

Decision Making Rationale: Why Interlake?

After months of study and research, the BSD Gifted High School Advisory Committee voted 12 to 6 on November 22 to approve and move forward with the Interlake High School Gifted IB/AP option. This was an agonizing decision for many of the committee members, balancing the needs and desires of their own children with what makes sense for the greatest number of current PRISM middle school students.

In preparing for this decision, committee members researched established gifted programs at high schools across the United States and reviewed journal articles and literature from gifted program educators. They talked with admissions officers at local, selective, and Ivy League universities, researched what good schools are looking for in college applicants, and investigated the content, acceptance and success of both International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement programs. They sought and considered input from existing and former PRISM students and their parents, solicited through both formal and informal surveys. Finally, they interviewed principals and teachers at both BSD high schools under consideration, attended tours of the facilities, and sat in on classes at both schools, and encouraged other PRISM parents to do the same.

Though the group hoped for a mandate, the input from more than 130 families of PRISM 6th, 7th and 8th graders in the form of survey responses – and their own views based on e-mail exchanges and discussions in their near-weekly meetings – showed opinions remained nearly evenly split. However, the Interlake IB/AP option achieved a slight edge in each of the three grade levels, as well as among committee members. The reasons behind the final vote were as varied as the committee members themselves. By sharing some of the views of the committee's voting members, it is possible to get some insight into the thinking behind the group's decision.

Those in favor of the Interlake IB/AP option stressed their views that:

- The IB program provides a holistic approach to education. It focuses on developing a well-rounded adult who is aware of being part of a greater whole. To this end, it puts greater emphasis on Creativity, Activity and Service as well as advanced philosophical thinking, and promotes critical thinking, inquiry, communications, and risk taking.
- The IB program already integrates many of its classes, much as we would be trying to achieve at Sammamish. Since it already exists here, we would not be “re-inventing the wheel” and would have a greater likelihood of success.
- The IB program is accepted internationally and by many top U.S. universities.
- Our students would be graded and tested to international standards, which ensures academic parity.
- Students and teachers in the IB program were enthusiastically engaged in every class and at every visit.

- Having seven classes allows students to take both music and a world language all year, without consuming all of their electives.
- The popular Theory of Knowledge class does not currently have an equivalent at Sammamish.
- At Interlake, our kids will have the option of taking AP tests as well as IB tests, and of earning an IB degree, which can be used to gain sophomore standing at many top colleges.
- The “emotional safety” of a smaller school makes a difference in kids’ day-to-day experiences. The small size of the school fosters a culture where kids interact with each other on a fairly high level
- IB’s integrated and world-view approach will help our children see the world from a different framework, to start looking at the larger issues in life –“an appropriate developmental milestone. IB has a lot of why’s mixed in with the what’s and when’s, and I think it’s therefore more conducive to a richer learning experience particularly tailored to the adolescent mind.”
- Although Sammamish might be a better fit for an individual committee member, we served as representatives of the PRISM community, and therefore needed to honor the will expressed by survey respondents.
- Completion of an IB Diploma in the junior year would allow our students to be the only kids in the US applying for colleges with an IB diploma in hand rather than just being a diploma candidate. This will make them stand above other college bound applicants.

It was, as stated previously, an excruciatingly difficult decision. Either program could have been adapted to meet the students’ needs, but only one could be selected. By selecting the Interlake IB/AP program as home for our gifted high school, the group met the stated preference of a small majority of interested PRISM families.

Please continue to stay involved in the process and continue to give your opinions. Our goal is to create an exciting and creative program that meets the needs of the gifted high school children in our region. As plans for the program evolve, I hope your concerns will be addressed and resolved. Our success depends on your on-going support, ideas, criticisms and guidance.