

# Follow-Up on Secondary Scholar Pathways

Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and Dual Enrollment  
Board Information – April 14, 2026

## Purpose of This Update

This update provides additional information following the January Board discussion on secondary scholar pathways. It focuses on Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and Dual Enrollment opportunities currently available in Downey Unified School District, as well as areas of continued study and future consideration.

## District Focus on Rigorous Academic Pathways

Downey Unified School District is committed to expanding rigorous academic opportunities as part of its enrollment sustainability and student success efforts. These efforts align with the district's six Areas of Focus:

- Career Technical Education (CTE)
- AVID
- Rigorous academic pathways (AP, IB, GATE)
- Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA)
- Dual Language Immersion
- Personalized technology integration

Athletics are also recognized as an important contributor to student engagement, leadership development, and overall well-being.

## Benefits of Rigorous Academic Pathways

Expanding and strengthening rigorous pathways provides several benefits for students and the district, including:

- Increased access to advanced academic opportunities
- Higher acceptance rates to competitive colleges and universities
- Improved student retention and engagement

## Rigorous Pathway Continuum in Downey Unified

Downey Unified offers a continuum of advanced learning opportunities across grade levels:

- Elementary School: GATE and IB Primary Years Programme (PYP)
- Middle School: GATE, Honors courses, math acceleration, and IB Middle Years Programme (MYP)
- High School: Viking Prime / Warren High School Scholar Pathway (AP Capstone), Dual Enrollment, and Early College

## Current High School Scholar Pathways

### *Advanced Placement (AP) Capstone – Viking Prime / WHS Scholar Pathway*

The AP Capstone Diploma is a College Board–recognized program that emphasizes research, analysis, collaboration, and presentation skills.

To earn the AP Capstone Diploma, students must:

- Earn a score of 3 or higher on AP Seminar
- Earn a score of 3 or higher on AP Research
- Earn a score of 3 or higher on four additional AP exams

The diploma is typically completed by the end of 11th grade.

Why AP Capstone Matters AP Capstone is designed to demonstrate college readiness beyond traditional AP coursework. Students develop critical thinking, research, and communication skills through real-world topics and independent projects.

## Sample AP Capstone Course Progression

Students in the Viking Prime / WHS Scholar Pathway typically follow a structured sequence that includes:

- Honors and AP coursework beginning in 9th grade
- AP Seminar in 10th grade
- AP Research in 11th grade
- Continued AP coursework in core subject areas through 12th grade

Electives may include VAPA, CTE, Dual Enrollment, and world language courses.

## Early College Program

### *What Is Early College?*

Early College is a structured dual enrollment model that allows high school students to earn both a high school diploma and significant college credit simultaneously.

Key features include:

- A prescribed set of 12 general education college courses
- Courses offered in partnership with Cerritos College
- Approximately 43.5 transferable college units
- No cost for tuition or textbooks

Students may save up to:

- Approximately \$28,000 in UC tuition costs
- Approximately \$11,600 in CSU tuition costs

Early College includes additional academic and social supports to help students succeed.

## Dual Enrollment (A-La-Carte Model)

Dual Enrollment allows students to take individual college-level courses while enrolled in high school.

Key features include:

- College and high school credit earned simultaneously
- Courses integrated into the regular school day
- Students may take up to 12 college courses
- No tuition cost to families

## International Baccalaureate (IB) Program Overview

### *IB Program Levels*

Downey Unified currently offers:

- IB Primary Years Programme (PYP): Elementary
- IB Middle Years Programme (MYP): Grades 6–10

The IB Diploma Programme (DP) is under study for potential future implementation at the high school level.

## IB Diploma Programme Requirements (High School)

If implemented, the IB Diploma Programme would include:

- Six IB courses and corresponding exams over grades 11 and 12
- Theory of Knowledge (TOK) course
- Extended Essay (independent research paper)
- Creativity, Activity, and Service (CAS) requirement

IB courses begin in 11th grade. Authorization from the International Baccalaureate organization is required to offer the Diploma Programme.

## IB Programme Rigor Progression

- PYP: Inquiry-based learning focused on curiosity, conceptual understanding, and learner traits
- MYP: Skill-building, interdisciplinary learning, and structured assessment
- DP: College-level rigor with external exams, independent research, and significant time management demands

## Comparison of AP and IB (High Level)

AP and IB share several common characteristics:

- College-level academic expectations
- Emphasis on critical thinking and analysis

- Rigorous assessments aligned to national or international standards
- Strong preparation for postsecondary education

## Stakeholder Feedback and Survey Results

### *Teacher Interest (Downey High School)*

An IB information session was held on February 26, 2026. Following the session:

- 40% of teachers completed a feedback survey
- Responses indicated a mix of interest, need for additional information, and non-interest in teaching IB courses

### Parent Survey Feedback – Carpenter Elementary (IB PYP)

Parent responses reflected high overall satisfaction with:

- Academic rigor
- Communication and support
- Student growth and well-being
- Preparation for future opportunities

Open responses highlighted both strengths of the program and areas where families felt additional academic support may be needed.

### Parent Survey Feedback – Sussman Middle School (IB MYP)

Parents reported strong satisfaction with staff support and student growth. Some families noted concerns about workload and program fit, emphasizing the importance of informed program choice.

## Enrollment Trends and Attrition

Data from comparable districts shows a gradual decline in IB participation from elementary through high school, a trend consistent across multiple systems offering full IB continuums.

Downey Unified continues to analyze:

- Enrollment trends across IB programs
- Student transitions after 8th grade
- Postsecondary outcomes

## Options Moving Forward

The Board is considering three primary options:

1. Maintain the current scholar pathway structure without IB expansion

2. Continue studying IB implementation by monitoring student outcomes, enrollment trends, and stakeholder feedback
3. Pursue IB Diploma Programme candidacy and authorization

## Recommendation

At this time, staff recommend:

- Continuing to strengthen and invest in the Viking Prime – AP Capstone Pathway as the district’s primary high school scholar pathway
- Expanding Dual Enrollment and Early College opportunities
- Continuing to study IB Diploma Programme feasibility before making a final decision

## Accessibility Note

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