

Charter schools: What makes Lehigh Valley Academy so special for BASD students? (15)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Charter Schools, Education, Gadfly's posts, Serious Issues March 18, 2019
(15th in a series on Education and Charter Schools)

Timely to our discussion is the showing of the “Backpack full of Cash” documentary this Thursday, March 21, 6:30pm – 8:00pm at NITSCHMANN MIDDLE SCHOOL, sponsored by Bethlehem Proud Parents – Free!

Half of BASD’s total charter school enrollment is in LVA, for whom BASD pays \$12m/yr.

LVA is seeking \$45m for a new building and may be increasing its enrollment.

“30 percent of [LVA’s] students are Hispanic, 36 percent are white and 12 percent are black. Almost 50 percent are considered economically disadvantaged. The charter school has a 95 percent graduation rate, almost 10 percentage points above the state average.” (from Morning Call)

What makes [Lehigh Valley Academy charter school](#) so special? What’s the draw?

Please bear with a long description. Remember that as taxpayers we are paying \$12m/yr. for LVA.

LVA’s distinctive feature seems to be the [International Baccalaureate](#) program (IB).

IB’s distinctive feature seems to be “International Mindedness.”

“LVA is the only fully authorized International Baccalaureate World School in Pennsylvania that offers an IB continuum to all students in grades K-12.

Beginning with full-day kindergarten and continuing through a student's senior year, LVA emphasizes inquiry-based learning and critical thinking to prepare a student for higher education and the 21st century globalized environment."

"The aim of all IB programmes is to develop internationally minded people who recognize their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet. Central to this aim is international-mindedness. International-mindedness is a multi-faceted and complex concept that captures a way of thinking, being and acting that is characterized by an openness to the world and a recognition of our deep interconnectedness to others."

"To be open to the world, we need to understand it. IB programmes therefore provide students with opportunities for sustained inquiry into a range of local and global issues and ideas. This willingness to see beyond immediate situations and boundaries is essential as globalization and emerging technologies continue to blur traditional distinctions between the local, national and international."

"An IB education fosters international-mindedness by helping students reflect on their own perspective, culture and identities, and then on those of others. By learning to appreciate different beliefs, values and experiences, and to think and collaborate across cultures and disciplines, IB learners gain the understanding necessary to make progress toward a more peaceful and sustainable world."

"An IB education further enhances the development of international-mindedness through multilingualism. All IB programmes require the students to study, or study in, more than one language because we believe that communicating in more than one language provides excellent opportunities to develop intercultural understanding and respect. It helps the students to appreciate that his or her own language, culture and worldview is just one of many."

"International-mindedness is also encouraged through a focus on global engagement and meaningful service with the community. These elements challenge the student to critically consider power and privilege, and to recognize that he or she holds this planet and its resources in trust for future generations. They also highlight the focus on action in all IB programmes: a

focus on moving beyond awareness and understanding to engagement, action and bringing about meaningful change.”

IB learner profile

The aim of all IB programmes is to develop internationally minded people who, recognizing their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world.

As IB learners we strive to be:

INQUIRERS

We nurture our curiosity, developing skills for inquiry and research. We know how to learn independently and with others. We learn with enthusiasm and sustain our love of learning throughout life.

KNOWLEDGEABLE

We develop and use conceptual understanding, exploring knowledge across a range of disciplines. We engage with issues and ideas that have local and global significance.

THINKERS

We use critical and creative thinking skills to analyse and take responsible action on complex problems. We exercise initiative in making reasoned, ethical decisions.

COMMUNICATORS

We express ourselves confidently and creatively in more than one language and in many ways. We collaborate effectively, listening carefully to the perspectives of other individuals and groups.

PRINCIPLED

We act with integrity and honesty, with a strong sense of fairness and justice, and with respect for the dignity and rights of people everywhere. We take responsibility for our actions and their consequences.

