

Midland Public Schools Language Policy (Preschool-Fifth Grade)

INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE/PRIMARY YEARS PROGRAMME CANDIDATE SCHOOLS
Revised March 14, 2016

Introduction

All teachers in the Midland Public Schools are language teachers. We believe language is the key to all learning. Language learning is a life-long process and essential in developing interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Furthermore, we believe that all students should have the opportunity to learn a second language. This enables students to have a better understanding of the world in which we live and promotes a more global perspective. As communication in our world changes rapidly, we are committed to adapting language instruction to reflect the evolution of language in a modern world.

This document describes our philosophies with regard to language and language development:

- It provides the school with a framework that will promote consistency in our approach between grade levels and between subjects.
- It provides parents with information about our principles and practices and assists them in understanding the curriculum.
- It assists teachers in the planning, presenting and evaluation stages of teaching.
- It is a tool for teachers to use to reflect on their language practice and guide professional development.

The points in this policy describe what we value and what we aspire to achieve as we continue to grow in our beliefs and practices. These practices may not YET be reflected in all of the points described in this policy, but it is our goal to put these principles into practice as we continue to grow.

Language Philosophy

Language is the major element that connects the curriculum. We believe that language is a vehicle for transdisciplinary learning and inquiry, and as such, provides a learning environment that promotes, generates and supports effective communication and language development. We understand that since language is central to learning, **all teachers** are, in practice, language teachers with responsibilities to facilitate effective communication.

Additionally, we believe that the IB Learner Profile is an integral part of learning within the PYP. It represents the qualities of effective learners and what makes students internationally minded. The five essential elements of the PYP (knowledge, skills, attitudes, concepts, and action) together with the over-arching Learner Profile attributes informs the planning, teaching and assessing of all language.

Language learning extends beyond the classroom and has close connections to the school library. The library has been organized in a way that labels books which highlight specific Learner Profile attributes. Media paraprofessionals highlight these attributes monthly to support the language development in the classrooms. The teacher plans collaboratively with other classroom teachers and single-subject teachers.

Language of Instruction

English is the primary language of instruction in the Midland Public Schools. All core curricula and instructional resources, including Units of Inquiry and the Programme of Inquiry, are written and presented in English. Through a variety of teaching methodologies that focus on inquiry teaching and collaboration, all areas of language arts instruction are addressed. Students are engaged in a wide variety of learning experiences in which they are actively involved in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Language is embedded in the curriculum and language learning is meaningful and relevant.

The focus of language is its application across the subject areas and throughout the transdisciplinary Programme of Inquiry (POI). The Programme of Inquiry provides an authentic context for learners to develop and use language. Wherever possible, language is taught through the relevant, authentic context of the Units of Inquiry. Language is used as a tool to construct meaning and develop an understanding of the world.

Language is essential to the development of social, emotional and cognitive skills. Language is used in multiple ways within a variety of contexts and for varied audiences. It has certain conventions that are essential, yet allow individuals to express themselves creatively.

The PYP classroom is also connected to the broader world through technology. Students research and communicate through printed media as well as through electronic networks in order to access information, communicate globally, and locate multimedia resources.

Language development allows students to acquire and apply a set of skills and attitudes as well as gain an understanding of the use of language. Language consists of strands (oral language, visual language and written language) which operate interactively. Each of these strands addresses both expressive and receptive aspects of language acquisition. The acknowledgement of both the expressive and receptive aspects ensures that teachers will be aware of the need to provide a balanced language program. In the Language Scope and Sequence (*Making the PYP Happen*, 2009), the strands of oral, visual and written language have been described separately and are represented by four continuums: listening and speaking; viewing and presenting; reading; and writing.

Language skills can be further developed by challenging each student's level of understanding and providing models of effective communication on an ongoing basis. There are different developmental stages as well as learning styles that need to be taken into account when learning a language. Individual students will progress through these stages at their own pace. Developing confidence as a communicator is critical in all students' language development.

The Midland Public Schools' Scope and Sequence documents (based on both Michigan's Academic State Standards as well as the Primary Years Programme's Language Scope and Sequence documents) identify the key expectations considered essential in language learning. Individual grade level handbooks as well as the Scope and Sequence documents found in *Making the PYP Happen* are the documents that guide our expectations and work with students.

Principles and Practices of Teaching Language

We believe that students become good communicators when:

- students are engaged in a wide variety of activities in which they actively listen, speak, read and write.
- the language curriculum is embedded in the district curriculum and language activities are meaningful and relevant.
- the teaching of elements of language such as text structure, grammar, spelling and vocabulary are taught as much as possible within the context of the Units of Inquiry and have relevance within that context.
- the learning environment is positive, supportive and encourages verbal expression.
- students are involved in assessing their work and receive continuous feedback from both adults and peers.
- mother tongue development is valued and supported.
- students and teachers view language as a system with patterns and structures that operate as tools for communication in different settings and situations.
- differences in the developmental stages and learning styles of students are acknowledged and utilized when planning curriculum and instruction.
- the teacher models effective oral and written communication strategies.

Spanish Instruction/Language B

Midland Public Schools incorporates Spanish as Language B. Students in kindergarten through fifth grade receive instruction in Spanish twice weekly for thirty minutes. Student instruction is provided by certified Specialist teachers who specialize in the area of Spanish. The purpose of this instruction is to immerse students in the language and expose them to the unique perspectives and practices provided by learning a second or other language.

