

## EDUCATION

# International Baccalaureate Program Teaches Students How to Learn

By Vincent Landolfi Jr.

While all the high schools in the Two River area challenge students with robust academic curricula, three offer a unique experience for those learners looking to expand their critical thinking and global comprehension.

Shore Regional High School in West Long Branch, Red Bank Regional (RBR) in Little Silver and Biotechnology High School (BTHS) in Freehold (part of the Monmouth County Vocational School District) are International Baccalaureate World Schools, offering students an advanced course of study known as the International Baccalaureate Program (IB).

The seeds of the program were planted in Geneva, Switzerland in 1945 with the full diploma program established in 1968 to give students a global education and promote international understanding.

For more than a decade, the Shore Regional School District has been offering IB courses. Vanessa Miano, Shore's I.B. program coordinator, explained that the core of the program pairs

an extended essay on an independent research topic with a theory of knowledge – or critical thinking – course, and a creativity, activity, service element that teaches students to become responsible members of the community through participation in social or community work, physical activities and creative activities. Students pursuing the IB diploma must complete courses in six subject groups: language and literature, language acquisition, individuals and societies, science, mathematics and the arts.

While the IB organization encourages pursuit of the full IB diploma, a rigorous and time-consuming proposition, students may instead choose to take one or more individual IB courses, without the core requirements.

Either way, through the program students take responsibility for their own learning and are encouraged to try different approaches, developing their individual educational pro-

cess, said Miano.

"Our I.B. program also allows those students enrolled to gain a more global perspective to learning while taking the time to understand and process information about varying and diverse cultures," she said. "We challenge them to ask assertive questions and think more critically in order to help them develop research skills that will certainly help them in higher education."

"Students who have completed the program also find they are able to write more effortlessly at the college and university level," Miano said.

The halls of Shore Regional High School in West Long Branch are adorned with many of the projects created during the I.B. program's 12-year history in the form of expressive wall murals. "The end-of-the-year mural project is a true collaboration," Miano said. "Students who have participated in the program vote, along with members of faculty and administration, on the colors, textures, materials, themes

and information they want to put forth in a manner they've learned throughout their time in IB." The murals are a visually stunning, sensory-broadening expression of all the learning the students experienced.

"Becoming a more global school encourages our students to consider both local and broad-ranging contexts with regard to learning in the 21st century," said Vincent DalliCardillo, Shore Regional principal. "Our IB program touches approximately 50 percent of the senior class and it is our hope and goal to develop students who will build a better world through quality practice and research with intercultural understanding and respect."

Incorporation of the IB program has been a well-received compliment to the existing, standard advanced placement (AP) curriculum. "Students who welcome the amount of learning required to complete an AP course for college credit can find that same challenge and credit in a dance, music or theater course that previously could

have only been taken as an elective," Miano said, but is part of the arts section of the IB program.

"We've found that students who want to challenge themselves intellectually at the AP level are inspired to do so in the IB program using the tools they've acquired in order to develop a higher, deeper thinking and learning process for themselves," added DalliCardillo.

Linda Rogers, the IB coordinator for Biotechnology High School, said she believes in the program's mission statement of developing "inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect."

RBR coordinators Lisa Boyle and Rose Powers said the benefits for IB program students are numerous, including improved time-management skills, increased experience with oral presentations and opportunities to apply college-level research and writing skills. According to them, IB students have an

edge over other students in the college admissions process. And as with AP classes, IB students can potentially earn college credit for individual courses or for earning an IB diploma, Boyle said.

Thomas Farrell, Shore Regional superintendent of schools, also believes in the benefits of the program. "International Baccalaureate aims to broaden a student's educational experience and challenge them to apply their knowledge and skills on a broader, more global level. Ninety-five percent of our graduates continue on to college from here, and we want to prepare them as fully as possible for the expansive, culturally diverse populations with which they will matriculate."

To that end, Farrell said, the Shore Regional School District Board of Education continues to wholeheartedly support the program. Annual funds are allotted in order to provide the comprehensive training for IB teachers and administrators, and to offset some of the students' registration and assessment costs.