

STUDENT TESTIMONIAL

I am an example that you don't need the best grades or test scores to be successful. What you need is grit and determination.

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Tarik Brown completed the Diploma Programme (DP) at Paxon School for Advanced Studies in Jacksonville, Florida. Facing intense hardship as a student, Tarik believes his success was due to the incredibly caring and supportive community he found within his IB World School. He received a generous scholarship to the University of Notre Dame in Indiana to study computer science and public policy, which has inspired him to start a scholarship programme called Founding Pathways for low-income students pursuing STEM fields.

Why did you originally decide to pursue the IB diploma?

When I was growing up, I went to schools that didn't have a lot of resources. My parents wanted me to get the most out of my education, even though the environment didn't provide the best opportunities for students. I just really liked school, so I managed to do well. My middle school teachers were really passionate about students who showed potential. With their encouragement, I was a high scorer on the state tests, which positioned me to be invited by schools looking for students to apply to the IB programme. At that time, I didn't feel like I could be successful in the IB, but my teachers and parents were excited that I was invited, and so I took the opportunity. When I arrived at [Paxon School for Advanced Studies](#), it was noticeably much more resourced than any of the schools I'd been in, and the way my peers and teachers cared about each other inspired me to do my best.

As an IB student, how did you shape your studies to fit your interests? Are there skills you developed that you still use today?

I wasn't really exposed to STEM education while growing up, but early on at Paxon I was able to join the robotics team at a neighboring school, which exposed me to new things that now become my main interest. IB offered me the flexibility to pursue my newfound love for the sciences, so I chose to take chemistry and physics. From the beginning the IB instilled a sense of commitment and organizational skills that I didn't have before. Since we got to explore things we were interested in, I learned how to commit to things and see them through. What you do matters and the products I worked on for my assessments, really mattered to me. I still refer to some of them in my interviews or applications for competitive experiences. The organizational skills I developed enabled me to develop my own systems for how I complete long-term projects and work toward completing things, even if they are hard.

Did you face any obstacles during your IB education? How did you overcome them?

I didn't have a stable housing situation during my junior year right when the IB started to get really hard. I found it really hard to focus on my studies when I didn't know **where I was going**

to sleep, each night. What got me through was the sense of community that the IB creates. People actually care about each other and support each other. This was such a significant factor for my success in the programme, helping me to develop perseverance and resilience even while things in my life were so unpredictable.

Tell us about your current studies—was there a moment when you knew you wanted to pursue this subject matter?

I was actually on two robotics teams. My friend and I started the robotics team at Paxon so it would be there for the future. The community and the mentors I were exposed to in these experiences made it clear that technology was my passion. I decided to follow on with computer science and I have discovered that I always have fun in my studies, even if it's hard. Computer science has become part of my skillset, but the IB showed me how important it is to help people. My minor is public policy because without any background in the field, my curiosity about how policy affects our daily lives revealed that when we look around at the problems people face, someone, somewhere made a decision that created that context. After the opportunity to participate in the Harvard Kennedy School's Public Policy Leadership Conference, I realized that doing something to give back, couldn't wait. I've started a small scholarship programme that offers support for low-income students who want to follow STEM careers, supporting them to buy necessary equipment they may not be able to afford.

What advice do you have for students who might be deciding whether the Diploma Programme (DP) is right for them?

I am an example that you don't need the best grades or test scores to be successful. What you need is grit and determination. It is worth the work and taking that challenge because it will prepare you for so much more than college. The IB experience will show you what you are truly capable of. For me, I now live by the philosophy that even if there is a 0.0001% chance of me succeeding in something, I still give it my everything. Each challenge has made me who I am today. Rather than focusing on the challenge, create a vision of where you want to go. A vision where you are successful.