OPEN-MINDED

We critically appreciate our own cultures and personal histories, as well as the values and traditions of others. We seek and evaluate a range of points of view, and we are willing to grow from the experience.

CARING

We show empathy, compassion and respect. We have a commitment to service, and we act to make a positive difference in the lives of others and in the world around us.

RISK-TAKERS

We approach uncertainty with forethought and determination; we work independently and cooperatively to explore new ideas and innovative strategies. We are resourceful and resilient in the face of challenges and change.

BALANCED

We understand the importance of balancing different aspects of our lives—intellectual, physical, and emotional—to achieve well-being for ourselves and others. We recognize our interdependence with other people and with the world in which we live.

REFLECTIVE

We thoughtfully consider the world and our own ideas and experience. We work to understand our strengths and weaknesses in order to support our learning and personal development.

In grades 11-12, IB offers 2 tracks:

Diploma Programme: Prepares students for effective participation in a rapidly evolving world. This is a demanding two-year curriculum that meets the needs of highly motivated students, and leads to a qualification that is recognized by leading universities around the world.

Career-related Programme is a framework of international education that incorporates the values of the IB into a unique programme addressing the needs of students engaged in career-related education. The programme leads to further/higher education, apprenticeships or employment.

The Diploma Programme curriculum

The Diploma Programme (DP) curriculum is made up of six subject groups and the DP core, comprising theory of knowledge (TOK), creativity, activity, service (CAS) and the extended essay. Through the Diploma Programme (DP)

core, students reflect on the nature of knowledge, complete independent research and undertake a project that often involves community service. The three core elements are:

- Theory of knowledge (TOK), in which students reflect on the nature of knowledge and on how we know what we claim to know.
- The extended essay, which is an independent, self-directed piece of research, finishing with a 4,000-word paper.
- Creativity, activity, service, in which students complete a project related to those three concepts.

How is TOK structured?

As a thoughtful and purposeful inquiry into different ways of knowing, and into different kinds of knowledge, TOK is composed almost entirely of questions.

The most central of these is “How do we know?”, while other questions include:

- What counts as evidence for X?
- How do we judge which is the best model of Y?
- What does theory Z mean in the real world?

Through discussions of these and other questions, students gain greater awareness of their personal and ideological assumptions, as well as developing an appreciation of the diversity and richness of cultural perspectives.

As part of theory of knowledge (TOK), each student chooses one essay title from six issued by International Baccalaureate (IB).

The titles change in each examination session. Upcoming and past TOK questions include:

- “To what extent are areas of knowledge shaped by their past? Consider with reference to two areas of knowledge.”
- “‘There is no reason why we cannot link facts and theories across disciplines and create a common groundwork of explanation.’ To what extent do you agree with this statement?”
- “There is no such thing as a neutral question. Evaluate this statement with reference to two areas of knowledge.”

- “‘The task of history is the discovering of the constant and universal principles of human nature.’ To what extent are history and one other area of knowledge successful in this task?”

Some examples of the 4,000 word extended essay are:

- “An analysis of costume as a source for understanding the inner life of the character”
- “A study of malnourished children in Indonesia and the extent of their recovery after a period of supervised improved nutrition.”
- “Doing *versus* being: language and reality in the Mimamsa school of Indian philosophy.”
- “The effects of sugar-free chewing gum on the pH of saliva in the mouth after a meal.”
- “To what extent has the fall in the exchange rate of the US dollar affected the tourist industry in Carmel, California?”
- “What level of data compression in music files is acceptable to the human ear?”

So the above should give us some idea of what the distinctive feature of LVA is. Gadfly is not sure if the IB is required of all students or it is an option, a track. Need to find that out.

Gadfly also needs to know more about 1) how LVA is promoted, publicized (if at all) among BASD students, and 2) whether both BASD and LVA have done surveys on why these students are choosing to attend LVA.

So, with luck, more info later.

How are you feeling about the \$12m?

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