

# Parent Information about IB and PYP



*If we are to reach real peace in this world, we shall have to begin with the children. (Ghandi)*

This brochure was created for the parents and community of Spicewood Elementary, IB World School. We sincerely hope that it gives a thorough explanation of the program, but if it does not, we highly encourage parents and members of the community to attend our monthly coffees, or meet with our Principal, Assistant Principal or PYP Coordinator in order to gain a better and clearer understanding of this outstanding program.

## What is the International Baccalaureate (IB) Organization?

The IB Organization is a foundation that offers three academic programs of international education: the Primary Years Program (PYP), the Middle Years Program (MYP), and the Diploma Program (DP). The IBO authorizes schools to offer one or more of these programs to its students. **Spicewood Elementary is an IB World School** that has been authorized by the IBO to offer the PYP. IB World schools share a common philosophy—a commitment to high quality, challenging, international education that we believe is important for all of our students.

### *The Mission of IB*

*The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.*

*To this end the organization works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programs of international education and rigorous assessment.*

*The programs encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.*

## “What makes IB programs unique?”

- “IB programs are recognized around the world and ensure an increased adaptability and mobility for IB students
- The curriculum and pedagogy of IB programs focus on international perspectives of learning and teaching, while insisting that students fully explore their home culture and language
- IB World Schools must undergo an exhaustive authorization process in order to offer one or more of the programs, which includes a study of the school’s resources and commitment to the IB mission and philosophy
- IB teachers participate in a wide variety of professional development opportunities to constantly update their knowledge and share their expertise with colleagues around the world
- The core components of IB programs encourage students to participate in creative and service-oriented activities, while at the same time emphasizing the importance of reflection on a personal and academic level
- The IB produces publications for schools to inform and support them as they offer IB courses. It is now beginning to produce material for use directly with students and to work closely with selected publishers and providers to offer material for students. These materials only will carry an IB logo
- Many students graduating from the IB Diploma Program find that it enhances their opportunities at tertiary institutions. The IB works closely with universities around the world to gain recognition for IB programs.”

## The International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program



*Learning is a journey, not a destination.*

### What is the IB Primary Years Program ?

The IB Primary Years Program (PYP) is offered for students aged 3 to 12 and focuses on the development of the whole child as an inquirer, both in the classroom and in the world outside. At Spicewood, ALL students in grades Kindergarten – Five participate in the PYP.

### **The Program:**

- Encourages **international-mindedness** in students
- Encourages a **positive attitude** to learning by engaging students in inquiries and developing their awareness of the process of learning so that they become lifelong learners
- Reflects **real life** by encouraging learning beyond traditional subjects with meaningful, in-depth inquiries into real issues
- Emphasizes, through the **learner profile**, the development of the whole student-physically intellectually, emotionally and ethically.

The PYP frames all learning activities at the school. It is used in national and international, state and privately funded schools. At Spicewood the teachers teach the PYP, but also the Texas Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and the Aligned Round Rock Curriculum (ARRC). Although challenging to combine, the teachers work tirelessly to blend the three sets of criteria into a seamless set of high-level learning objectives and activities.



### **The Written Curriculum**

The six transdisciplinary themes are the most significant and distinctive feature of PYP. These themes are about issues that have meaning and importance to us all. The six themes of global significance create a transdisciplinary framework that challenges students to think beyond the confines of learning within single content areas. The themes are:

- **Who we are**
- **Where we are in place and time**
- **How we express ourselves**
- **How the world works**
- **How we organize ourselves**
- **Sharing the planet**



The program places great emphasis on learning about the themes. Each theme is addressed each year by all students and incorporates local and global issues into the curriculum. The benefit of this model transcends the restraints of the traditional single subject and frames the learning throughout the primary years. At Spicewood, parents are informed about the units being taught through a variety of

communications. A brief description of the unit is displayed on a quilt that hangs in our main hallway. Teachers describe how the students are engaging in PYP in their weekly newsletters and on their websites. Student-led conferences also allow our students to describe their learning objectives to their parents and show examples of their learning in their PYP Portfolios.

Students learn and apply a set of Transdisciplinary *Skills* that transcend across the curriculum: social skills, communication skills, thinking skills, research skills and self-management skills.

The traditional content areas maintain a significant role in the IB Primary Years Programme. **The six specified subjects are language, mathematics, science, social studies, arts and personal, social and physical education.** The overall expectations for each subject area are defined and in addition, the Spicewood students learn the state and local curriculums as well. Students at Spicewood also learn the languages of English *and* Spanish.



*Education is not the filling of a pail. It is the lighting of a fire. (Yeats)*

### **The Taught Curriculum**

The six transdisciplinary themes provide teachers with a framework to develop a program of *inquiries*, which are in-depth investigations into important ideas, identified by the teachers, and requiring a high level of involvement on the part of the students. These inquiries are substantial, in-depth and usually last for four to six weeks.

