



IB CONTINUUM
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GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

Civic participation

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Becoming more globally engaged

Since its inception, the International Baccalaureate (IB) has worked with schools, governments and international organizations to help develop internationally minded young people who can work together to create a better world. International-mindedness is fundamental to the ethos and philosophy of an IB education, focusing on the development of multilingualism, intercultural understanding and global engagement in the classroom and beyond.

Global engagement often begins by being engaged closer to home. Engagement can include taking responsible action to educate oneself, inform others, advocate for change and undertake service in a local community. This kind of engagement can raise students' self-esteem, confidence and belief in their own efficacy for creating positive change. As their centres of concern expand, students are more likely to witness the common concerns that connect us at local, national and global levels. Global engagement inspires an education without borders that helps students to overcome stereotypes and prejudices that can separate people and create conflict.

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Educating for civic participation

The idea of civic participation is sometimes limited to helping students to understand legal systems and individual duties with respect to local and national government. More broadly, civic participation involves individuals or groups taking action to address public concerns. Civic participation means seeing oneself as part of a larger social fabric and trying to improve the communities to which one belongs—whether that community is a classroom, a school, a city, a nation state, an international organization or the global ecosystem.

Fostering lifelong attitudes of civic participation begins at home and in the classroom. Schools can foster democratic classrooms as students from diverse backgrounds exchange ideas, explore conflicting opinions and values, learn to listen thoughtfully to others, explain their perspectives, and develop understanding in light of new information. Teachers can encourage civic participation through holding class meetings, helping students to play appropriate roles in classroom decision-making, and creating safe learning environments in which students can interact with respect for other people and their differences.

Civic participation can include activities that range from organizing a school environmental campaign to volunteering in a literacy programme or from standing for election to student government to compiling data that informs policy choices.

Civic participation beyond the classroom

Beyond the classroom, civic participation can take many forms. In some traditions, civic participation is seen as being actively involved in the political process. Other perspectives focus on maintaining social relationships and participation in harmonious communities. For adults, civic participation may involve direct engagement in the political process through activities like voting, joining political parties or campaigns, or serving in appointed or elected office. In many parts of the world, civics and governance are closely intertwined. The world's complex and diverse governing systems require citizens to reflect meaningfully on the best way to become engaged and manage differences in values and opinions. Sometimes people choose to express these differences through personal persuasion, demonstration, conscientious objection or civil disobedience.

Civic participation focuses on the responsibility that all people have to take an active role in the decision-making processes that affect them and to ensure that decision-makers are held accountable by the individuals and communities they serve. Individuals and communities often face difficult decisions about how best to secure peace and justice, and sometimes their response can include protest and dissent.

Around the world, communities have developed different ideas about the extent to which young people can engage in political decision-making. Some countries have youth parliaments or councils; however, historically, youth participation in the political process is low. Globally, younger citizens are less likely to vote. While young people may not always choose to participate in formal civic processes, they are increasingly engaged with issues they care about. Many young people are actively involved in advocacy groups, social media campaigns, and service delivery programmes that advance a variety of humanitarian, social, environmental and economic causes.

Civic participation and IB programmes

Students in all IB programmes participate in activities that expand their circle of concern for others and help them to develop skills in cooperation, conflict resolution, problem-solving, and creative and critical thinking. These life skills prepare students for civic participation—in both small and large ways—as they grow through the IB continuum of international education.

In the **Primary Years Programme (PYP)**, young children often express strong feelings about fairness and justice, and teachers can facilitate positive expressions of these ideals. Younger students can explore a sense of responsibility and respect for self, others and the environment. Initial steps in preparing for a life of civic participation and service can include:

- taking initiative in the classroom to help others
- consulting in groups to establish agreements and find solutions to problems.

In the PYP exhibition, students make presentations about their learning and reflect on actions they have taken to solve local problems. PYP inquiries into how we organize ourselves and sharing the planet help students to develop foundational understanding that informs civic participation.

