

Dear Oregon House Education Committee,

I read a portion of this testimony in support of HB4137 at the live meeting on 2/12/2024. Thank you for reading my prepared comments which I was unable to complete in the time allotted.

Hello my name is Jennifer Wiandt Owens and I have been a teacher at Cleveland High School in Portland for 24 years and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme Coordinator for 19 years.

As coordinator, I have been intimately involved in planning, teaching and coordinating programming for juniors and seniors earning an International Baccalaureate, or IB, Diploma. In my experience, the IB Diploma is a program with high academic standards which are internationally developed and influenced as well as revised over time to reflect a changing world. It has facilitated excellent college preparation for our students as well as an opportunity to develop genuinely interdisciplinary and internationally-minded perspectives. I also feel strongly that it promotes tools for lifelong learning in a manner that maintains relevancy and flexibility in a changing information environment - via Internet or more recently A.I.

The requirements of the IB Diploma are substantial, academically holistic and demanding - particularly in the way of time commitments. I sometimes liken earning an IB Diploma to preparing for a triathlon. It is more than training to be an elite runner, a swimmer or a cyclist. It is training to do all three in the context of living your life. And yet, students that make this juggle, find that the transition to college is seamless and they are overwhelmingly successful there and beyond to post-graduate studies and careers.

Given the benefits this program, a big part of my job has been to trying to increase access to the program; however, meeting the requirements of both a high school diploma and the IB Diploma can be a barrier. Some of these barriers are inevitably easier to overcome for our traditionally successful students, whether by taking class online or over the summer, participating in language immersion programs or other enrichment options in elementary and middle school, or just by accessing some of the extra resources available in wealthier neighborhood schools. Many students whose parents are "in the know" about the IB program are able to help students accelerate learning before or during high school in order to streamline their schedules.

For the students without these advantages, the schedule is tight. Many of these students build confidence to participate during high school and are then saddled with more classes than their affluent peers. So, I am hear today to ask that you consider HB 5137 as a way to even the playing field and assist schools like Cleveland in increasing access to the IB Diploma program.

Two anecdotes came to my mind that I would like to share with you by way of illustrating how the passage of HB 5137 might be helpful to students.

Years ago in a counselor entered my IB Senior English Litterature class in Feburary. She called the names of six of my best and brightest students, five of which were IB Diploma candidates. After they stood in front of all of their peers, she told them that they were short a credit in PE and they were at risk of not graduating. The irony was deafening for me, because as IB coordinator, overseeing their Creative, Active and Service, or CAS, requirements, I knew these students were cross-country runners, avid hikers and backpackers, ski and swim team members and bike commuters. It was an indelible moment for me, as they were also our top scholars, thinkers, and leadership giants. How had this happened? Were they really on the verge of not graduating?

A few years later, two sisters, recent immigrants from Vietnam, enrolled at Cleveland High School with the desire to earn an IB Diploma. While one sister was entering her senior year, with not enough time to complete the full two year process, her younger sister, Kristey, was eager to try. The academic areas Kristey selected for emphasis, designated as Higher Level courses within the context of the IB Diploma, were Biology, Chemistry and Mathematics. Kristey's other IB Diploma subjects included History, Spanish, Theory of Knowledge and Literature study in Kristey's first language of Vietnamese, an option that is offered within the IB Diploma for international students. In addition, Kristey needed to complete PE, Health, Gov/Econ, senior English literature in order to earn an Oregon Diploma. While Kristey's English was already very good, she was receiving ELL support and completing all but her Spanish and Literature course in English, often completing lengthy written assignments that were more complex than those in our graduation required course counterparts, she was still beholden to all these additional requirements. Kristey persevered and completed the IB Diploma, but it was at an enormous cost to her sleep and her general health. Today, Kristey is a radiology resident at Virginia Mason in Seattle. I can thank this process for getting the two of us back in touch.

Again, as we look in education to create equitable opportunities for all of our students, I am hopeful that we can use this legislation to leverage the opportunity that the IB Diploma program represents for a more diverse group of students. Besides offering students a world-class educational background, the IB Diploma program offers a bridge to selective admissions, an edge with scholarships and time and cost-saving advancements in course sequences.

We know that traditionally these programs have best served our students who have the greatest stability and financial resources in their lives. To me, the IB Diploma offers a comprehensive holistic program of high school development that is relevant, interdisciplinary, academically rigorous and comprehensive. What a shame if students miss out on earning one simply because their schedules do not permit them to complete all of the requirements for both the IB Diploma and the Oregon Diploma.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Wiandt Owens  
IB Teacher and Diploma Programme Coordinator  
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