



# FAQs

Frequently Asked Questions – Academic Programs and Performance at the  
German International School  
Washington D.C.

## Pedagogical Philosophy:

### **1. What are some key elements of the German International School's pedagogy that differentiate it from American schools?**

An important goal of the German International School is to teach students how to work independently. The German International School places value on actively including students in classroom instruction. Instruction is a combination of teacher directed and student initiated activities. The idea is to empower students to make learning a self-directed process. Instruction also focuses on teaching critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Teachers at the German International School expect the students to take responsibility for their learning. From the elementary school onwards, students are taught to use a calendar (referred to as their "Agenda") to mark down homework and test dates. Students are expected to track this information and prepare accordingly. The school does not ask the parents to do this for their children.

Unlike U.S. middle and high schools, which teach subjects over the course of one year, the German International School teaches subjects over several years. For example, students begin taking Biology, Chemistry and Physics in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and continue to take these subjects through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade (with some options in grades 10-12 to elect particular science classes and/or foreign languages). Subjects are taught in smaller blocks of information over several years, rather than larger chunks of information in one year. Math is similar. Rather than splitting Math neatly into one year of Algebra, one year of Geometry, and so forth, Math classes in the German system are taught in a somewhat different order. For example, 8<sup>th</sup> grade Math includes concepts from Algebra and Geometry, and classes continue to build on those concepts until Calculus is introduced in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades, along with statistics and other concepts. For the DIA (German International Abitur), and unlike in many U.S. high schools, students are required to take Math each year through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

## **2. What are tests like at the German International School Washington D.C.?**

In general, examinations involve very little multiple choice testing. Rather, exams generally require written answers with reasons and explanations. In many cases, exam questions include analytical elements that are not answered through memorization but through the students' understanding of broader concepts. In most subjects, tests are 50% of the final grade and the other 50% includes other types of assignments, such as oral participation and special presentations, as determined by the teachers. This allows the teachers more pedagogical freedom to construct classes as appropriate for students. Homework is not a core component of grades, though it may be considered in the oral participation grade; it is expected that homework will be completed on time.

## **3. What kind of training do German International School teachers have?**

Most of the teachers in the elementary school and upper school are trained in accordance with the German system for educating teachers and must have at least the equivalent of a master's degree in the subject matter areas (under the German system, this requires passing the first and second "Staatsexamen" or first and second level state exams for teachers). Some German International School teachers have doctoral degrees. Many teachers are responsible for two subjects in grades 5-12. This allows teachers to have a big picture of the educational trajectory of the students and gives them an understanding of what is important for the students' development over the years.

In the preschool, all teachers and teachers' aides are certified by the Maryland State Department of Education - Early Childhood Development (Region 5 – Montgomery County). Most of the teachers exceed the state and county requirements and have been trained as preschool teachers ("Erzieherinnen") in Europe or the United States for two to four years, with some holding degrees in education, ranging from associate's to master's degrees.

## **General Performance Evaluation:**

### **4. What is the BLI (*Bund-Länder-Inspektion* = Federal-State-Inspection) and how has the German International School Washington D.C. scored? What are the academic performance components of the BLI?**

The BLI is an instrument for the German federal and state governments to assess and ensure the quality and development of German International Schools Abroad. During the multi-day inspection, the BLI determines the overall quality of the school using indicators in a number of areas. The core of the inspection is observing instructional time of as many teachers as possible. Inspectors analyze a variety of documents that the school provides prior to the inspection, including information about the curricula in the core academic subject areas. The first BLI at the German International School took place in the 2008/2009 school year, and the second took place in the 2014/2015 school year. The first inspection resulted in a series of recommendations which the German International School executed. This led to the second inspection being conducted at a higher level baseline of

performance. The German International School Washington received the designation as an excellent German International School abroad after each of these two inspections. The most recent inspection also identified other areas of outstanding performance, including student satisfaction, the quality of school facilities, and the dedication of teachers, as well as areas of improvement.