In the **Middle Years Programme (MYP)**, the community project paves a way for civic involvement. It gives students an opportunity to develop awareness of a given community's needs and to take action to address them.

“Principled action...represents the IB's commitment to teaching and learning through practical, real-world experience. IB learners act at home, as well as in classrooms, schools, communities and the broader world.

IB World Schools value action that encompasses a concern for integrity and honesty, as well as a strong sense of fairness that respects the dignity of individuals and groups. Principled action means making responsible choices, sometimes including decisions not to act”.

What is an IB education? (2013)

In the MYP community project, service can be:

- direct (for example, tutoring or serving at an animal shelter)
- indirect (for example, redesigning a website or developing educational materials)
- advocacy-focused (for example, initiating awareness campaigns about cyberbullying or sustainable energy use)
- research-oriented (for example, collecting data to influence policy or practice, such as environmental surveys).

MYP global contexts and key concepts like communities, global interactions and systems can help students to develop their understanding of civic participation.

The **Diploma Programme's (DP)** global politics course provides a strong foundation for civic participation. Students critically examine different perspectives and approaches to political issues at local, national, international and global levels. Political issues are broadly understood to encompass any questions that have to do with relationships of power in a society and, within a conceptual course, examples and case studies differ based on where and when global politics is taught. Within countries, students examine the nature and limits of state sovereignty and the legitimacy of state and non-state actors in dealing with questions of human rights, development, and peace and conflict. Beyond nation states, students learn about growing global interdependencies, the role of international bodies, and how social organizations at many levels are exerting new forms of power and influence. In their coursework, students engage experientially with a political issue, often in their own community, and thereby become aware of the complexities and potential of active citizenship.

Across the DP, ongoing opportunities for discussion, debate, oral presentations and teamwork enable students to develop many of the skills needed for effective civic engagement.

The **Career-related Programme (CP)** includes service learning as a core component. The five stages of IB's service learning component, for example, require students to investigate, prepare, take action, reflect and demonstrate their learning. Throughout this process, students explore their capacity to make a meaningful contribution to their community and society. Service learning can raise awareness of community connections and problems, citizenship and social responsibility, and relationships between local and global concerns.

Learning about civics and civic participation extends beyond programme requirements and focused explorations of global politics or community affairs. Teaching and learning across the curriculum can help students to develop skills and attitudes that foster civic participation. For example:

- in science, students can learn how to support environmental conservation efforts
- in mathematics, students can gather statistics and analyse data to advocate for improved public services
- in history, students can explore ways to help communities to increase their quality of life
- in the arts, students can create and respond to works that engage civic issues and ideas.

Civic participation in IB World Schools

These learning stories explore some of the ways that IB World Schools foster civic participation.

As the Head of Early Childhood Education at the **Western Academy of Beijing**, China, Holly Bowen Reardon oversees nearly 700 PYP students. "There's a big mix of cultures, values and beliefs and we

"Democracy is a universal value based on the freely expressed will of people to determine their political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives.... While democracies share common features, there is no single model of democracy".

UN World Summit Outcome (2005)

honour those and the location we are in," Ms Reardon notes, "but we also create our own values within the school community—values that honour everyone's role as an equal citizen and ensure that everyone has a voice."

In addition to getting regular input from students, the teachers focus on giving students agency to work together on solving problems. When resources for play-based learning must be shared, students generate and document rules and agreements about how they will allocate materials. The need to share building blocks and paint creates discussion about fairness, sustainability (making valuable things last), and individual rights (who gets to have and use learning resources).

Students learn about their roles, responsibilities and rights not only in the community of the school, but also beyond it. They have been involved in recycling, making donations to immigrant schools, and raising awareness of local manufacturing and global trade. These activities create "ripple effects" for the students' civic participation later in life.

