

**Agassiz Elementary School Language Policy**

**Agassiz Mission Statement: Our Promise, Our Graduates**

Our Promise

Our promise is to provide a culture of **academic excellence, foster a rigorous** and nurturing learning environment, and instill within students a love of learning by identifying their positive distinctions, whether academic, artistic, or athletic, thus empowering them to be responsible, contributing members of a global community.

Our Graduates

Agassiz students will be lifelong inquirers who are persistent problem solvers, are curious about the world, have a strong sense of self, and are able to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and ideas.

Agassiz students will be critical thinkers who are able to analyze a concept and determine their own viewpoint while respecting differing opinions.

Agassiz students will be principled individuals, showing integrity and empathy, and will possess a foundation of knowledge that enables them to thrive in a diverse, changing society.

**Introduction**

The Agassiz Mission Statement and the learner profiles are contributing factors in the development of the language policy. Students with varied cultural and language experiences and abilities will be able to express themselves and receive information in a way that uses strengths to support growth areas and reduces frustration. The following are examples of how we address language and culture through the lens of connected learner profiles:

* Communicator - Teachers provide strategies that help students of all cultures express themselves at the school.
* Risk Taker – Learning a new language involves taking risks when using newly learned and acquired forms of expression.
* Caring - Teachers and students develop an understanding of different cultural obstacles with regard to accessing the English language text (audio, visual, and print). Additionally, teachers and students realize that cultural norms and traditions differ significantly yet are equally valid.

**Process of development of the Language Policy**

The following key steps were used to develop the language policy:

1. Language policy committee established

2. Survey of teachers regarding philosophy of teaching language to all students

3. Parent language survey to determine the language(s) spoken in the household

4. Draft of language policy created

5. Feedback of draft from various constituents (leadership team, middle school teachers, reading specialist, language acquisition teachers, bilingual coordinator and governing body)

6. Revisions of draft made and policy finalized

7. Publication of the language policy to all stakeholders

**Language Philosophy**

Just as all content area teachers are teachers of reading in accordance with the Common Core State Standards, we are also teachers of language as it is central to learning. While the majority of our students and staff have English as their native language, we investigate and develop meaningful ways to recognize and value the other languages that our students and staff speak. Students are encouraged to recognize other languages as part of what makes them unique during self-explorations to develop rapport within classrooms at the beginning of the year. Cultural explorations occur throughout the grade levels and are certainly a central component during the IB-MYP years. Our annual inquiry fair theme varies, allowing the students to highlight the benefits of cross-cultural understandings and multilingual abilities. Classroom libraries include native language books in the dominant non-English language, Spanish, and the school library has an expanding section of books in Arabic and Spanish and both fiction and informational books about various countries with a focus on representing the cultures our student body represent. Although English is the mode of instruction, students and staff are free to speak in whatever language is comfortable for them.

**Student Language Profile**

The mother tongue of the majority of students who attend Agassiz is English. Other languages spoken by students include: Arabic, Bosnian, Farsi, French, Greek, Gujarati, Hebrew, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Latvian, Mandarin, Mongolian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, Tamil, Thai, Turkish, Russian and Ukrainian.

**Staff Language Profile**

The languages other than English spoken by staff include : Arabic, Assyrian, French, Japanese, Greek, American Sign Language, Spanish and Tagalog.

**Language of Instruction**

With the exception of language acquisition classes in Arabic and Spanish, instruction is done in English in alignment with the Common Core State Standards.

**English Learner and Mother Tongue Support**Our English learners (ELs) receive pull out and push in English as a Second Language (ESL) services. If they are endorsed in ESL, homeroom or content area teachers also provide services. Many paraprofessionals are also bilingual and can provide native language support. Social interactions between students and staff that speak the same language occur informally in a language other than English. Bringing home languages into the school in this casual manner teaches students the importance of these languages and their value in realms outside of the home. In addition, some students attend weekend language schools to continue their development of their native language. The native language of students is supported through: school inquiry projects investigating and valuing student cultures and languages, family visits to the classroom to share cultural and linguistic traditions, greeting songs employing the languages spoken by students, native language books in the school and classroom libraries, and through the two language acquisition programs offered in Arabic and Spanish.

**Language Acquisition Programs**

**Instructional Practices for the Provision of Arabic:** Students in Kindergarten through fifth grade participate in Arabic class twice a week for 30 minute periods. Currently we have two native speakers of Arabic within the student community. Arabic instruction focuses on all domains of language acquisition: reading, writing, speaking and listening. Students learn through instructional units of study that are developed according to the Alignment of the National Standards for Learning Languages with the Common Core State Standards. These foreign language standards focus on communication, cultures, communities, and making connections and comparisons.

**Instructional Practices for the Provision of Spanish:**  Students in sixth through eighth grade have Spanish class twice every six days. About ten percent of the students in the program have had some Spanish exposure at home with about two percent designated with more advanced proficiency. Students are taught in heterogeneous groups with differentiated inquiries and expectations according to their language phase determined by an *Avancemos* textbook placement assessment. All four language domains are taught to all phases of learners with a greater focus on listening and speaking in the initial phases and on reading and writing in the more advanced phases. Spanish curricular units are developed employing the IB MYP objectives, the American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages Standards and the Common Core Language Arts Standards. Each unit develops core vocabulary and grammar constructs and concludes with a final summative task that allows students to use what they have learned for a real life purpose. Final summative tasks are assessed in the following criteria twice a year: A: Comprehending spoken and visual text, B: Comprehending written and visual text, C: Communicating in response to spoken, written and visual text, and D: Using language in spoken and written form. Additional information regarding the IB MYP Spanish curriculum can be found in the IB-MYP Language Acquisition subject guide.