## **5. What types of comparative test are taken by German International School students?**

The *Hamburger Schreibprobe* (Hamburg Writing Test) is the comparative test given in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grades. It is a standardized test for writing and language comprehension in the German language. It is oriented to general standards that are set for children in Germany. Through such testing, the elementary school seeks to ensure that students are on the appropriate level of academic achievement.

Beginning at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, die *Grundschuldiagnose* (Elementary School Diagnostic) is taken by students two to three times per academic year. The students are tested in spelling, grammar, and reading comprehension, standardized to the appropriate level of expected achievement by students in Germany and German schools abroad at that age. Both the Hamburg Writing Test and Elementary School Diagnostic can be used in higher elementary school grades, depending on the needs of the students and where they are in their curriculum. The results of the tests are not made public, but rather are used to influence curriculum adjustments, if needed. The tests can also be used to determine if remedial teaching is required, for which additional teachers may be brought into the classroom. Teachers generally discuss the results of these tests with parents during parent-teacher conferences.

For the Math curriculum, a *Diagnoseheft* (Diagnostic Book) is used beginning in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades. It contains tests which are given every three to four weeks during the course of the year. It allows teachers to determine which students may need remedial teaching.

In 10<sup>th</sup> grade, all students at the German International Schools abroad in North America take a common test in Math, German, and English, which is approved by the German government. While the results of these tests are not made public, they do factor into students' grades. The grades achieved provide students and parents with some measure of how prepared the student is for the final two years of preparation for the DIA program (DIA = German International Abitur – see below for more information).

## **6. How does English language instruction work at the German International School?**

English lessons begin in 1<sup>st</sup> grade with an initial focus on oral language skills to ensure that students do not confuse English and German when they start learning to write and spell in German. Beginning in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade written English is added. Students are divided into different skill levels depending on their English capabilities (beginner, intermediate, advanced). The goal is that students achieve a high level of proficiency in speaking, writing and reading both the German and English language. The English lessons at the German School are far more demanding than English in German elementary schools in Germany, and children in the advanced English level are taught on a native-speaker level. The number of hours spent on

English lessons increases over time, starting in 1<sup>st</sup> grade with two class periods, four in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, and five weekly lessons in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

Unlike in Germany, where English comparative tests are not taken by students, in English classes in the Elementary School the Standardized American Language Assessments are given to students two to four times a year. The German International School believes English language skills are just as important as German language skills. The assessments allow for a comparison to the English language skill levels of American students. Generally, the German International School has found that students who must leave the German International School integrate well into American schools.

Students in the upper school (grades 5-12) must take English class every year for five hours per week in grades 5-10 and four hours per week in grades 11-12 (plus an optional two hours per week in grades 11-12 for AP English – see below). English is taught at a native speaker level and includes instruction in spelling, grammar, reading, writing, and literature. In grades 5 and 6, students who do not yet speak English at a sufficiently high level may be placed in a separate English language learner class and then integrated into the native speaker class as their proficiency allows. In addition, supplemental afternoon instruction may be offered (and in some cases required) for students in grades 7 and up who need to improve their English speaking, reading, and writing skills.

In addition, certain other classes at the German International School are taught in English: U.S. History is taught in English, general History is taught in English beginning in grade 5 and bilingually in grades 9-12, and Biology is taught bilingually starting in grade 7.

## **PSATs/SATs:**

### **7. How do German International School students perform on their SATs relative to Maryland and national averages?**

The SAT is a standardized assessment test used for college and university admissions in the U.S. German International School students consistently score higher on the SATs than the Maryland and national averages. In 2015, the average German International School student SAT score was 1927 compared to 1552 for Maryland and 1490 nationally. For longitudinal data on German International School SAT scores, with a breakdown of Critical Reading, Math, and Writing scores see [http://www.GISWashington.org/files/GISWashington/Dateien/2013-14/Akademisches/15\\_12\\_02\\_SAT\\_averages.pdf](http://www.GISWashington.org/files/GISWashington/Dateien/2013-14/Akademisches/15_12_02_SAT_averages.pdf).

