

## **Experiences of early IB schools: Rufus King International Baccalaureate World School, United States**

Rufus King International Baccalaureate High School (School Code Number 0119) was established as Rufus King High School for the College Bound in 1978, when it was also authorized to offer the IB Diploma Programme.

The state Department of Public Instruction was originally interested in starting two IB Diploma Programmes in the state of Wisconsin: one at Racine Case High School, and the other at Wausau East High School. Our then Superintendent of Milwaukee Public Schools lobbied for another IB Diploma Programme in the city of Milwaukee, and Rufus King was the selected site.

At that time Rufus King was targeted to be closed and reopened as a magnet school, with the IB programme being the magnet specialty. Thus in 1976 and 1977 all students then attending the school were transferred to other high schools. Rufus King was reopened in 1978 as an IB Diploma magnet school, under a court desegregation order, with 400 students, 50% of whom were minority, and 50% of whom were non-minority.

Those first IB students, parents, and faculty had a vision of an urban, desegregated school of the highest academic expectations, where all students could eventually experience the IB Diploma Programme. They believed in United States urban and public education, diversity, and quality education. The IB vision with its emphasis on education for a global community took shape in those early years.

At the beginning, administrators and school personnel addressed community and parent groups in churches, schools, and even supermarkets to spread the word about the new IB programme. The school grew to 800 the second year, and ultimately to its present student population of 1400. The school continues to maintain a diverse, multicultural student body, true to its original mandate.

A loose set of entrance requirements were subsequently dropped, and a lottery system was put in place until approximately eight years ago, when an early admissions process with a loose set of entrance requirements was reinstated.

The first group of IB students, teachers, and parents, like first IB groups everywhere, were our pioneers. They were and continue to be students from the entire city as well as the surrounding suburbs. The students, teachers, and parents learned the IB programme together; strong interpersonal ties developed and continued long after graduation. Most of the Rufus King staff, being a part of a then small nationwide group of IB teachers, became some of the first IB North American (IBNA) workshop leaders known in those early years as the “flying circus”.

Those first IB teachers, almost to a teacher, stayed at Rufus King for their entire careers, building an enviable and renowned urban IB Diploma Programme. They were academic risk takers who subsequently have shared and passed on their vision to new teachers.

During our first examination session of 1979, ten IB examinations were given to five students, and IB class enrollment was 60. In the second year class enrollment grew to 100, with 63 IB examinations given to 18 students, and four IB Diplomas awarded.

Since those first years, the programme has grown tremendously. In May 2004 over 600 IB examinations were given to 200 students, approximately 60 students were IB diploma candidates, and IB class enrollment has grown to about 2000. Approximately 90% of the entire student population is involved in at least one Pre-IB or IB class.

Well over 1000 students each year now vie for the 350 freshmen seats. Rufus King is consistently in the top 50% of schools in the U.S., and the top 3.5% of schools worldwide in the number of IB examinations given.

According to research done by Jay Mathews top education writer for the *Washington Post*, and published in a March 2000 *Newsweek* article, Rufus King ranked among the top U.S. high schools. In this same study Rufus King was the top ranked Wisconsin high school. It has been named a Blue Ribbon School twice (1994 and 1996) by the U.S. Department of Education, and ranked as the top Wisconsin high school twice (1994 and 1996) by Redbook magazine.

And finally, Rufus King International Baccalaureate High School was chosen as the site of a presidential visit (May, 2002). At that time, President George W. Bush recognized the school as one of the best high schools in the United States, delivering his educational policy address at the school, and singling out our students and staff for national recognition.

Despite all of this recognition, our main concern and focus has always been and continues to be the delivery of the IB Diploma Programme. As the IB mission is, so is the Rufus King mission: to develop inquiring, knowledgeable, and caring people who understand and respect others.

Thus, we celebrate our 26<sup>th</sup> year as an IB Diploma World School.

Andrew Meuler  
Principal  
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