

# Hilton first school in state to offer IB in all grades

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The Hilton Central School District recently received certification for its grade 5-10 International Baccalaureate program, making it the first district in New York to offer the rigorous curriculum from kindergarten to graduation.

The IB program was created in Switzerland in 1968 and is recognized internationally. It places particular emphasis on learning through asking questions and cross-cultural understanding.

Other schools, including Wilson Magnet High School in Rochester, offer it for students at some levels. But Hilton is now the only one in the state where students can take IB classes in grades K-12.

Tim Dobbertin, principal at Merton Williams Middle School, said having a uniform curriculum helps ease students' transitions between elementary, middle and high school. He also noted that the IB curriculum aligns fairly well with Common Core standards.

"It's a comprehensive way for us to up our game a little bit," he said. "Expectations are higher; kids have to master more difficult, higher level skills; and they have to do more intricate things with their learning."

Jean Jackson had three children get IB diplomas at Hilton High School, with the youngest graduating in 2013. "It was a lot of work, but all three of them have said they're really glad they did it," she said. "It helped them get into the colleges they wanted to get into and prepare them for the classes they're taking. ... It made them think deeper." The focus on globalism and cross-cultural understanding was also important to the district, which has a very homogenous student body. District leaders are also considering adopting the Urban-Suburban program for largely the same reason.

"Up in Hilton, we're (91 percent) white, and traditionally most kids stayed around here," Dobbertin said. "That's not the way it is anymore. They're going out into a world that's diverse ... and we feel this is what we need to do to give our kids an edge." Besides the fee paid to the IB accreditation organization, Hilton has also incurred additional costs by hiring more foreign language teachers, Dobbertin said. Only one of Hilton's three elementary schools currently offers IB, but Dobbertin said the demand at that level is so high that it will likely spread to the other two schools before long. Bridget Skinner stumbled upon the IB curriculum when signing her daughter up for elementary school but has since become a strong advocate. Her daughter is now in eighth grade at Merton Williams, where the curriculum has been in place while the certification was pending. "The teachers want them to be inquirers and risk-takers, and be caring and well-balanced and reflective," she said. "There's all these words they throw out, but they really mean something and they really instill it in the kids. ... I think those are really valuable characteristics for everyone."

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