### **8. Do students take the Preliminary SAT (PSAT) and when?**

Though they can do so earlier, most students take the PSAT as a practice test in grade 10 and then take the official PSAT/NMSQT in grade 11. PSAT and SAT tests and preparatory classes are not mandatory but have been offered by the school if there has been sufficient interest.

## ***Advanced Placement Courses:***

### **9. What Advanced Placement (AP) courses does the German International School offer?**

Currently, the German International School offers AP-designated courses in German, English, Biology, and Calculus. The German International School is in the process of obtaining re-approval from the College Board of AP courses in Chemistry, Physics, Spanish, and French based on new course requirements. (Note that AP English requires students to attend an extra 2 periods of English class per week, taught in the late afternoon. This is not required for graduating with a DIA or a Maryland High School diploma but is required in order to have the class designated as an AP class on the student's record).

### **10. What percentage of students enrolls in AP courses? In which school years do the students take the AP exams?**

The German International School does not differentiate between basic and advanced classes; all students take advanced classes. If a class is designated as an AP course, all students taking this subject take the AP level class. The German International School also designates certain classes as honors classes on transcripts to demonstrate the demanding academic levels of achievement expected of students. AP classes start in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, although some 10<sup>th</sup> graders take the AP German exam because it is relatively easy for them to do well on the exam. Students decide individually

whether to sit for AP exams, and AP exams can be given at the German International School.

### **11. Maryland high schools collect data on the number and percentage of students enrolled in AP courses and those scoring 3 or higher on the exams. Does the German International School collect similar data for purposes of comparison?**

The German International School does collect such data, however using it in the same comparative fashion as Maryland high schools do would be misleading. As noted above, all students are technically enrolled in AP-level courses in certain subjects. However, only a handful of students take the AP exams since students planning to study in Germany may not benefit from taking an AP exam. Many students do not take the AP exams as part of the admissions process, but rather to get credit once they are accepted at a university or college. Therefore, data from the German International School would not comparatively provide the same information as data from Maryland high schools.

### **12. Can students take AP exams without having taken a class on the subject matter or after having been taught the subject matter over the course of two years?**

Students can take AP exams in any subject if they are interested, even if the corresponding course is not offered (or not designated as an AP course) at the German International School. The counselors will help students find a testing location for AP exams that are not administered at the German International School.

## Diplomas awarded by the German International School

### 13. What is the DIA?

At the German International School Washington D.C., students graduating from the 12<sup>th</sup> grade in 2019<sup>1</sup> or later can earn both the German International Abitur (Deutsches Internationales Abitur or DIA) and a high school diploma from the state of Maryland.

The DIA was established by the German government as a degree that may be awarded by German International Schools abroad, in part to accommodate the bilingual environment often present at such schools. A primary difference between the traditional German Abitur (sometimes called “*Reifeprüfung*”) and the DIA is that students are taught some subjects bilingually. For example, at the German International School, English is taught at the native speaker level, U.S. History is taught in English, general History is taught in English beginning in grade 5 (and is taught bilingually in grades 9-12), and Biology is taught bilingually starting in grade 7. Otherwise, minimum course requirements and curricula are generally very similar for the DIA and a traditional German Abitur, aside from U.S. History which is a requirement unique to the German School Washington in order to obtain a Maryland High School Diploma.

### 14. I have also heard the term “*Reifeprüfung*” and “*DIAP*” – what is the difference between these degrees and the DIA?

Because these degrees are being phased out at the German International School after 2018, this document does not go into great detail about these degrees. In short, the “*Reifeprüfung*” is the traditional German Abitur, historically awarded by the German International School. It does not require students to study certain courses bilingually, and there are some variations in the classes and credit hours required. Final Abitur exams also vary slightly from those described for the DIA in question 17 below (e.g. only four exams are required instead of five; no media presentation is required).

The “*DIAP*” (which stands for Deutsche International Abitur Prüfung or German International Abitur Examination) is very similar to the DIA. In 2015, the German government revised the requirements for the International German Abitur for students in future years, and it became the DIA. Like the DIA, the DIAP requires a certain amount of instruction in English and requires five examinations (three written, two oral). However, there are slight variations between the DIAP and the DIA in terms of the hours of required instruction in the various classes, the specific requirements for the Abitur exams, and the way final grades and exam scores are combined to calculate the student’s final grade point average.