For example, in an inquiry about “Sharing the Planet,” fourth grade students might look at “finite resources and infinite demands”. In order to better understand the central idea that “our planet has limited resources that are unevenly distributed” and using water as an example, we could inquire into where water comes from, how different countries use water, how much water we use, what happens after we use it, and how human activity has affected the availability and/or quality of water. To support this inquiry, students could develop knowledge and acquire skills derived from science and social studies; and also develop the transdisciplinary skills of research, critical thinking, communication and time management.

In an inquiry about “Who we are” for students in kindergarten, we might look at “families and friends”. In order to better understand the central idea that “people need families and friends” we might look at how families are similar and different across cultures, how we make and keep friends, why we need families and friends, and families and friends through literature and the arts. To support this inquiry, students might develop knowledge and acquire skills derived from social studies, arts, and personal, social and physical education. In addition, they could develop the transdisciplinary skills of decision-making, listening, collecting data and working cooperatively.



*Teachers change the world--one child at a time*

By teaching with a purpose and a global perspective, students see the relevance of learning content and connecting it in ways that are engaging and challenging to them personally. Students who participate in this way can reflect on their roles and responsibilities as world citizens and learners.

All students participate in in-depth exploration of important ideas through each unit of inquiry, and collections of evidence reflect how well they understand that idea. They work in a variety of ways, including independently and in collaborative groups that allow them to learn to their best advantage.

Students and parents should develop an understanding of the IB learner profile. The ten aspirational qualities of the learner profile are intended to inspire and motivate the work of teachers, students and schools, and provide a statement of the aims and values of the IB and a definition of what we mean by “international-mindedness”. **IB learners strive to be inquirers, thinkers, communicators, risk-takers, knowledgeable, principled, open-minded, caring, balanced and reflective.**



### The Assessed Curriculum

Assessment is an integral part of each unit of inquiry because it both enhances learning and provides opportunities for students to reflect on what they know, understand and can do. The teacher’s feedback to the students provides the guidance, the tools and the incentives for them to become more competent, skillful and better at understanding how to learn. Teachers believe in ongoing assessment that is used to determine students’ next steps in the learning process.

Deciding on how best to teach and how best to assess student learning is a collaborative process within our school. The IB has developed a planning tool that supports effective collaboration on the part of all teachers and the PYP coordinator. Grade level groups of teachers at Spicewood meet with our PYP Coordinator about seven times a year for a half-day each to collaboratively discuss their units of inquiry. Whenever possible, the Librarian, Assistant Principal, District Collaborative Teacher, and Principal join these meetings. Special-area-teachers use a wiki© to communicate in and among each other and the staff when addressing the six units of inquiry. All of Spicewood’s staff development days and voluntary summer retreat time are devoted to further developing our teachers and the PYP at Spicewood.



### Quality Assurance and Professional Development

Any school wishing to offer the Primary Years Programme and attain IB World School status must first go through a rigorous authorization process. The IB sends teams from the organization to visit IB World Schools every 3 or 5 years in order to support an ongoing process of review and development, using standards and practices that apply to all IB World Schools. This authorization visit is an excellent opportunity for schools to be reflective and improve their practices. This process also ensures participants that the schools are well prepared to successfully implement the program. Spicewood began our journey of becoming an IB World School in 2003 when we earned a grant of \$90,000.00. Spicewood was authorized as an IB World School in February 2007.

IB is a challenging program that demands the best from students and teachers. The teachers at Spicewood are an extraordinary group of individuals who are highly committed to the IB philosophy. Their exceptional talent and willingness to go beyond the basic curriculum is awesome and *very much appreciated* by students, parents, the community, and administration.

IB Schools can access an extensive package of IB professional development for teachers and administrators. Because of the high quality of these trainings, Round Rock ISD has hosted international PYP and MYP summer conference for the past five years. The summer conferences in Round Rock have seen some of the largest gatherings in North America and continue to expand after each successful summer session. Teachers at Spicewood are highly trained and have clearly benefitted from the continuous local support of our district. In addition, Round Rock ISD commits thousands of dollars to our IB schools each year. At the elementary level, we have two additional personnel units devoted to IB: the PYP Coordinator and the Spanish Teacher. Spicewood also receives additional allocated funds from Round Rock ISD that allow us to pay the IB fees and support the extensive IB training as well. Our Parent Teacher Association (PTA) supports our school's IB program each year by allocating thousands of dollars for materials, activities, and resources. Our PTA also allocates money each year for scholarships. There is money for students who can't afford special things that are offered at school, such as yearbooks and books at our annual Bookfair. Teacher scholarships allow us to provide specialized professional development training that keeps our staff on the cutting edge of what research supports as "best practice." Because of our district and PTA, we recognize our extreme good fortune of being able to maintain the high standards required of the IBO.

In summary, students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are faced with the challenge of learning about an interconnected world where knowledge is constantly developing. The International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program prepares students for these challenges and the journey of lifelong learning.



Source: Making the PYP Happen, The IB Primary Years Programme, 21<sup>st</sup> century education