



Westminster High School Language Policy

Language Philosophy

Westminster High School (WHS) recognize that the study of language and culture is the foundation for all learning. As teachers in the school and IB Programme, all teachers are teachers of language. Language and culture studies develop international understanding, reinforces cultural identity, enhances personal growth, and promotes effective communication. Further, our diverse population and the diversity of languages spoken out Westminster High School requires a focus on language as a foundation of not only learning but also of culture and identity.

To that end, language and culture at WHS focus on the growth of native and second language acquisition, which promotes the idea that all students graduate as bilingual, bi-literate, productive, and global minded citizens. The IB Programme recognizes the need for second language acquisition on a continuous spectrum in addition to offering rigorous growth for the native language speaker. We want to simultaneously nurture native languages, helping students grow in their first language, while teaching a second (or third) language.

It is also understood that the most conducive environment to language learning is a positive and encouraging one, wherein students have the opportunity to engage in authentic and meaningful learning experiences. WHS values differentiated and varying instruction, which integrates the skill areas of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and cultural analysis of country, language, and student background.

Language Profile

At our last five year review, in 2010, 39% of our district students were enrolled in English Language Development. Since that time, our ELD population has increased district wide to 45%. We continue to have native speakers in English, Spanish, Hmong, Lao, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Russian. Many of our ELD students report Spanish as their mother tongue. These students are assessed for language proficiency and offered alternative language services to help them in their English language acquisition and development.

Language Choices and Offerings in the IB Program:

Currently:

- English is the language of instruction
- English as a subject is taught through Language A1, HL; World Literature
- Modern languages are taught through:
 - Language B, SL or ab initio: French
 - Language B: SL or ab initio: Spanish
- Nurturance of the mother tongue is taught through:
 - If a student is a fluent Spanish speaker, but does not read and write fluently, the student may choose to study year 2 of Spanish SL
 - If a student is both fluent and literate, he or she may choose to study Spanish A: Language and Literature as Group 1, and English A: literature becomes Group 2

Language Levels and Progression

- Students in the 9th and 10th grade are placed at the appropriate level: usually English Language 1 and English Language 2, for a study of literature.
- ELD students may begin their careers in sheltered classes, taking EngLang 1 or 2 that is focused on content *and* language development; these students will experience transition courses for placement in non-sheltered classes
- Native English speakers with no target language proficiency but with two or more years of French or Spanish will continue in IB French SL or IB Spanish SL
- Students entering the diploma program with no language background may take ab initio French or Spanish
- Spanish background students/native speakers are assessed for literacy as well as fluency in the target language; students can then choose between French and a variety of Spanish options

We have an increasing number of fluent Spanish speakers whose native tongue is neglected in the school setting, and whose native language is therefore withering. Additionally, many of our Spanish speaking students hope to utilize Spanish in their future careers. Therefore our goal, in the next several years, is to offer Language A1 in Spanish, so that native speakers can study literature in their mother tongue and nurture that native language.

Ultimately, we want to establish purposeful pathways and scheduling for language courses in and before the diploma program.

Essential Understandings

- We view the on-going language development for WHS and RMS students as the responsibility of all teachers
- We understand that our students come with many different language backgrounds, to our school, and will all progress at a different pace
- We strive to keep abreast of the most current research regarding language acquisition
- We provide linguistic learning strategies for the students
- We give on-going feedback in students' progress in all languages of instruction
- Students receive, and are encouraged to apply, a balanced program of instruction, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, and presenting
- Students are exposed to the modeling of rich language experiences
- Students are encouraged to read and interpret a broad range of literature, reflecting a variety of cultures
- Students are encouraged to explore language through the arts
- Students are encouraged to view language as a tool for learning
- Students are encouraged to become fluent in more than one language
- Students are encouraged to develop a love of language and literature in all tongues
- Students are taught literacy skills in context
- Students are given time to apply learning techniques appropriately, and reflect on their learning
- Students are encouraged to take risks, use self-correcting techniques, and to share and develop their work in a social context
- The Learner Profile demonstrates that students must be open toward both language acquisition and other cultures, taking risks and moving outside of their initial comfort zone
- Learning another language and culture can further the purpose of your life
- Language acquisition requires appropriate leveling and scaffolding, which is true in Language A1 and language acquisition courses as well as other content area courses
- Students deserve all the academic challenge, rigor, and learning that their mother tongue allows, and should not be kept from learning because of language alone

Language Support

Successful language learning can best be accomplished through a thorough support system within the school. To that end, we require staff to participate in a minimum of three ELD staff development sessions per year and utilize our ELD department as professionals, trainers, and resources for the rest of the staff.

Techniques and Support for staff in teaching language, especially support for students who are not proficient in English:

ELL Induction

- All district employees complete an ELL induction program upon being hired in the district
- Staff must, each year, identify NEP, LEP, and FEP students using data from ACCESS test scores
- Agreed Upon Instructional Strategies:
 - Purposeful pairings/mixed grouping configurations, including whole class, small groups, and partnering;
 - Low+high
 - High+high
 - Low+low
 - Interdisciplinary Instruction and Curriculum Planning
 - Making Learning Visible through pictures, images, graphic organizers; allowing multiple demonstrations of learning, including drawing, acting, etc
 - Activating prior learning by making cultural and personal connections and affirming cultural knowledge
 - Focus on language with word banks, word walls, etc
 - Making language goals explicit by providing students with specific academic language sets
 - Focusing on comprehensible input
 - Teaching annotation, highlighted text, and marginal notes

Support for Students and Families in Accessing Learning and Language:

- VOICES
 - An intentional effort by Adams 50 to bridge the gap between the school district and the diverse community it serves
 - Serves students, teachers, and parents
 - Focuses on resources and referrals, workshops, staff support and development, and Spanish and English classes
- Sheltered content instruction
 - Offered to ELL students in need of language support in core content areas
- Pull-out program
 - Intervention program for ELL students in need of additional support who do not need sheltered content instruction
- ELL Summer School
 - Offered to all ELL students requiring or wanting additional language support in core content areas

Further Considerations

The committee that revised our language policy for this five year review was a passionate group of educators, which included our Language A teachers (IB World Literature), our Language B teachers (French and Spanish), our Theory of Knowledge teacher, and two of our ELD specialists, including the department chair.

Each year, during our TOK seminar on language as a way of knowing, we ask some of our bi-lingual students to sit on a panel for questioning and investigation. This panel reveals a rich and complicated world wherein the connection between language and knowledge is evident to students and teachers alike. We passionately believe in providing opportunities to our ELD students for growth and knowledge, as well as challenging our native English speakers to expand their world-view through language.

As such, we hope to revitalize our language policy, making it a readily available, living document, whose philosophy and focus is embraced by all students and staff in the IB program. As a whole we serve many students who are learning in a language other than their mother tongue. We view this as an asset and will continue to support these students in the future in an attempt to maintain access for all students.

Policy Distribution & Review

All WHS IB policies will be reviewed annually during the first IB staff meetings of the year, revised, and posted to the WHS IB website.