Families with students graduating in 2017 or 2018 should consult with the school with regard to any questions about necessary requirements for these degrees.

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<sup>1</sup> Students graduating in 2017 or 2018 are able to choose between the traditional German Abitur, known as “*Reifeprüfung*,” and an earlier version of the German International Abitur Diploma, known as the “*DIAP*”. After 2018, the German International Abitur (DIA) will be the only German Abitur-level diploma offered to graduates of the German International School Washington (in addition to the U.S. high school diploma). Because the other types of German Abitur are being phased out, this FAQ focuses on the requirements of the DIA, but Question 14 explains some of the differences between the various degrees. **For questions about the requirements for students currently in grade 10 or higher, please contact the school.**

## **15. Why should my child pursue the DIA degree?**

Under the German International School system, the Abitur (including the DIA) serves two purposes. First, it is the degree awarded to students who successfully complete the coursework at the “Gymnasium,” the highest level high school in Germany, and who pass the required final exams with a specified minimum grade point average. Second, the Abitur serves as a college admissions test, as any student who obtains an Abitur or DIA is deemed qualified to attend a German university. Because German International School students are educated under the German International School system, graduates are considered to have an “in-country” education for German university admissions purposes. With the exception of certain areas of study that are in high demand, such as medicine, law, veterinary science, engineering and several others, which require minimum grade point averages for admission (referred to as “*Numerus Clausus*”), students with an Abitur degree (including the DIA) generally need not apply to universities for admission. Rather, once they have been awarded the Abitur, they may simply register at universities based on a space available basis.

The German Abitur/DIA also is recognized at universities in Europe, the United States and around the world. Many consider the following degrees roughly equivalent for purposes of college preparation (though there are differences in the educational approach for each): the German Abitur/DIA, the International Baccalaureate, the British A-levels, French Baccalaureate, Swiss Federal Maturity Certificate, and a U.S. high school diploma *that is accompanied* by passing scores on AP exams in certain core subject areas. The DIA at the German International School has the added advantage of requiring students to be essentially bilingual (with a working knowledge of at least one additional modern language). Finally, some U.S. colleges and universities award college credit and/or advanced placement for classes in which the student passed the Abitur exam. Thus, earning a DIA and U.S. high school diploma at the German International School provides graduates with a competitive high school degree and a variety of choices for college or university.

## **16. What are the subjects that students must take to earn the DIA?**

The DIA is awarded after completion of a rigorous multilingual college preparatory program culminating in oral and written examinations.

**In grades 5-9**, students are required to take courses in all major disciplines, including German, English, Math, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, History, Art, Music, Physical Education, Religion or Ethics, and (starting in grade 6) either French or Spanish, and (starting in grade 9) Social Science (which encompasses aspects of Sociology, Economics and Politics). In addition, students may take either (but not both) Latin in grades 8-10 or a combination of science experimentation / information technology in grades 8-9.

**In grade 10**, students enter the “Oberstufe” (“Upper Level”). This first of three upper level years is referred to as the “*Einführungsphase*” (“Lead-in Phase”), because grade 10 prepares students for the rigorous coursework in grades 11 and 12 that leads up to the Abitur exams. While students continue their studies in all of the major subjects in grades 10 (German, English, History, Social Science, Math, Religion/Ethics and Physical Education), tenth graders at the

German International School choose (1) either Art or Music, (2) at least two of the three science classes (but may continue all three), and (3) either to continue the foreign language chosen in grade 6 or take a new foreign language (usually Spanish), or both. Those students who began taking Latin in grade 8 also have the option of continuing Latin in grade 10 (as an additional subject, beyond those required as described above) and may sit in the spring of grade 10 for a “*Latinum*” examination (certifying a level of proficiency in Latin that is required or recommended for certain courses of study at German universities).

