

Language Policy

VERSION 2.2

SHARPSTOWN
INTERNATIONAL
SCHOOL



Philosophy

At Sharpstown International School, we believe that every teacher is a teacher of language. Language learning occurs in every classroom on our campus, regardless of academic discipline. Our goal is to provide our students with the tools they need to effectively communicate in more than one language. The acquisition of language is a dynamic, life-long process that permeates all learning. It is a key factor in intellectual growth, promoting the development of personal and intercultural understanding.

The development of mother tongue proficiency is crucial for maintaining cultural identity. A healthy respect for the students' own culture and the culture of others is of paramount importance to Sharpstown International School. We value the linguistic diversity of our community, and work to support both mother-tongue development and additional language acquisition of our students and families.

Definitions

Mother-tongue – refers to the language the student uses at home and/or outside the classroom or school environment; also called “first language,” “home language,” “native language,” “heritage language”

Language acquisition – describes the process of learning a language that is not the student's first language

English Language Learner (ELL) – a student whose first language is not English; also referred to as English Learner (EL), English as a Second Language (ESL) student, Limited English Proficiency (LEP) student

Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) – comprised of ESL-certified educator, campus administrator, and parent, charged with reviewing information, classifying students, notifying parents, and monitoring ELL academic progress

English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) – mandated by the state of Texas; outline English language proficiency level descriptors and student expectations for ELLs in Texas; required to be implemented as an integral part of each subject in the required curriculum

Language Profile

English is the language of instruction at Sharpstown International School, with the exception of language acquisition classrooms, which currently include Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, French, and Arabic.

Houston Independent School District mandates determining the home language of every student and establishing campus LPACs to monitor and support the development of all ELLs.

All language and literature teachers who teach ELLs are required to maintain ESL certifications from the state of Texas. Teachers of other subjects are provided with ongoing professional development to enhance their implementation of the ELPS in their individual classrooms.

Language Acquisition in the Middle Years Programme

The primary aim of language acquisition in the Middle Years Programme (MYP) is to encourage students to gain competence in a modern language other than their mother tongue, with the long-term goal of balanced multilingualism.

The International Baccalaureate acknowledges that learning additional languages greatly contributes to the holistic development of students. Proficiency in an additional language gives students access to a broader range of input, experiences, and perspectives, and is believed to raise achievement in other subject areas.

The study of languages in the MYP aims to encourage in the student a respect for and understanding of other languages and cultures, and to provide a skill base to facilitate further language learning. The development of communication skills in more than one language supports the concept of an international education and promotes multilingualism and multicultural understanding.

Language Acquisition in the Diploma Programme

Language acquisition in the Diploma Programme (DP) is focused around familiar and unfamiliar cultural contexts, allowing students to further develop their linguistic and cultural fluency with the goal of being able to communicate effectively in an environment where the target language is spoken natively.

Students who pursue the IB Diploma will study a language other than English at either higher level or standard level. Both higher level and standard level encourage students to further develop their ability to communicate in the target language through the study of language, themes, and texts, contributing to conceptual understanding of language. An option for students choosing a third language for the IB Diploma is language ab initio, which is designed for students without previous experience in the target language.

All language acquisition options available to students in the MYP are available in the DP and will be offered by the school based on student interest.

English Language Practices

English is the primary language of instruction at Sharpstown International School. All students develop fluency in the language of instruction and all teachers are considered to be

language teachers. Teachers participate in ongoing professional development on effective practices for promoting language learning in all students.

All students enrolled in grades 6-12 receive instruction in English language and literature that is aligned with the requirements of the Houston Independent School District, Texas standards (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills), and the International Baccalaureate Language and Literature aims and objectives.

Campus LPACs establish proficiency and process goals for English language development for all students not proficient in English.

Curriculum is developed and vertically aligned to provide a continuous framework for English language development for all students. Within this model, students work to meet their grade level standards in reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Teachers model proficient literacy behaviors within the context of their academic disciplines. Teachers and students work together to practice literacy and communication skills. Students demonstrate their literacy and communication skills through independent and collaborative work.

Language Acquisition Practices

The importance of becoming culturally and linguistically proficient is recognized at Sharpstown International School, where all students are required to participate in language acquisition in a language other than English. Current language acquisition offerings are Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, French, and Arabic. Beginning in grade six, students study one of the four languages over the five years of the MYP. The students learn to speak, listen, read, and write in an additional language as well as develop an appreciation for the culture. Instruction is constructed as additional language instruction for native English speakers and as literacy instruction for native speakers. Student progress is assessed against the district, state, and IB Language Acquisition aims and objectives.

MYP language acquisition builds on experiences in language learning that students have gained during their time in the IB Primary Years Programme, if that was available to them, where knowledge, conceptual understanding, and skills are developed through transdisciplinary units of inquiry. Students continuing on to the IB Diploma and Career-related Programmes will have grounding in an additional language that will enable them to fully engage in IB standard level and higher level courses where they can best employ the inquiring, reflective approach to language learning developed through the MYP.

Literacy Strategies

Literacy is an important component to language development, consequently, the teachers at Sharpstown International School use two district-led programs, *Literacy in the Middle* and *Literacy Empowered*. *Literacy in the Middle* exposes students in grades 6-8 to authentic and purposeful reading, writing, and vocabulary study across all grades and core subject areas. Focusing on independent reading, writing, and student discourse in a one-to-one technology-infused classroom environment, *Literacy Empowered* sets out to implement best practices and resources for core classrooms in grades 9-12.

All ELLs participate in the required ESL program, where they receive instruction in English using ESL instruction strategies, making all content comprehensible. ESL curriculum is established by the school district and teachers work within this framework to accommodate individual student needs.

Instruction is differentiated using the following strategies:

- Peer and native language support
- Visual and/or verbal cues to reinforce
- Pre-teaching vocabulary
- Tiered sentence stems
- Re-phrase, repeat, or slow down
- Extended wait time
- Extra time for complex material
- Word banks
- Adapted texts
- Oral administration of tests
- Bilingual dictionaries and glossaries
- Drawing or pictorial representations
- Scaffolded writing assignments

Interventions

Administrators and teachers review state and local reading scores for all students monthly. Students who are reading below grade level standards are provided with tiered reading interventions. Reading interventions are offered at three different tiers and are guided by data on student progress.

Mother-tongue Support

At Sharpstown International School, we believe in the need to support our families whose native language is not English. We encourage our parents and students to speak and develop their mother tongue at home and at school. This strengthens the child's language

and cognitive skills while instilling a sense of importance about his/her culture. In addition, we use a number of resources to support mother-tongue development and assist in our communication with families.

We provide written and telephone communication in both English and Spanish, the most prevalent home language of our students. Campus staff with the most direct interaction with families are fluent in both English and Spanish. Spanish interpreters are available on site for teachers and administrators who are not fluent. The Houston Independent School District Translation Services Department provides translation and interpretation services in Arabic, French, Mandarin, Spanish, and Vietnamese to help support the languages most commonly spoken by our students and their families.

We offer several campus clubs and organizations that promote mother tongue development. The school also hosts an International Festival every fall, where students and parents are welcomed to share their cultural background with the community. The school continues to maintain a library of materials written in the mother-tongue languages of our students, both in print and electronic form.

Policy Review

This policy is reviewed annually in May by the Shared Decision-Making Committee (SDMC) and communicated to the school community through the school website. Teachers and other staff members participate in annual refresher training on our policies and practices during August in-service as well as ongoing professional development as needed throughout the school year. Amendments to this policy are considered as needed based on changes to IB policy, federal and state policies, district policy, and community needs.