In **Glasgow Middle School** in Fairfax County Virginia (near Washington, DC, USA), Amy Benjamin's individuals and societies class learns about how bills become laws as the state legislature begins its annual session. More than 500 MYP year 3 students choose a bill to support or oppose, and then they write a letter to their state senator or delegate. Students conduct research on the case for and against the bill, as well as its potential impact. Well-written letters are sent to elected representatives who often respond; one student's letter about the Equal Rights Amendment was read into the legislative record of the General Assembly.

Students later hold a congressional session of their own. "Through these learning engagements," says Ms Benjamin, "students become more interested in current affairs and often continue to refine their arguments in passionate debate that continues long after the lessons end."

In the run-up to elections for the European Parliament in 2014, students in Lisa Olofsson's class prepared their own election for more than 900 students from 60 countries at **Midgårdsskolan High School** in Umeå, Sweden. A university town of about 120,000 inhabitants, Umeå was chosen as the 2014 European Capital of Culture. Its political and economic role in Sweden gives students a first-hand look at the links between local, state, regional and global issues.

The school's mock election was organized as a three-month project that met requirements for the engagement activity coursework in the DP global politics course. Students began by consulting a local non-profit organization that helps students to organize the *Skolval* (Swedish for school selection). Students developed their understanding of democracy, public representation and the importance of civic engagement. They also learned practical democratic skills such as how to follow election procedures and design ballots.

Students organized the election, established contacts with local media and political parties, and prepared educational materials. On election day, students participated as election observers and vote counters. In order to make informed decisions for the youth vote, students enlisted local officials and elected leaders to debate and answer questions in school forums. Hundreds of students discussed topics such as environmental protection, migration policy and economic development. (In Sweden, political parties make school presentations with permission and if the invitation is extended to all parties. Many school leaders think that such forums help students to learn about the democratic process.)

Isaiah Koh is the IB CP Coordinator at the **School of the Arts** (SOTA) in Singapore. An IB World School since 2011, SOTA serves approximately 1,100 students (aged 13–18) who specialize in various art forms as part of their academic curriculum. Because Singapore itself is such a small country, SOTA students regularly participate in an annual service abroad trip of 2–3 weeks' duration.

"Teaching and learning in the IB celebrates the many ways people work together to construct meaning and make sense of the world. Through the interplay of asking, doing and thinking,...this approach leads towards open, democratic classrooms".

What is an IB education?

This programme is funded in part by a multi-year grant from the National Youth Council of Singapore, which places a priority on both international and experiential learning.

IB teachers work closely with community-based organizations in several countries in the region. For example, students worked in Cambodia with Phare Ponleu Selpak, an association that seeks to use art as a healing process for the trauma of war, and particularly the damage that local populations have endured from land mines. The students planned and taught art workshops to explore how dance, music, theatre and the visual arts could be used to help these communities.

Well-planned service trips can move students out of their “comfort zones”, challenging them to think about privilege and helping them to learn how to work as a team. School leaders keep the focus on engaging with others in a shared commitment towards the common good.



There are many models and definitions of citizenship, including:

- participatory** (actively taking part in civic, social and community life)
- personally responsible** (dutifully following laws and demonstrating good character)
- justice-oriented** (critically addressing social issues, inequity and injustice)

Westheimer and Kahne,
“What kind of citizen?
The politics of educating for democracy”



Some ideas for getting started with civic participation

- Research examples, activities and approaches that other educators have used to involve students in civic life.
- Develop habits of mind in which students and teachers consider what positive impact they can make in the world, what goes on beyond classroom walls, and how they can become personally involved.
- Guide students to research the needs of communities to which they belong.
- If participating beyond the classroom is not feasible, empower students to work together to make improvements in the school’s learning environment, raise awareness about local and global issues, and advocate for positive change.
- Teachers and leaders: examine individual and shared civic orientations, and reflect on how they influence school culture and classroom interactions.