Each student in grade 10 will have a minimum of 34 class hours per week for their required subjects, but some choose to take more (e.g. by continuing Latin or by taking an additional foreign language or science). Grade 10 is an important year because the Abitur regulations require that any subject in which the student plans to take a *written* Abitur exam be taken consecutively in grades 9, 10, 11 and 12 (and any subject in which the student plans to take an *oral* Abitur exam be taken consecutively in grades 10, 11 and 12). Thus, any subject which the student chooses *not* to continue in grade 10, such as a science or a foreign language, cannot be a subject for that student’s Abitur exams. In addition, in grade 10, students are required to take regional common exams in Math, English, and German (see question no. 5).

**Grades 11 and 12** are known as the “*Qualifikationsphase*” (“Qualification Phase”), because the courses taken during these two years qualify the student to take the Abitur exams, and it is the material covered in these two years that form the basis for the exams. As in grade 10, core subjects continue to be required (German, English, Math, History, Social Science, Physical Education, either Music or Art, and either Religion or Ethics). In addition, students add U.S. History (which is taught over the course of two years), and they must choose at least three of the following five subjects: French, Spanish, Biology, Chemistry, and Physics. Students also have the option of taking AP English (which involves attendance at an additional 2-hour class per week, beyond the regular required English class).

## **17. What are the tests the student must pass to be awarded the DIA?**

During the last semester in grade 12, students must take five Abitur exams, including three written exams and two oral exams. Detailed requirements for the selection of the exams apply, and students will receive tailored advice on potential choices in courses and exams that would allow them to satisfy these requirements. Among others, the following requirements must be met:

- One of the three written exams must be German.
- One of the three written exams must be either Math or a foreign language (English, French, or Spanish).
- Exams must include at least one subject from each of three categories: (1) languages, (2) social sciences (including history), and (3) math/science.
- At least one of the oral exams must be conducted in the German language.

Students may take up to 50% of the exams in English (or English and another foreign language, not to exceed a combined 50% of exams in a language other than German). Classes which are

taught bilingually in grades 11 and 12 (Biology and History) are tested bilingually and count as half English and half German for purposes of the 50% limit.

Written Abitur exams typically take place in February while oral exams are held in late May. Oral exams include one traditional oral exam where the student is presented with a problem, is given a short time to prepare and deliver an oral response, and then answers questions posed by a panel of teachers. The other oral exam must be in the format of a media-assisted presentation (e.g. computer slide presentation, video, photos, posters, etc.) for which the student has several weeks to prepare.

## **18. How are the student's final grades for the Abitur determined?**

The student's final grade point average (used to satisfy "*Numerus Clausus*" university entrance grade point cut-offs in some areas of study) is calculated based on the student's grades achieved in all academic classes in grades 11 and 12 (approximately 2/3 portion of the grade) combined with the scores on the Abitur exams (approximately 1/3 portion of the grade). Upon passing the Abitur exam in German or a foreign language, the student also will earn an internationally recognized language proficiency certification in the respective language.

## **19. How is the GPA calculated for a U.S.-college/university bound students?**

For purposes of U.S. college admissions, a student's final GPA is calculated based on his or her grades in all classes taken in grades 9-12, as required by most universities. The Abitur exam scores are not included in the GPA calculation for U.S. college purposes but are noted on the student's transcript.

## **20. How do our Abitur scores compare to those of German students in Germany?**

The average Abitur score was 2.09 in 2016 and 2.12 in 2015 on the German grading scale from 1 (highest) to 6 (lowest). These average scores are better than the average in high achieving German states such as Bavaria, Thuringia, and Saxony.

## **College and University Placement:**

## **21. What percentage of students graduating from the German International School goes on to attend colleges or universities?**

In most years, all graduating seniors go on to attend a college or university either in the U.S. or abroad after graduating from the German International School. Under the new G8 German educational system, since students are completing school after 12 rather than 13 years, some students use the opportunity to take a gap year. Most students spend their gap year undertaking various activities, such as volunteer work in developing countries or internships in their field of interest, to prepare for their entrance into college or university. Some students who go to Germany also choose to pursue an increasingly popular dual-track program involving employer-sponsored programs in which students spend part of their time learning on the job and part of their time

in a university degree program, all while being paid a salary. Many large companies such as Siemens, Volkswagen and others offer such programs and hire many of their graduates for full time positions.

