

Two Fluvanna Schools Authorized as IB World Schools

Cunningham and Columbia Elementary Schools became the first two schools in the Central Virginia area authorized to teach the International Baccalaureate's Primary Years Programme (IB-PYP). Both schools were notified this month that they had received authorization from the International Baccalaureate Organization.

Only five other elementary schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia are authorized IB-PYP schools. Cunningham and Columbia become the sixth and seventh schools added to the growing list of IB Virginia schools. Currently, in addition to the two Fluvanna schools, the Commonwealth's authorized IB-PYP schools are Dutrow Elementary, Newport News City; James River Elementary, Williamsburg-James City County; Burbank Elementary, Hampton City; Randolph Elementary, Arlington; and Highland Park Learning Center, Roanoke City. Eleven other Virginia elementary schools are in the exploration or candidate phase that may well lead to future IB-PYP authorization. These schools are in Prince William County, Alexandria City, and Falls Church City.

The International Baccalaureate Organization is a non-profit organization that offers three academic programs to a community of schools around the world and is recognized for being a leader in international education. To become authorized IB World Schools, Cunningham and Columbia Elementary underwent a process of in-depth trainings and evaluations. In December 2009 for Cunningham and March 2010 for Columbia, the process culminated in visits by IB Authorization Teams to evaluate the schools' commitment to the IB philosophy and success at adopting the academic program. The authorizations received are the outcomes of the authorization visits.

The journey to become authorized IB-PYP World Schools began over three years ago for Fluvanna's schools. Several months were spent in exploration of instructional components of the PYP Programme and visits were made to authorized PYP schools. Teachers received training, wrote and implemented units of inquiry, pioneered collaborative planning efforts among staff, and gauged student involvement and growth. The Primary Years Programme (PYP) endorses the Professional Learning Community model of teacher collaboration and reflection in the discussion of student achievement and instruction. The PYP is unique because it is inquiry-based teaching that focuses on student questioning. Rather than working through a standard lesson, students study a central idea by creating and exploring their own questions with the teacher's guidance. Through this concept-driven process, students learn the skills needed to acquire, organize, and communicate knowledge. This enables them to become independent learners, capable of pursuing knowledge beyond the classroom and throughout life.

According to Superintendent Tom Smith, "The staffs and students at these schools are to be congratulated for a job well done."