

St. Francis of Assisi School seeks International Baccalaureate status

By Elizabeth Lowe

elowe@CatholicReview.org

St. Francis of Assisi School embraces the charisms of its patron saint, who was known for his love of animals and the environment, as well as serving the world around him.

It is fitting that the Baltimore school, which emphasizes community outreach, is a candidate for the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme.

"We have always done service," said Mary Carol Lidinsky, the school's IB coordinator and assistant principal. "This will let them take it one step farther."

Two years ago, St. Francis applied to become an IB school for sixth, seventh and eighth grade. The IB Middle Years Programme is focused on helping students become creative, critical and reflective thinkers, with an emphasis on service to others, according to information from the nonprofit.

St. Francis implemented IB in the middle school grades last fall, Lidinsky said. The school will submit an application for final authorization as an International Baccalaureate World School this fall. The program should be fully implemented by June 2015.

"It's intense," Rebecca Malone, principal of St. Francis, said of the application process. "It's not something you enter lightly."

The IB program, which promotes global awareness, allows for more coherence across the middle school grades and subjects, Malone said. St. Francis continues to follow the Archdiocese of Baltimore's curriculum, but IB allows for a richer classroom experience for students.

"It's about broadening their (students') awareness about other cultures," said Malone, who noted the program "should make their day feel less fragmented, their studies more unified. It is accessible to all learners."

Meaghan Schneid, an eighth-grader at St. Francis who plans to attend the Institute of Notre Dame in Baltimore this fall, said IB has helped to prepare her for high school.

"It's more hands-on and we learn more than what's in the textbook," she said. "We write papers that most people our age wouldn't have written."

Seventh-grader Rosa Lemonds described IB as challenging and rewarding.

"It's more hands-on," she said. "It's more work, but when you get into the groove of it you can understand it. You can understand how it's helping you."

Cami Colarossi, a member of St. Francis' board, served on the IB exploratory committee during the 2011-12 school year.

"I like the interdisciplinary nature of the instruction, I like the way the multiple learning styles are addressed," said Colarossi, mother of sixth-grader Evan. "The IB is liberal arts education at its best for young people."

Theo Ngongang, another school board member who served on the exploratory committee, is a native of Cameroon. He likes IB because of its global focus.

"Having an international background, I think it's helpful to the intellectual development of the kids," said Ngongang, father of fourth-grader Carol and seventh-grader Arsene. "Having an IB accreditation clearly puts you at a different level. We live in a global world. It's only going to get more and more global."

Archbishop Spalding High School in Severn was recently named an authorized International Baccalaureate World School - the only one in the archdiocese - and will offer IB Diploma Program classes for juniors beginning this fall.

Angela Bentzley, Archbishop Spalding's IB coordinator, said IB allows "students to see the different perspectives of people and understand different thought processes and respect other cultures and other values. To be able to understand and respect them, that's really key."

What is IB?

International Baccalaureate is a nonprofit educational foundation established in 1968. According to its website, IB "works to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring youths who help create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect." It partners with schools, governments and international organizations to develop programs which encourage students "to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners."

There are more than 3,700 IB schools in 147 countries.

Also see:

Pope to celebrate Holy Thursday Mass at center for elderly, disabled

Atlanta archbishop will sell new residence at center of controversy

The prom-posal: See the creative ways in which teens ask one another to the dance

#CRBlog