**22. What percentage of graduating students study in the U.S., German-speaking countries, or elsewhere in the world?**

While the percentages vary from year to year, in recent years about one third of the graduating students attended college in the U.S. and two thirds went on to study in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Canada, the Netherlands, and other countries.

**23. Are students accepted by their top choice colleges and universities? What kind of support is given to students interested in enrolling in colleges and universities in the U.S. and overseas?**

German International School students are generally accepted at the schools they want to attend. Two counselors are responsible for individually advising all students interested in attending college or university. One counselor specializes in U.S. schools and the other in German and overseas schools. Counselors are available to guide students who wish to have assistance with everything from identifying the right school to filling out applications. Beginning as early as the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, the counselors put students in touch with recruiters and admissions staff at the schools in which they are interested. In the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, students do a short internship to explore possible career choices, and in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, students work with counselors and take self-assessment tests to assist them with identifying professions for which they may be suited. More information about college and career counseling can be found at <http://www.GISWashington.org/career-and-college-guidance.html>.

**24. What kind of outreach does the German School do with colleges and universities in which students have expressed interest? How does the German International School share with the admissions staff of U.S. colleges and universities the quality of the German International School education?**

The counselors personally contact the admissions staff of colleges and universities which students are interested in attending. Many U.S. colleges and universities are generally familiar with the value of a German International Abitur (and some even give college credit for certain classes in which students passed an Abitur exam). However, should a school not be familiar with the German International School system and Abitur, the counselors provide those colleges and universities with the needed background information on the quality of the German International School education and Abitur. Admissions staff at colleges and universities recognizes the benefits of the rigorous German educational system and of having been taught in a bilingual and international environment.

The counselors have found that recruiters are interested in German International School students because they stand out in the large pool of applicants. When speaking with colleges and universities, the counselors highlight the value of the German International School education. Among the items they point to are the multi-cultural environment; the broad language base; well-traveled students with a

worldly perspective; the rigor of the Abitur in addition to the high school diploma; the strong science department; the high percentage of students in graduating classes that go on to attend colleges and universities; the career accomplishments of German International School alumni; the strong student transcripts with high levels of academic performance in challenging courses; and students' engagement in life and activities outside of the school.

## **25. What colleges and universities have German International School students been admitted to in recent years?**

The list below is a partial list of universities and colleges around the world where German International School students have been admitted in recent years:

<b>USA</b>	<b>Germany</b>
American University	Christian-Albrechts-University Kiel
Brown University	European University Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder)
Catholic University	Ludwig Maximilian University Munich
Columbia University	Technical University Berlin
Cornell University	Technical University Darmstadt
Embry Riddle Aeronautical University	University of Bern
Franklin and Marshall College	University of Bremen
George Mason University	University of Cologne
Georgetown University	University of Eichstätt
George Washington University	University of Heidelberg
Harvard University	University of Konstanz
James Madison University	University of Paderborn
Kalamazoo College	University of Tübingen
Loyola University	University of Würzburg
North Carolina State University	
NYU	
Occidental College	
Oberlin College	
Princeton University	
Radford University	
Rice University St. Mary's College	
Stanford University	
Tufts University	
Tulane University	
University of California – Berkeley	University of St. Andrews
University of California – Los Angeles	London Business School
University of Maryland	University of Edinburgh
University of Virginia	
Ursinus College	
USC Marshall Business School	
Williams College	
Yale University	
<b>Canada</b>	<b>United Kingdom</b>
Carleton University	
McGill University	
<b>Other:</b>	
	ETH Zurich
	Georgetown University School of Foreign Service (Qatar)
	IE Business School (Spain)
	INPG Grenoble
	KTH Stockholm
	Maastricht University, Netherlands
	Medical University Vienna
	Second Faculty of Medicine Charles University (Prague)
	Stockholm School of Economics
	Université de Reims
	UTN Cordoba (Argentina)