

The International Baccalaureate combines an exacting curriculum with a holistic education.

That process became more rigorous in 1989. "Many schools were eager to have the IB name," Mr. Campbell said, "but they didn't really understand the commitment and had to drop the program. IB is not a quick fix. It doesn't fit into our instant-gratification, fast-food culture."

Popular in Florida

When the IB program began at Atlantic Community High School in Delray Beach, Fla., in 1989, about 30 students were taking the courses. Today, 94 seniors are in the program. With 41, Florida has the second-highest number of IB schools in the nation behind California, with 50, and leads the nation in the number of students graduating with IB diplomas.

One reason? A state scholarship program allows Florida students who graduate with the diploma to attend any state university for free.

David Youngman, who coordinates the IB program at the 2,800-student Atlantic Community High in the Palm Beach County system and has taught IB biology for 10 years, said the curriculum appeals to students looking for something more.

"The main benefit to students is they come out with a more complete education," Mr. Youngman said. "You are a well-rounded student. It is truly like doing college work."

At Washington-Lee High School in Arlington, Va., the IB program seems a natural fit in a school with a distinctively international flavor. Students speak 30 different languages and hail from 60 countries. Many are the sons and daughters of military personnel or diplomats stationed in Washington.

"There is a connection this program has with people's life experience here," said Marilyn Leeb, who coordinates the school's 5-year-old program. "This is the top of the line. It's the Cadillac of college-prep programs."

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