

An Open Letter to the RBUSD School Board regarding the proposed IB program at RUHS, including comments about the recent article in the *Easy Reader*:

Dear RBUSD Board Members:

The December 16 issue of the Easy Reader featured an article about the IB program being proposed for RUHS. (The article is available at this link: <http://www.easyreadernews.com/2010/12/redondo-beach-news/international-baccalaureate-redondo>) In the article, several teachers, including myself, were able to express some of our concerns about the district and high school administrators' decisions in trying to bring the IB program to RUHS. Rather than list them all again, I would summarize those concerns as being about priorities (what is best for our students?) and process (top down vs. ownership). We have presented these concerns to the board at a board meeting and in a lengthy conversation with the superintendent. However, the quote from the superintendent simply dismisses us as being unable to handle change, while the quote from the Valencia principal adds charges of teachers feeling threatened.

I must insist that these comments are further mischaracterizations of the truth, which unfortunately have become rampant in the administrative attempts to implement the IB program. Along the way, the existing AP program has been mischaracterized as lacking critical thinking and relying almost exclusively on multiple choice tests. IB has been mischaracterized as being a program that will benefit the students in the "middle" when in fact it is designed for just a few of our very best students. At the board meeting when approval for moving forward with the application was sought, district administrators mumbled the dollar amounts involved while the board was not given detailed financial information until after that meeting. At the same board meeting, and in the article, high school administrators talked about discussions of IB in Ed Council and within departments while leaving out the crucial detail that the majority of reactions to the proposal were negative. (Yes, teachers did come back from training two years ago saying the program is very strong, but they also had serious questions about whether it would be a good fit at RUHS.) High school administrators also reported having more than enough teachers excited about the program. You should know that these numbers include teachers who expressed an interest in finding out more about IB and were then signed up by admin to be committed to teaching IB. The numbers also include some teachers who have signed on out of fear of having their teaching schedules changed to lower level classes or eliminated altogether if they avoid IB. (So fear of change is indeed present on campus, but not in the way the superintendent's quote would imply.)

The superintendent's quote also expresses some level of frustration with the teachers who are questioning the administration's actions, clearly wishing to brush us aside so he and his team can proceed as they wish. But in an email exchange with the superintendent about IB a year and a half ago, he asked me: "If not IB, what academic option(s) would you provide for students who are inquisitive, critical thinkers, and (here's the best one) skeptical about what they are being taught and by whom they are being taught?" Let me ask this question at a different level. What kind of teachers do you want in the district, Dr. Keller? Professional, inquisitive, critical thinkers who are (here's the best one) skeptical about what we are being asked to teach and the process, priorities, and motivations of the administrators who are trying to determine what we teach? Choose carefully, because the quality of our students' education hangs in the balance.

Several department chairs (representing many teachers) at RUHS have asked for the opportunity to have meetings in which the entire faculty could learn about and discuss the administration's vision for the possibility of bringing IB to RUHS, and they have been turned down. We would like to learn about the details of the IB program without being signed up for official training. (The Valencia principal says we are skeptical because we don't understand, so why will our administrators not help us understand?) We

would like to have professional conversations about what is best for our school and our students. This includes addressing the question of what is the best way to meet our WASC goal of improving the programs for our “middle” students. (Is hoping for a “trickle down effect” from an IB program the best way to meet this goal?)

I humbly ask you, the members of our RBUSD School Board, to direct your administrators to schedule as many meetings as necessary with the teachers at RUHS so that all the pros and cons and options can be discussed. If the IB program is a good fit for RUHS, it will survive careful scrutiny in the light of day.

Respectfully,
Tim Baumgartner
RUHS Mathematics Teacher