

Language Policy: 2020-21

Introduction and Purpose:

The purpose of this document is to:

- Communicate to all stakeholders in our IB community – administrators, teachers, students, and parents – the programmatic expectations for fostering language growth as required by IBO
- Provide clear guidelines to all stakeholders by defining language instruction and services offered in the context of the Middle Years, Career-related, and Diploma Programs within Henrico County Public Schools
- Establish clear responsibilities of all stakeholders.

This document draws its authority from the IBO 2007 *Guidelines for Developing a School Language Policy*, the *MYP From Principles into Practice*, *DP From Principles to Practice*, *CP From Principles to Practice*, IBMYP and IBDP subject guides, *Language and Learning in IB Programmes* and the HCPS and Commonwealth of Virginia curriculum guidelines. It was created in 2009 in collaboration with administration and faculty from our IB sites and is reviewed with input from teachers, parents, students, and administrators (the HCPS IB Advisory Council) with the incorporation of all new IB revisions as they occur, or at least every five years.

Philosophy:

Since language is a major vehicle of inquiry, instruction, and expression, it is fundamental to any educational program. Because of this, **all teachers in the program, regardless of discipline, are language teachers**. Language education is more than learning to speak and write in another language. In our program, language education includes how our students must be careful “consumers” of language with an awareness of the subtleties of rhetoric and reasoning as well as how language use may differ in each academic discipline. Our students receive instruction and experience in all disciplines in the art and science of written and oral communication. Finally, our program emphasizes the social and cultural uses of language to establish identity and build relationships.

Since our programs are housed in American public schools, the language of instruction as well as the language of the larger culture is English. Yet, because IB’s mission is to promote a more peaceful world through intercultural awareness, it is the goal of our program that all students are proficient in English, the language of instruction, and another language, at this time French or Spanish. With second language proficiency, students may begin to assert their membership in the global community.

Our Language Profile:

The language profile of our student population breaks down in the following ways:

- The majority of our students are native English speakers with an English-only background who then go on to achieve at least Standard Level proficiency in second language acquisition by their senior year.
- A growing number of our students are bilingual, having acquired both English and another language since birth. These students add French or Spanish in addition to their home languages.
- Some of our students are bilingual with parents of limited English proficiency who have acquired English as a result of attending school in America.

- A few of our students are English background speakers who have a significant proficiency in another world language due to participation in an immersion program in grades K-8 or through exchange study abroad.
- A few of our students have studied a language other than French or Spanish – such as German, Italian, Latin or Slavic languages – prior to their admission to our program. While we cannot nurture the growth of proficiency in these languages at this time, we do seek to give them opportunities to use this skill through the Personal Project or Extended Essay.

Second Language Acquisition:

Second language acquisition begins in middle school. Our students have three “tracks” they may pursue, depending on how rapidly they want to progress or how adept they are in the process. To promote the highest degree of excellence for each student, our program requires that each entering ninth grader have had at least a year of French or Spanish before entering high school. Students coming from our IB middle schools are well into their IB second language process, but we also have students from non-IB middle schools enter at the high school level. It has been our experience that students with at least five years of language instruction have a higher degree of success in their IB Language Acquisition exams. For students who come into our program from outside our district or state, we have made some allowances for this sequence, supplementing our language instruction program with summer study through other institutions, so that students may have adequate instruction for the rigor required. This procedure is not preferable since a summer’s study can never equal a year’s instruction and experience, but it is our goal to not exclude worthy students who are otherwise in all ways qualified to participate in our program.

In terms of instruction, our program follows the curricula outlined for the Middle Years Program as well as the Diploma and Career-related Programs. Our Language Acquisition students receive preparation for their MYP assessments in grades six through nine, bringing them to a high level of proficiency. In their senior year, students will either be in their fifth or sixth year of instruction, taking either the Higher Level or Standard Level exam, depending on the needs they have to fulfill the IB Diploma requirements. Career-related students may opt to continue Language B study as a part of their academic program, sitting for the Language B exam as seniors. Regardless of whether they continue DP language study, all CP students complete the Language Portfolio, demonstrating growth in a language that is not English.

Excellence in and pleasure with this second language is fostered outside the Language Acquisition or Language B classroom. Beginning in sixth grade, students are encouraged to explore ways to use the language with their families and in their communities. Our middle schools offer international travel opportunities in the summer. They are led to see how the language acquisition is not just a subject to study in school but is rather another way of expressing the ideas they are learning in their other classes and in life. In addition, middle school libraries offer support through purchase of books in the target languages and hosting events focused on language awareness.

Our high schools offer both French and Spanish National Honor Societies. These student organizations host events such as film festivals and cultural awareness celebrations for the benefit of the whole school. Language awareness is also fostered through the core attributes of the two programs. The Personal Project offers students an opportunity to acquire their families’ mother tongue in order to communicate in writing or conversation with grandparents back in the home country. DP Theory of Knowledge offers the study of language as a way of knowing. In investigating the history of language, students explore idiomatic expressions and etymology as it relates to the history of

English as well as of other tongues. In CP Personal and Professional Skills, students pursue understanding of communication and thinking as two of the five themes required for the course. Additionally, international travel with connections to Service as Action and/or Activity, Creativity, Service may be available. Finally, at the high school level, through the vehicle of weekly seminars, students are exposed to speakers, films, and dialogs on the relationship of language to identity as well as personal and political relationships.

