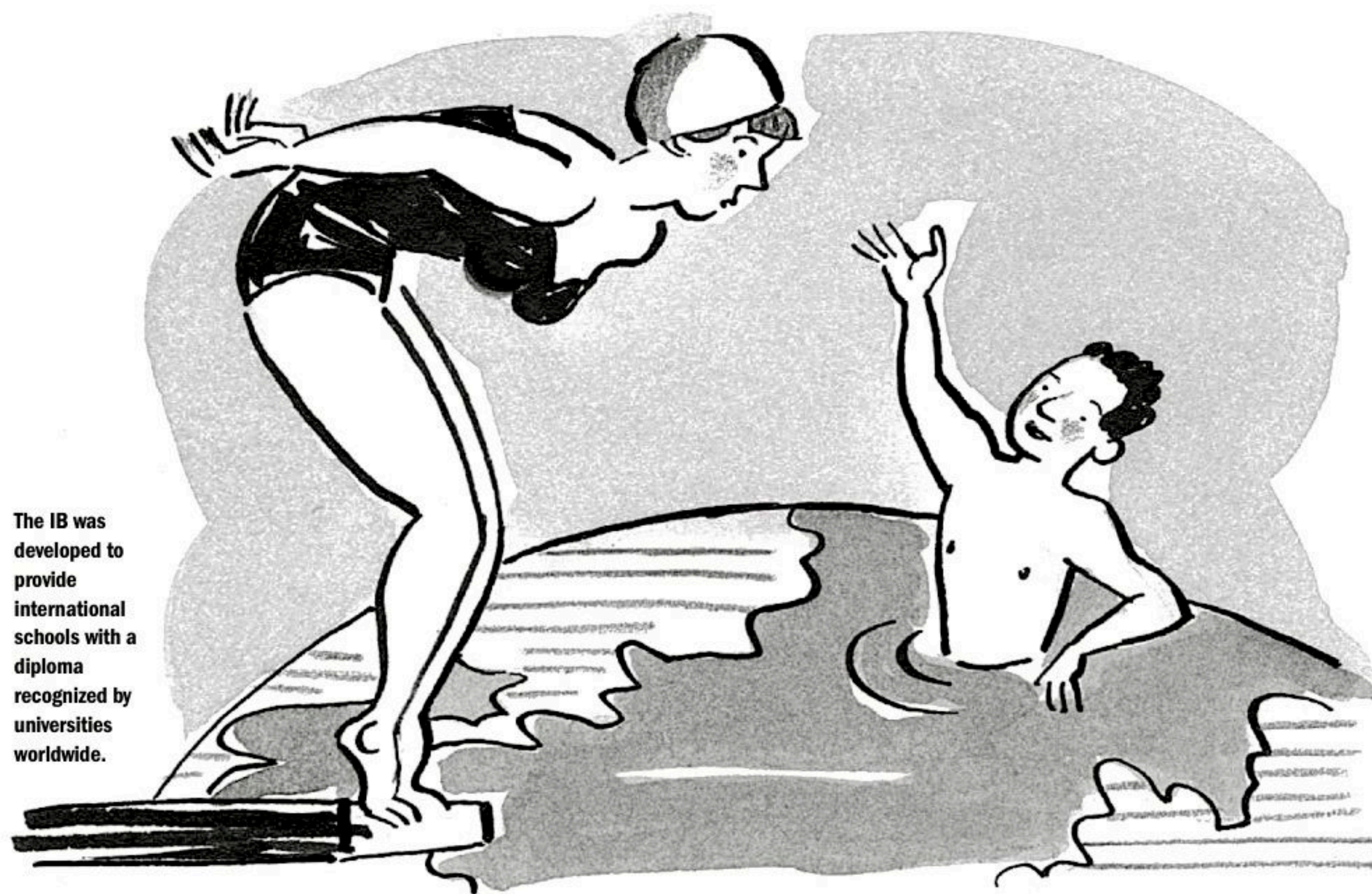


# Lifelong learning: International Baccalaureate



The IB was developed to provide international schools with a diploma recognized by universities worldwide.

**Growth** | Gaining ground

## From elite beginnings to an equal opportunity education

When British Prime Minister Tony Blair endorsed the International Baccalaureate program last November, he may have upset many of his countrymen who cling to the traditional English system of "A levels" and "O levels," but he was right in line with the thinking of education experts around the globe.

The subject of his endorsement, the International Baccalaureate Program, is "the most challenging high school curriculum at the advanced level," says Jeannette Law, educational adviser for Northern Italy for the U.S.-Italy Fulbright Commission. "It is attractive to schools because it is interdisciplinary, requires writing skills and is flexible; graduates can go to universities anywhere in the world," she explains.