Students learn the target language through a variety of activities and methods. The 5 C's of World Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons and Communities) are incorporated as well as the language strands of oral, visual and written communication. The language components of listening, speaking, presenting, reading, writing, and viewing across all grade levels are an important part of instructional experiences in Spanish.

Other Components

- Classrooms support Spanish language learning through conversations and connections as appropriate.
- When applicable, attempts are made to incorporate meaningful Spanish connections to the Units of Inquiry.
- The Spanish-speaking world is explored through study and conversation that may include both the customs and geography of those regions.
- Technology is incorporated to enhance and expand learning when applicable.
- A variety of teaching resources including audio, video, authentic texts, and realia are used when applicable in the instruction of Spanish.
- Student work may be displayed.
- School “common areas” are labeled in Spanish. Labeling objects within the classroom in Spanish is a continuing and growing practice as is the incorporation of Spanish within the daily school-wide announcements.
- When possible, students and their families are provided opportunities to connect with the larger Hispanic community through interactions and events. Some examples may be, but not limited to: conversations with visiting native speakers, classroom volunteers and participation in the fifth grade Fiesta Hispana - a celebration recognizing the connections in our community.
- Professional development and collaborative time is provided on a regular basis for the elementary World Language staff under the supervision of the district Auxiliary Education Specialist and the Teacher Leader.
- Resources and teaching materials are continually evaluated, updated and expanded.
- Common assessments are given at the second and fifth grade levels. Second grade is interpretive in format while fifth grade is interpersonal and oral in format.

Mother Tongue Support

We encourage parents and students to continue to communicate in their mother tongue whenever possible. We believe that the continued development of the mother tongue language is crucial for cognitive development and in maintaining cultural identity. It enables our school community to develop intercultural awareness and understanding, and enables students to maintain esteem for the language, literature and culture of their home country.

We strive to support the diverse population within the Midland Public Schools by nurturing our relationship with the relocation services offered by the Dow Chemical Company. As students with differing languages and cultures enter our schools, appropriate resources may be purchased and provided for use by students and teachers. Additionally, a variety of resources, in mother tongue languages, will continue to be purchased through our annual library and PYP budgets. Consideration will be given to honor new families by presenting a book to be housed in the school library in the family's mother tongue.

We encourage parents to use their mother tongue outside of school as a way to maintain their child's connection to their culture. When possible and desired, a family may be provided with a partner family to both aid in the transition to our community and provide opportunities to continue to use the mother tongue.

Additionally, parents are invited into the classroom and to school events whenever possible to share their language and culture. Staff members continue to create connections with families in order to foster positive relationships that create a connection to a student's first language. Students may be encouraged to be language "experts" in their mother tongue as we are committed to creating a school environment that supports all students in their language development.

English Language Learners:

Midland Public Schools is committed to supporting ELLs (English Language Learners) in many ways. Students are assessed when they enter the district using a formal assessment tool, WIDA-ACCESS (W-APT), which looks at four language domains. Students who score as "non-proficient" are assigned a tutor for one to two hours of one-on-one assistance per week. Students are assessed annually using WIDA-ACCESS to monitor progress and plan instructional next steps for support and instruction.

Beyond this targeted instruction, we continue to provide experiences and support within the classroom to build relationships with families. Students are frequently partnered with a student within their classroom to provide support and assistance. Assignments/learning experiences will be adapted as needed to ensure students are able to participate and be engaged in daily classroom activities. Classrooms may include labels in both English and the mother tongue of the student. In addition, tools may be created to support effective classroom communication, which may include technology that translates or word rings that consist of common phrases.

Assessment of Language

Language comprehension, both written and oral, are assessed on an ongoing basis. The results are used to inform instruction. A variety of formal benchmark assessments are used throughout the year to assess student language progress. These assessments are indicated in the Midland Public Schools Assessment Policy (See this document for more specific information related to assessment.).

Resources:

- Making The PYP Happen: A Curriculum Framework for International Primary Education (IBO, 2009)
- PYP Language Scope and Sequence (IBO, 2009)
- The Primary Years Programme as a Model of Transdisciplinary Learning (IBO, 2010)
- Guidelines for developing a school language policy (IBO, 2008)
- IB/PYP Scope and Sequence -English
- Midland Public Schools' Handbooks/Curriculum Guides
- How Midland Schools Works (sections on ELL, etc.)

The following people formed the initial Language Policy Committee (2014-2015):

Lou Ann Bensinger, Elementary Curriculum and Instructional Specialist/IB Primary Years Programme
Robin Harshman-Rogers and Ellen Flegenheimer-Riggle, PYP Coordinators
Jennifer Brenes, Elementary World Language Teacher Leader and Spanish Teacher

All staff at the following Phase 1 PYP schools provided input for this document: Adams, Chestnut Hill, Plymouth, and Woodcrest.

The revised MPS Language Policy was shared with Phase II PYP schools: Carpenter, Eastlawn and Siebert. Feedback was provided by PYPCs and stakeholders in winter 2016.

The Midland Public Schools Language Policy will be continually reflected upon and revised as described in our Essential Agreements regarding policies and practices.