple opportunities to perform to their true abilities. For example, consider a student who is having a bad day on the day of her AP test, and thus does not perform to her true potential. Unfortunately, all of her work over the past year is based off of that single performance. However, if a student is having a bad day when the time comes for one of her IB tests, and she does not perform to her true ability on the test, she will have a chance to make it up because

there are multiple exams, and their averages will determine her final grade. So although the AP testing style may be more beneficial for students who prefer to take only one test, one cannot deny that some students will be more successful with IB testing because there are multiple IB tests. Because of this, the removal of the IB program would put students who would be better fit for the IB test format at a disadvantage.

In addition to the beneficial test format, the IB program requires students to complete the unique core requirement of Theory of Knowledge (TOK). Actually, Theory of Knowledge was one of my favorite classes in my entire high school career, as it exposed me to an entirely new way of thinking. For example, in TOK I learned about the concepts of relativism and absolutism, and ever since, I have been relating my experiences to these concepts. In addition, without TOK class, I would have never discovered my love for the subject of philosophy. So, the removal of this class may not only deprive students of an introduction to new schools of thought, but it could also deprive them of an opportunity to discover a subject they love. Additionally, Theory of Knowledge helped me to make connections about the material I learned in my various IB classes. For example, one week in TOK, we connected the information we were learning about the Holocaust from IB History class with the theories about morality we had studied previously in TOK. These connections were a key element of the class. In fact, British journalist Tony King asserts that, “At the heart of the IB is its ‘theory of knowledge’ element, which draws the academic threads together, encouraging pupils to reflect on the processes of thought used in the different domains.” Here, King acknowledges the unifying nature of the class, as well as the enrichment of critical thinking that results from the integration of various subjects. The connections that the Theory of Knowledge class cultivates are unique to the IB program, as there are no AP classes that have even a remotely similar function to that of TOK. So, the removal of

the IB program would result in the loss of the unique and unifying educational experience that is Theory of Knowledge.

Not only does IB provide students with the opportunity to take Theory of Knowledge, but it also inspires students to reach out to the community, mainly by requiring the completion of CAS hours. If you are unaware, CAS stands for creativity, action and service, and in order for the CAS requirement to be fulfilled, a student must complete fifty hours in each category, for a total of 150 hours over a two-year period. The requirement of CAS hours not only encourages students to participate in community service, but it also encourages them to think creatively about the improvement of our world and reminds them of the importance of physical activity in their lives. For example, some of my fellow IB classmates decided to restore the gazebo on campus, which, as you may be aware, had deteriorated over many years of wear and tear. This project not only gave students hours for the action portion of their CAS, but it also improved the Cathedral campus. An additional CAS project that was completed by the IB students in my class was the organization of an exchange program. Since the IB program lasts for two years, we had enough time to get in contact with an IB school from Costa Rica and make plans for some students from the school to live with host families and attend Cathedral for two weeks during the winter of our senior years. This experience was challenging for both the Cathedral and the Costa Rican groups, because there was a lot of planning and preparation required from the students. Nevertheless, the exchange program was a great success, not only because of the cultural enrichment, but also because all of our creativity hours were completed in the organization and planning of the program. Additionally, the CAS requirement is unique because a reflective writing piece must accompany each activity that is completed. This allows students to take time and consider the impact that they are making on the community, and hopefully, it will inspire

them to continue in their work. Clearly, the CAS requirement that accompanies the IB program is an enriching and highly beneficial element not only for Cathedral students, but also for the school itself.

Besides the benefits of the CAS hours requirement, the IB program provides students with the opportunity to be internationally recognized as successful pupils, thus providing them with international opportunities. After all, the program's headquarters are in Switzerland, making IB highly popular in Europe ("IB"). To illustrate this popularity, consider the situation of a student in my IB class, Taylor, who chose to participate in the program because she was interested in attending college in Europe. Fortunately, she had done research and discovered that European schools look favorably upon students with an IB diploma. As a result of her participation in the IB program at Cathedral, Taylor is now attending the prestigious St. Andrew's University in Scotland. Similarly, another student in my IB class, Jane, applied and was accepted to the American University in Rome, which also looks favorably on students with IB diplomas. Although Jane did not choose to attend this school, she was still grateful that the IB program gave her the opportunity to apply and be accepted (Doe). Not only does IB prepare students for study in European countries, but it prepares them for study in eastern countries as well. For example, the superintendent of an Oregon school district, Doug Nelson notes, "Our graduates will be competing in a much more global society. We want them on the same footing with others not just from Seattle and Portland, but from China, Singapore, Korea, and India" (Schachter 28). In his statement, Nelson emphasizes one of the reasons he had for supporting the IB program, which is the international aspect of the program. As demonstrated by the situations of Taylor and Jane, as well as the statement by Superintendent Nelson, the IB program allows students to broaden their options in regards to international study. So a removal of the IB

program would deprive those students interested in attending college abroad from receiving the education that many international schools appreciate.

In addition to the creation of international possibilities, the IB program gives students more opportunities to earn college scholarships and admission. For instance, the official IB website lists over eighty-five colleges in the United States that give scholarships to students who earned their IB diplomas (“University”). More specifically, schools such as Oregon State University and the University of Minnesota offer automatic admission and an entire year of credit to students who have earned at least thirty (out of forty-five) points of IB credit (Schachter 30). Regardless of this information, some may claim that there are still some colleges in the country that do not accept IB credit. While I agree that the IB program is not as well-known as the AP program, I would like to point out that many college admissions officers are becoming more aware of the IB program and its benefits. In fact, David Hawkins, the director of public policy and research for the National Association for College Admissions Counseling, asserts that, “The IB has been on the radar screen easily for more than a decade. Many admissions officers I’ve talked to hold the IB program in high esteem, at least as high as AP. They see IB as more difficult” (Schachter 30). Not only does Hawkins’ statement demonstrate admissions officers’ familiarity with the program, but it also highlights the equal, if not superior, status of the IB program in admissions officers’ eyes. As you can see, the IB program provides students with many opportunities in regards to applying to and receiving scholarships for college, so the removal of the program would result in the loss of these great benefits for students.

The enormous value that the IB program provides for Cathedral can be demonstrated by the additional enrollment the program gives the school, the development of students’ writing and analytical skills, multiple tests for students with different testing styles, the benefits that result

from the TOK and CAS hours requirements, international opportunities, and the chance to earn scholarships for college. So, as you can see, the IB program provides Cathedral with many valuable features. Thus, the removal of the program would be a great detriment to the students as well as the school as a whole. In fact, the benefits that the IB program provides greatly outweigh the financial worry, especially because that worry can be easily soothed with the knowledge that your school and students are receiving the invaluable educational experience that is International Baccalaureate. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter, and I hope that you keep what I have said in mind when it comes time to make your final decision.

Best regards,

Maggie -----

Cathedral High School Class of 2010
University of Notre Dame Class of 2014

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