**Instructional Practices for the Provision of English**

We integrate and balance speaking, listening, reading and writing the English language in our IB-MYP program following the Common Core State Standards as follows:

Speaking and Listening

We explicitly teach speaking and listening dialogically, academically, and conversationally. We emphasize active listening, and civil discourse as a part of our teaching.

Reading

We practice a balanced reading approach which includes comprehension of informational and narrative texts, looking at the vocabulary and parts of speech and language in expository and narrative texts, and oral and silent reading fluency in those narrative and expository texts.

Writing

We teach students to compose, write and revise expository, narrative and argumentative/persuasive text on assigned and self-selected topics. We write for various purposes.

**Integration of Language within Subjects**

Reading, writing, speaking and listening are utilized in every subject area in the IB-MYP program. Explicit instruction in how to read primary documents, expository texts, and other required texts, both digital and traditional takes place in every classroom. Students are required to learn and use academic vocabulary in all the disciplines, as well as be able to speak and discuss knowledgeably in their courses on mathematics, individuals and society, language and literature, and science. Students are expected to write in the persuasive, expository, and narrative forms in all the disciplines. Scaffolding and differentiation within these subjects will be used to provide all ELs access to the curriculum.

**Equity of Access to IB-MYP for all Students**

At Agassiz School we use the Federally mandated Response to Intervention (RtI) model to ensure equity of access to our curriculum to all students. At the middle school level, that is access to the IB-MYP program. Following is the description of how RtI develops at Agassiz and, particularly, in the MYP program:

**Response to Intervention (RtI)**

At Agassiz it is important that we meet the language needs of all of our learners. In some cases, students will need language support (speaking, listening, reading and/or writing) beyond the daily classroom activities. In that case, Agassiz uses a tiered support system called Response to Intervention (RtI). Each tier provides increasing support beyond the core curriculum. The process is designed to improve each students’ academic performance and confidence.

**Tier 1**

Tier 1 is the first level, and is the curriculum to which all students are instructed. In the case of MYP, it is the units that are designed in each of the subject areas, which integrate Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Students are given universal screening (NWEA-MAP), and school-based benchmark assessments are given at regular intervals.

**Tier 2**

*If adequate progress is not made with Tier 1 supports and differentiation, then student is moved to Tier 2.*

Students are identified for Tier 2 intervention through universal screening and assessments, including NWEA and Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessments. Students are given additional small group or individualized instruction within the classroom to support them and accelerate their progress to that of a typical student in their grade level.

**Tier 3**

*If adequate progress is not made with Tier 2 supports and differentiation, then student is moved to Tier 3.*

Students are referred for Tier 3 intervention, which provides very small group (not more than 4) or individual instruction outside of the classroom in addition to Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports. This intervention occurs 3-5 times per week for 30 minutes. Students are monitored and data is collected. If progress is not made, a referral for and Individualized Education Program (IEP) is considered.

**Language Professional Development for Staff**

The bilingual coordinator provides at least one professional development annually. This session changes focus based on the areas of need that the staff identifies each year, always focusing on how to best service our EL population within the general education classroom. Past sessions have focused on the following:

* Determining how ELs are identified
* Assessing and exiting ELs
* Examining teacher misconceptions regarding ELs
* Learning how ELs experience school with and without adequate supports
* Learning the difference between content specific and general academic vocabulary and how to effectively teach both
* Engaging in strategies for providing comprehensible input to ELs
* Scaffolding classwork to make it accessible and meaningful for ELs

The staff also completed a survey regarding orientations towards cultural and linguistic diversity. The derived information led to a healthy discussion about improving our practices in highlighting this diversity of both the staff and school community in meaningful ways, such as through a diversity inquiry fair and rapport building activities at the beginning of the year.

**Parental Involvement**

Parents are surveyed annually to determine the changes in languages that our students experience at home. This information is used to target library book purchases and classroom cultural studies in order to make sure that the cultures and languages of the students are addressed and valued in school.

In cooperation with other staff and parents, the bilingual coordinator learns of parental concerns and incorporates these messages into professional development sessions for the staff.

Agassiz holds a variety of parent education events throughout the year. At the IB MYP events,

the emphasis of cultural awareness and international mindedness, which are at the heart of the IB program, are explained. Parents are encouraged to visit their child’s classrooms to discuss the traditions, celebrations, rituals, and culture of the families’ cultural heritage.

**Communication of Language Policy**

The following are ways Agassiz will communicate the Language Policy to its community:

● New MYP teachers will be given the opportunity to review the policy with IBC

● The IBC will share the policy with the governing body

● The policy will be available on the school’s website

**Review of the School Language Policy**

The IB MYP teachers and school administration will review this policy annually to make any warranted changes.

**Works Cited**

IBO. *Guidelines for developing a school language policy*. Cardiff: IBO. 2008.

IBO. *MYP Language Acquisition Guide*. Cardiff: IBO. 2014.

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*Knowledge*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2010. Print.