The IB was developed in 1968 to provide international schools with a secondary school curriculum and diploma recognized by universities worldwide. Its mission has since

expanded to "develop challenging programs of international education and rigorous assessment," not only for private schools catering to international students but also national school systems, and not only for high school students but pupils from ages 3-19.

Today, over 50 percent of IB schools and over 70 percent of IB students are enrolled in public (state) schools. In fact, in the United States, 90 percent of IB programs are in public schools, reports Brad Richardson, the IB's regional director for North America. Many of those schools are located in urban centers or in low-income communities. "The IB Diploma Program is often used as a means to improve student achievement across the board and ensure equity and quality in schools that previously were unable to enjoy high-quality learning," he notes.

Malcolm Kay, superintendent of ACS International Schools, a group of three private schools in the United Kingdom all offering IB

programs, shares this view. "Students with a range of abilities have shown that they can thrive on this curriculum, and as a program of study there is great breadth and opportunity for all to both learn and demonstrate the learning," he says. "Far from limiting opportunity, broad-based education provides greater scope for students to demonstrate their understanding through varied and individually appropriate assessments."

Proof of this lies in the performance of IB schools in Newsweek's 2006 list of "America's Best High Schools." Six of the top 10 schools in the United States last year offered IB programs, despite the fact that the IB is offered by roughly 1 percent of U.S. schools.

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According to Richardson, "Successful IB schools can be found in urban, suburban or rural communities. They are in low-income communities. They are in communities with significant minority populations. These schools choose the IB because it provides a high-quality education for all, while preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century."

Today the IB organization in Geneva works with 1,969 schools — public, private, parochial, magnet, charter and independent — in 125 countries to develop and offer its three programs for primary school (PYP, ages 3-12), middle school (MYP, ages 11-16) and IB Diploma (ages 16-19). The overall growth rate has been 17 percent annually since 1971, with much faster growth in the newer PYP and MYP programs.

Schools offering all three programs are still a rarity: In the United Kingdom, five schools offer the PYP and six schools offer the MYP, while 97 schools offer the IB Diploma. By way of contrast, Mongolia has only one IB school, which offers all three programs. Deidre Fischer, director of the International School of Ulaanbaatar, explains that by providing all three, her school is able to "offer a quality education for all students and allows us to have the IB philosophy as an instrumental component of our vision and mission. The advantages are many in that it encourages best-practice teaching and allows us to focus on improving student learning. It enables us to label ourselves as an IB World School, and parents know that there is a certain standard of teaching within the school."

An IB World School is one that has been recognized as such by the IB organization. The "world" designation is appropriate because each IB curriculum stresses interdisciplinary learning, international understanding and the appreciation of other cultures. At the diploma level, students must take subjects in six different groupings, pass a Theory of Knowledge course, write an original extended essay of 4,000 words and participate in "creativity, action, service" in the creative arts or community service. Kay of ACS points out that some of his students are working in schools and orphanages in Africa and also with the ORBIS Flying Eye Hospital. ■

**Professional development** | A holistic approach

## For the benefit of the whole school

Because the word "educate" means "to lead out," it makes sense that the person who does the leading, the teacher, is the single most important factor in a child's education.

For this reason the International Baccalaureate Organization places a great deal of emphasis on the professional development of its teachers. Before a school can be certified as an IBO World School, the program coordinator for that school and at least one teacher in every subject must undergo IB training. "Then we encourage the training of all teachers in our approach, but it is up to the schools themselves to do it," explains Jonathon Marsh, head of the professional development and research division for the IB organization. "Underpinning our philosophy of professional development, we don't provide certification or evaluation of teachers. We are fostering the idea of professional development for the whole school, not just teachers."

Because professional development is deployed at the regional level, rather than centrally, there are minor variations in IB training among the organization's four regions

around the world, reflecting regional specificities, but the basic structure and requirements are consistent. There are three levels of training: 1) introduction to the program; 2) assessment and understanding of various subject groups; 3) a wide range of specialized topics that may be specific to course material (cutting-edge advances in physics) or pertain to teaching in general (leading theories of classroom learning).

### Online workshops

Workshops are held periodically in many parts of the world, but because of the time and cost of attendance, more and more of them are now being offered online. "These last up to six weeks, a few hours a week, instead of one intensive weekend," says Marsh. "We started in 2005 and have done independent evaluation, and the response is largely favorable."

Online access is one of the ways he sees to help the organization deal with its most pressing issues in the coming years: the speed of growth and the scaling-up of professional development to meet the demands of that growth. ■

**Intensive weekend teacher-training courses are being supplemented or replaced by online workshops.**

