The Methow Valley School District recently facilitated an International Baccalaureate Parent and Community Night. The event was designed to provide parents and community members with information about the International Baccalaureate Program.

Our next meeting has been scheduled to take place on Wednesday, March 18th at 6:00 pm at Methow Valley Elementary. During our meeting, staff will:

- Share information about the IB program
- Describe why we believe it is a good fit for our schools
- Respond to questions raised by parents and community members

Below are responses to some of the “frequently asked questions” that have emerged following the first meeting.

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers...

Why is our school district considering the IB for our schools?
Because we can always be better!

Only two days after a heart-breaking loss in Super Bowl 49, Seattle Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson made his regular weekly visit to Children’s Hospital in Seattle. When asked why this was so important, he said, “They can change the world.” During the same interview, he was asked to describe his progress as a professional and as a member of a team that has experienced such high levels of success. He stated, “I don’t look backward, only forward... We can always be better.”

Our staff shares this same belief about our schools and our students. We too, believe our students can change the world. We believe it is our responsibility to prepare our students for a rapidly changing world. As professionals, we believe we can always become better and need support to do so.

We’re ranked top 10 in the state... Our schools are good enough! If it’s not broken, why are we trying to fix it?
Yes, our schools are good! However, this statement begs the question, ”Is being in the top 10 the only way we intend to evaluate our success?” If so, then we should look more closely at the top rated high school in the state. We should ask ourselves how they’ve achieved that rank and how they’re approaching teaching and learning. What we’d find is a balanced approach to teaching and learning and high quality professional development provided to all staff.

What is IB?
IB is a non-profit educational foundation that provides high quality professional development focused on supporting teachers in their effort to develop knowledgeable students who know how to think critically across subject areas, seek creative solutions to real problems, and take action using their learning.

Is IB another fad?
No. The International Baccalaureate Program has been in existence for over forty years.
Where are IB schools located?
Currently, there are 3,968 IB schools worldwide. There are 2,109 IB schools in the United States, 91% of which are public schools. IB is the fastest growing program on the North American continent.

How much flexibility does IB provide to schools?
The IB program provides schools with a high level of flexibility. The curriculum taught in each school reflects the vision and beliefs unique to each community.

Is this a curriculum? If not, then what is it?
No, it is not a curriculum. IB programs serve as a framework that promotes a balanced approach to teaching and learning.

What does a “balanced” approach to teaching and learning mean?
A balanced approach to teaching and learning can be defined as a combination of instruction from the teacher in core subject areas of reading writing, math, and science, balanced with the facilitation of integrated units of study that engage students in research and project-based learning. Teachers integrate all required state standards into each unit of study.

What is an “integrated” unit of study?
An integrated unit of study is an approach to teaching and learning that combines social studies, science, the arts, health and fitness, and other subjects. These subjects are traditionally taught in isolation. This approach encourages students to think critically and develop solutions to real problems.

Can you share an example with me?
My guess would be that like most people, you have taken one or more U.S. History courses during your school experience. It’s also likely that in doing so, you studied the American Revolution. In a traditional course, one might expect to become knowledgeable about key dates, battles, and individuals that shaped the outcome of this important moment in our history. This is important... However, in addition to becoming more knowledgeable, one might argue that the broader concept of “conflict”, both historically and in contemporary times, is an idea worth exploring using student-generated questions.

Can you share another?
Another example might include a unit of study focused on the concept of “change”. In this unit, students might research the changes that have taken place within our own community as a result of the recent fires and floods. Based upon student interests, this could lead into a scientific investigation into the biological impact of the fires upon our native vegetation, a mathematical analysis of the economic impact to our community, and/or the emotional trauma and recovery efforts that took place within our community. Looking at this more broadly, students might be encouraged to look at other events that have unfolded here and elsewhere that have impacted communities. Possible examples of student-initiated action as a result of their learning could include: serving as a volunteer firefighter, participating in the long-term relief efforts, publishing an article in Trial By Fire...
Do students grade themselves?
No. Teachers monitor and evaluate each student’s learning. As part of good teaching, students are encouraged to reflect and communicate what they've learned in a variety of ways.

