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## Two Schools, One Programme: Building a Successful Partnership

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As we stand in the door of Atlantic Community High School's International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme English IV class, we identify Kyle, Robert, Whitney, Sharice and the 29 other IB diploma candidates that make up the Fab 33. The Fab 33 are special to us because these 33 students are the first diploma candidates to have completed Carver Community Middle School's Middle Years Programme (MYP) in preparation for Atlantic Community High School's Diploma Programme.

These students, who began their IB journey as 6<sup>th</sup> graders in the 1999 - 2000 school year, worked hard and looked deep within themselves as they began to understand that international mindedness, life-long learning and rigorous academics were not just phrases. As we look at these young men and women, we remember the road we traveled to provide them with the opportunities of an international education.

### Two Schools, One Programme

During school year 1997-1998, we were appointed to serve as the MYP liaisons for the partnership by our respective schools Atlantic Community High School and Carver Community Middle School. We were to oversee implementation of the MYP and to assist in the writing of the application document. When we began, we focused on the opportunities the MYP held for our students, not the difficulties of collaboration between two schools. "Two Schools, One Programme" became the motto of our program, and it still is. We agreed that to make a true partnership, our faculties had to think of themselves as one unit and the whole student body as their students.

The principals played a large part in this vision, allowing the two faculties to go to training together and to interact as one staff. Even though the IB tells us that the MYP and the Diploma Programmes can exist separately, the vision given to us by the school district and administration was a seamless progression of intercultural awareness, holistic knowledge and communication from grade 6 through grade 12. In order for this to work, we had to begin with the end, the Diploma Programme, in mind.

### Planning Backwards

Two Schools, One Programme is more than just a phrase. Our true best practice is collaboration at the practical level. For our partnership, there were several steps involved to make this collaboration become a reality. Our first step was to ask the expert Diploma Programme teachers from Atlantic to speak to their middle school counterparts at Carver concerning the IB Diploma Programme. In order for our partnership to flow correctly, the middle school teachers needed to know what was expected of 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade "Pre-IB" (soon to become MYP) students and 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade IB diploma candidates. We called this process "planning backwards." The Atlantic teachers discussed the nature of the examinations at the end of the Diploma Programme, thus highlighting the supportive skills that needed to be taught in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

After this meeting, the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade teachers along with their Diploma Programme counterparts compiled a list of skills for each subject area and forwarded them to the middle school teachers. After the middle school teachers received their respective subject area skills list, they spent a week reviewing their existing middle school curriculum, our Florida Sunshine State Standards and developing a rough time line of their subject area, which was used to develop the grade-level implementation plans and course descriptions for the application document.

### Top Down

Our second step was to have the two faculties meet together again to discuss the skills. We divided the faculty into subject area groups and allowed them to discuss their skills lists, develop their course descriptions and discuss assessment tasks. The middle school

teachers saw the value in having the Diploma teachers involved due to the expertise in criterion referenced assessment. The Diploma teachers began to understand that the middle school teachers were the experts in teaching through the areas of interaction and the MYP philosophy. As the middle school teachers viewed the criteria for the level 5 assessments in relation to challenges of the Diploma Programme, they began to understand the value of a rigorous curriculum in the MYP. This shared expertise and collaboration bred the continuity and rigorous program that we had envisioned from the beginning.

As a result of the examination of skills by both faculties, each teacher in the MYP knew where the skill development began and what the end result in each subject area would be. During one of these joint meetings, the science departments noticed the physical science component of the IB sciences curriculum was not required or taught at either one of our schools. The science teachers studied the MYP science aims and objectives and determined what facets were appropriate for middle school and for high school. This collaborative effort led to the teaching of the physics objectives in grade eight, allowing students to prepare for, in grades nine and ten, Diploma Programme biology and chemistry.

Productive collaboration could be seen everywhere. After we had aligned the curriculum, the algebra I honors, algebra II honors and geometry teachers at both school sites began giving the same departmentalized exams and reviewing their scores together to determine grade boundaries for semester exams. The French and Spanish language teachers duplicated this task. Due to this extensive exercise in professional cooperation, the faculty at Atlantic decided that the students entering grade nine from Carver did not have to complete a placement exam required of all other students from other feeder schools.

## Student Successes

The "Two schools, One Programme" concept has fostered amazing growth and creativity in our students: Tippu has taken his personal project about museum architecture and is planning to pursue architecture as a major in college. Kyle has continued his interest in world peace, maintaining his personal project web site and arguing for world peace on the Atlantic debate team. Jonathan has come to understand his Attention Deficit Disorder and used it as the basis for his extended es-

say. Abbey continues to expand her art and her creative writing. Josh is taking AP and IB English classes at the same time. More importantly, students who probably would not have succeeded in the Diploma Programme otherwise have "stayed the course."

At the time of this publication, the Fab 33 are preparing for their graduation. We have celebrated early admission to Harvard University, University of Florida, Florida State University, Iowa State University and New College as well as many others. The students are beginning to receive scholarships based on academics as well as interests. We are still preparing extended essays, world literature papers, English orals, French and Spanish orals and studying for Diploma Programme exams.

Life-long learners. Global thinkers. Risk takers. Seekers of the academic challenge. When we think about the opportunities the MYP and DP have opened for our students, it makes the challenges of collaboration on the practical level worth the extended effort on behalf of our staff.

*Kelly Daniels is now the Diploma Programme Coordinator at Forest Hill High, a prospective MYP school. Carolyn Timberlake is the MYP Coordinator at Atlantic Community High School.*