Potential challenges

Exploring civic participation can raise controversial issues, prompt disagreement and bring multiple perspectives into conflict. Political participation is a sensitive topic in many communities, regions and nation states. Discussions about civic participation should always consider political realities and cultural sensitivities. As students move towards adulthood, their parents need to be involved in planning the development of skills and attitudes that support civic participation. Direct participation in civic affairs must always be undertaken carefully and respectfully, in ways that protect the safety and dignity of all community members.

As schools help students prepare to make decisions about their civic participation, some essential good practices include the following.

- Research any initiatives, causes or charitable organizations that students want to support. (Some questions to ask might be: “Do they have a good reputation in the community? Have they worked with young people before? Do they have responsible financial practices?”)
- Consult closely with parents and school leaders to secure their support.
- Enforce child protection regulations and comply with all relevant health and safety requirements for any out-of-school activities.

- Comply with all school policies and any legal requirements regarding school visitors who interact with students.
- Discuss guidelines for posting information about school projects on social media forums.
- Consult closely with parents and school leaders when planning opportunities for service learning and civic participation. Ensure that school administrators understand the issues and opportunities involved.
- Establish clear goals and mutual outcomes for service learning trips.

Finding out more

Websites and organizations

A UN fact sheet on Youth, Political Participation and Decision-Making is available at: www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-political-participation.pdf

A fact sheet on Democracy and the United Nations is available at: www.un.org/en/globalissues/democracy/democracy_and_un.shtml

The World Youth Movement for Democracy provides a space for young people to build relationships, to collaborate across borders and to deepen their knowledge of key policy issues: democratic-youth.net/world-youth-movement-for-democracy/

Ashoka's Youth Venture programme provides opportunities for young people to become changemakers in their communities: www.youthventure.org/

The Civic Action Project is a US-based initiative that offers teachers a variety of lesson plans and resources on helping students to identify an issue that is important to them and connecting it with public policy: www.crfcap.org/

The Global Civics Academy offers lectures and a free online course about the dynamics of global interdependence: www.globalcivics.net/

The Johns Hopkins School of Education offers a list of resources on promoting democratic classrooms: education.jhu.edu/PD/newhorizons/strategies/topics/the-democratic-classroom/

Books and articles

Altinay, H. 2011. *Global Civics: Responsibilities and Rights in an Interdependent World*. Washington, DC, MD, USA. Brookings Institution Press.

Dewey, J. 1916. *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. New York, NY, USA. Macmillan.

Ehrlich, T. 2000. *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*. Westport, CT, USA. Oryx Press.

Kaye, CB. 2010. *The Complete Guide to Service Learning: Proven, Practical Ways to Engage Students in Civic Responsibility, Academic Curriculum, & Social Action*. Minneapolis, MN, USA. Free Spirit Pub.

Rubin, BC and Giarelli, JM. 2008. *Civic Education for Diverse Citizens in Global Times: Rethinking Theory and Practice*. New York, NY, USA. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Westheimer, J and Kahne, J. 2004. "What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy". *American Educational Research Journal*. Vol 41, number 2. Pp 237–269. democraticdialogue.com/DDpdfs/WhatKindOfCitizenAERJ.pdf

Research about civic participation and the IB

Impact of Participation in CAS on Students' Civic-Mindedness and Civic Engagement (January 2013)
www.ibo.org/globalassets/publications/ib-research/dp/civicmindednessreportphase1.pdf

International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme: Study of North and South American Students' Civic-Mindedness (October 2013)
www.ibo.org/globalassets/publications/ib-research/dp/civicmindednesssummaryfinal_000.pdf

About Global engagement good practice guides

This series explores common activities that can engage students in service and action that can support the development of international-mindedness in IB programmes. They provide background information, establish connections, suggest ways of working and pose questions for reflection that teachers and other school leaders can use to make their own decisions about how best to develop international-mindedness in the unique context of each IB World School and the learning needs of individual students. These guides share observations and suggestions from a global community of IB practitioners. The IB does not endorse or require participation in specific global engagement activities.