Mother Tongue Support:

Our program recognizes the personal and cultural significance of a student's mother tongue for, but not limited to, the following reasons:

- Preservation of a student's native language and culture promotes diversity within our program, thus providing our school community with a greater global awareness.
- Acquisition and use of multiple languages, especially across language families, fosters high-order cognitive skills.
- Preservation of a student's home language perpetuates relationships with family members who may still live in these countries and whom these students may visit. Maintained fluency enables these students to travel with ease in their countries of cultural origin, and they benefit from this "cross pollination" of American and their home culture.
- Maintenance of first languages enables students to preserve cultural identity of smaller subgroups within the larger community. This allows the student greater opportunity to absorb the religious and cultural values of his/her extended family.
- CP students may expand their proficiency and fluency in their mother tongue by selecting that language as their focus for their Language Portfolio.

For students with limited English proficiency in need of additional language services, we provide individual tutoring and curriculum differentiation in all of our classes. All of our teachers are trained in the pedagogical use of scaffolding, by which they can assist their students make connections between the more familiar first language and the language of instruction. All classes utilize visual aids, electronic media, graphic organizers, collaborative learning groups, and student demonstrations. Finally, in some cases, we also have contacts with other institutions where students may supplement their IB study with English language drill in summer courses.

Language Instruction in the Subject Areas:

In all subjects, students are expected to "consume" information through reading textbooks and instructional materials, write responses to inquiry in that field, and participate in dialog in that subject. Teachers in the subject areas of history, science, mathematics, and the arts offer instruction in how each subject's epistemology or logic may differ from the next and therefore how text information is organized and included. All teachers require written responses in informal practice as well as in formal examinations. Finally, all classes hold discussions, Socratic seminars, debates, and presentations that further develop oral language skills. All instruction is focused on raising student achievement to its highest level on the IBDP written and oral exams and assessments, as well as on fostering life-long learning skills that will nurture the student into adulthood.

Within each subject, reading language is targeted to explore the following:

- the purpose of the academic inquiry
- what basic assumptions might be inherent in our approach and whether those assumptions are justifiable
- from what point of view we collectively and individually approach a subject

- what sort of information the discipline produces and how to determine the accuracy, relevancy and sufficiency of those data
- key concepts and vocabulary, or the “language” of that discipline
- what sorts of claims are made in the subject and how they are supported
- what implications this knowledge has, and how it affects the student and the community.

Because there is an intimate relationship between clear writing and clear thinking, students are also instructed in the following ways:

- the appropriate approach to clear explanation in each subject area
- the appropriate and reliable sources of information within each discipline
- how to construct effective and persuasive arguments by making claims and supporting them
- how to write for differentiated purposes and audiences, especially in the area of use of colloquialisms or slang
- how to write observing appropriate conventions of English and of the discipline
- how to use reflection as a tool for self-growth
- how to appropriately cite or attribute the use of others’ ideas or words in the context of their written products

Since some classes consist largely of presentation and discussion, students are also guided in the oral use of language in the following ways:

- how to answer a question directly, the question that is asked rather than the one they think they heard
- how to carry on a discussion by adding their comments to build on what others have said
- how to pose thoughtful and significant questions
- how to present ideas verbally as differentiated from in a written product
- how to organize their thoughts and respond articulately
- how to make a formal presentation, considering audience and purpose
- how to respond respectfully even if the discussion is passionate, and the parties may hold opposing opinions or beliefs

Language Support in the Subject Areas:

As students start middle and high school, teachers may solicit a writing sample that is then assessed. This allows teachers to diagnose strengths and challenges and craft instruction appropriately. If a student seems to be struggling, the teacher can refer to the data to analyze better how to remediate the student in reading comprehension skills as well as writing skills so that he/she can achieve at his/her highest level.

Regardless of grade level, just as with those who may have comprehension or expression struggles due to limited English proficiency, native speakers may also have varying degrees of ability, knowledge, and skill. Teachers offer individual tutoring for all students in reading comprehension, clear and critical thinking, effective writing, personal connections, and expression.

In our program, teachers communicate with parents concerning student achievement as well as challenges so that they may better engage in support in the home. Each teacher maintains an online platform, such as Schoology, through which to communicate class content, assignments, and ancillary support materials.

In addition, our librarians supplement the classroom with instruction on resource reliability and differentiation, research skills, argument building and documentation formatting styles as well as providing literature written in the target languages at varying levels. The librarians are available to our students in person before and after school, as well as during the daily enrichment period and online through the Schoology platform, which is available to parents as well as students.

Language Policy Review Process

This policy is reviewed with input from teachers, parents, students, and administrators (the HCPS IB Advisory Council) to reflect school needs and reflect all new IB and HCPS revisions as they occur, or at least every five years.