

# Briarmeadow Charter School Language Policy

## School Language Philosophy

Briarmeadow Charter School, an authorized International Baccalaureate school, was founded on constructivist beliefs and the learning philosophy that by reflecting on our own experiences, we construct understanding of the world we live in. Based on the cognitive and developmental theories of Jean Piaget (1963), teachers focus on creating stimulating learning environments responsive to individual needs and strengths.

Teachers are models of language usage and demonstrate an appreciative attitude toward world language and literature. Language is central to learning and therefore the responsibility of teachers across the school; consequently, classroom structures and systems reflect the schools' constructivist philosophy that deep learning requires time, human interaction in the community, and flexibility.

### Oral Language

Oral language is the vehicle by which we come together to construct meaning. Language acquisition is supported by a language-rich environment and learned in a context where risk-taking is encouraged and mistakes are considered inevitable and necessary. Talk is seen as fundamental to learning. Discussions, open-ended questions, and conversation all play a role in language acquisition. Play is the vehicle through which the early learner develops oral language. Communication skills including listening, speaking, reading, writing and media literacy are acquired most effectively from using language in meaningful, multicultural contexts embedded in real world experiences. With a strong emphasis on effective language use, the school fosters a deep appreciation for collaboration and interaction of students, teachers, administrators, parents and the community.

### Written Language - Reading

The ability to read written language is a developmental process where readers construct meaning from a text. Students learn to read through reading and through instruction that is grounded in observations of the reader's prior knowledge and current ability. Jerome Bruner (1978), L.S. Vygotsky (1978) and Marie Clay (1985) all agree that teachers should provide support that enables the reader to work within their "zone of proximal development", going just beyond what they can currently do alone. Classroom structures, such as Daily 5 and Reader's Workshop, are developed to allow teachers the opportunity to work with small, flexible groups of readers. Students work in cooperative groups using discussion to develop deep ideas about texts. When students are performing below grade level expectations, specific intervention is designed and delivered to ensure student success.

### Written Language - Writing

Similarly to reading, writers learn to write by writing. Writing is not viewed as a set of skills learned in order to receive a grade. Instead, writers create pieces for an authentic purpose where voice and meaning take precedence over rote skills. Over time, literary technique instruction are embedded into writing when the skills can be connected meaningfully and purposefully to writing. Teachers utilize Writer's Workshop as well as Visible Thinking strategies to demonstrate student products as well as student thinking processes. This practice also demonstrates the value we place on student ideas.

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## Visual Language

Visual language education refers to the understanding that “images and language interact to convey ideas, values and beliefs” (International, 2009). This learning can clearly be seen in the earliest students through looking at pictures to determine the plot of a story. It can also be seen in our print rich classrooms, where our thinking is visible. To meaningfully engage digital natives, teachers use a variety of technology resources including, social media, hashtags, Skype, iMovie, Digital Story Creator, iPads, iPods, laptops, and desktops to create authentic experiences for students to understand, respond, create and critically analyze visual media.

## Development of mother tongue

Language is a part of one’s identity. As such, Briarmeadow strives to include library books that reflect the diversity of languages spoken at the school. Teachers’ classroom libraries house multicultural literature that aims to reflect the cultures and languages represented in the classroom as well as outside the classroom. Teachers use a variety of multicultural text to develop student perspectives about the nation and the world. Through participation in discussion about these texts, students gain knowledge that helps them participate as both national and global citizens (Eh Loh & Thomas, 2010). Using multicultural literature in this way allows students to reflect on themselves and the world around them. Through our instruction, we also strive to demonstrate value in and make connections to students’ mother tongue.

## Learning in a language other than mother tongue

Significant support is provided to those students learning English as a second language. By the end of their first year at Briarmeadow Charter School, all teachers are certified English as a Second Language instructors trained to support acquisition of English language proficiency. English Language Learners are placed in an English-speaking classroom as part of Briarmeadow Charter School’s inclusion philosophy. These students are provided the same courses as students whose mother tongue is English, but instruction is enhanced to include second language teaching strategies.

In order for students to be truly successful in English, they must acquire both social and academic language proficiency. Teachers provide students with daily social interaction using a variety of strategies. Students are given opportunities to listen, speak, read, and write at their current level of English development while gradually increasing the English they read and hear, and are expected to speak and write.

Teachers provide instruction that is aligned with the student’s English proficiency to ensure that students acquire knowledge and skills in the curriculum. Comprehensible language is used to convey meaning of concepts to students through visuals, physical response and repetition (Krashen, 1983). Instruction is then differentiated to match students’ language development and support scaffolded to lead to independent acquisition of language and content knowledge (Seidlitz, 2010).

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The faculty, staff, administrators, parents, and students value second language acquisition as well as understand the various cultures that make up the Briar Meadow community. To continue to provide the best instruction possible to English Language Learners, the staff attends trainings as well as works collaboratively to keep current on best practices. Teachers are constantly involved in self-directed action research and engaged in reflection on the best ways to teach English Language Learners. Teachers also participate in the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) to assess the growth of each identified English Language Learner using the English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS).

## **Language B**

Beginning with Kindergarten, all students are exposed to the Spanish language via a variety of instructional methods. The language instruction is offered through exercises in listening, speaking, reading, and writing and is delivered through an interactive and concept-based approach to Spanish language learning. Spanish instruction includes grade appropriate oral reading, reader's theater, games, research, songs, nursery rhymes, prose and poetry all designed to build confidence and skills in utilizing the language socially and academically.

## **Parent Involvement**

While we believe that all teachers have a responsibility to language education, we also believe that parents are a child's first teacher. The same skills that allowed children to learn language, also allow students to learn how to read and write. Parents are encouraged to model reading and writing in any language they are capable of and to talk to their children about the application in their own lives. Teachers also invite parents to share their language and culture in the classroom throughout the year.

Parents are required by their parent commitment to engage in reading or some kind of language activity for a minimum of 20 minutes each night. Multiple curriculum nights are organized throughout the year to enable parents with the tools and strategies needed to help their child at home and to show that parents and teachers are a team. Parents are also required to attend all parent-student-teacher conferences initiated by the teacher in addition to student led conferences. Teachers also organize conferences by parent request. Parents and students have access to BrainPop, BrainPop Jr., MyOn, Duolingo, and eStoria that they are able to access outside of the school.

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