Are you teaching values that are in contrast to our family values?
IB programs promote the development of the whole person. This includes attributes that most people associate with what it means to be a responsible citizen. IB encourages students to learn about individuals that have positively impacted the world. Examples of qualities they might identify in themselves and others include:

- Knowledgeable
- Caring
- Responsible
- Disciplined
- Reflective
- Open-minded
- Curious
- Effective communicators
- Critical thinkers
- Courageous

One parent recently stated, “As we saw with the fires and floods this summer, Methow people are resourceful, creative, energetic, innovative, courageous, and optimistic. They're helpful, generous, responsive, and aware of other’s situations and needs. The IB framework nurtures these character traits and with so many role models of these traits in our community, our kids are sure to thrive under this framework.”

I’ve heard rumors that special education services will be eliminated. Is that true?
No. This couldn’t be further from the truth. IB programs are designed to serve all students. In an IB school, special education teachers provide direct instruction focused on developing the skills, knowledge, and learning strategies students need to access the general curriculum. As part of a balanced program, special education teachers also work closely with classroom teachers to design and implement integrated units of study. Special education teachers, classroom teachers, and students monitor individual student progress toward the objectives identified each student’s Individualized Education Plan.

Are the course load, homework, and projects so burdensome that the students will not have time for athletics and extra-curricular activities?
No. Assignments, projects, and homework will be similar to what is currently expected of our students.

How does this better prepare our children for the world?
In an IB class, students are engaged in studies that relate to real issues. They apply reading, writing, speaking and listening skills as they research topics. Current examples of IB-type learning taking place in our schools at present include the 8th and 10th grade National History Day projects and the 4th and 6th grade Creative Mind projects.
I've been told that IB is un-American and unpatriotic!
The Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC), dedicated to addressing the needs of children of US military personnel, has singled out the IB as a worthwhile and rigorous academic program for the children of US service members. IB begins with an understanding and appreciation of one's own culture.

I've read IB undermines Christian values.
IB programs do not advocate a single religion. Many private schools with religious affiliations offer IB programs to their students.

What is the future of the Diploma Program?
We haven’t made a decision... We plan on forming a committee to examine the program. During this process, we will continue to offer AP classes at the 11th and 12th grades and the Big Picture Learning Program at Independent Learning Center.

I've heard IB isn’t as rigorous as Advanced Placement (AP) coursework.
Not true. Hundreds of universities in the United States alone recognize the IB Diploma as a mark of academic excellence – Some include Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Carleton, Macalester, John Hopkins, Howard, MIT, Princeton, Stanford, and many others...

What does this mean for my child when he/she graduates?
We’re committed to developing students who graduate with a broad range of options. We want every student to be able to graduate and pursue his or her passion and interests. For some, this may mean choosing to go to college. For others, this may mean attending a trade school. And for some, this may include seeking employment. This is reflected in our diverse course offerings.

I've heard our teachers have been participating in IB workshops during the last year. Is that true?
Yes. As part of our exploration process, our staff spent the last year learning about IB. This included school visits, meeting with teachers currently working in IB schools in Washington, and participating in IB Workshops held in the Pacific Northwest and online.

Why didn’t I hear about this until now?
Nothing has been hidden. We’ve shared our learning with our community during school board meetings, APT meetings, in school newsletters, in the MV Pride, and in the Methow Valley Newspaper.

What is IB going to cost?
The cost of the IB program for our district is approximately 2% of our annual operating budget. This includes all fees and staff participation in workshops and ongoing professional development.

Will we have to pay for it? Will there be student fees?
No. In fact, our schools are focused on delivering the best possible education free of charge. A recent example of this effort includes the elimination of supply fees, course fees, and some enrichment fees.
What programs will be cut to fund IB?
None. In fact, just the opposite... Last year, in addition to the elimination of school supply fees and other school-related expenses that often create economic hardship for students and families, the Methow Valley School District initiated of a variety of new programs and expanded existing programs. Some examples of these programs include:

- Full Day Kindergarten
- Elementary Counseling Services
- Youth and Family Social Worker
- Expanded Science Course Electives
- Robotics
- Advanced Construction Trades Coursework (in partnership with Twispworks)
- Increased staffing for the Independent Learning Center
- Staff participation in IB workshops

Are the Capital Projects Levy and Transportation Vehicle Fund Levy being recommended going to be used to fund IB?
No. Funding associated with a Capital Projects Levy can only be used to make physical improvements to our school facilities. The Transportation Vehicle Fund Levy can only be used for the purchase of new buses.