



Cullen Middle School

6900 Scott Street
Houston, Texas 77021
(713) 746-8180

Jacqueline Thompson - Principal



“Language is the road map of a culture. It tells you where its people come from and where they are going.”

Rita Mae Brown

Philosophy

Students, teachers, and staff at Cullen Middle School are a community of inquirers who use language actively; taking risks as we grow our skills in an atmosphere of trust, collaboration, and rigor.

Because language is critical to thinking, learning, inquiry, and communication, we are committed to maximizing the development of our students’ language skills as those skills are evidenced by their listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

- We focus on honoring the mother tongue as well as the acquisition of additional languages in order to develop multi-lingual students who are prepared for their roles as global citizens. We honor and celebrate all languages and customs.
- We recognize that language is the vehicle for the questioning, researching, discussing, creating, and reflecting that lead to knowledge in any curricular area.
- We believe that language supports positive personal growth as it is critical to the expression of the attributes of the IB learner profile.
- We recognize that the technological advances of recent decades present new opportunities for learning and communicating and that students must be supported in order to acquire the facility necessary to use these technologies effectively.

Language is the vehicle by which we come together to construct meaning. Therefore, we collaborate to build, nurture, and refine our language practice. In response to experience, needs, and interests, and with respect to our cultural differences, we empower students to listen, speak, read, write, present, and view as they learn language, learn about language, and learn through language.

Listening

We believe that teaching students to be active and attentive listeners happens in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. Students develop listening skills in order to understand basic and daily communications such as classroom directions and to understand more complex nuances of communication such as author’s purpose and perspective. Students also learn that individuals may interpret spoken messages differently because of their unique backgrounds and experiences.

- Books on tape
- Read aloud
- Student presentations
- Buddy reading
- Shared writing
- Peer editing
- Note taking/dictations
- Book club
- Listening comprehension stories with questions
- Poems from voices of other poets and readers

Speaking

We speak to express, to instruct, to persuade, and to entertain; we learn to organize our thoughts into coherent sentences and to make sure we are heard and understood. We grow our speaking skills through:

- Buddy reading with parents and older students
- Discussions of read alouds
- Reading Clubs
- Writer's workshop

Reading

We read as readers, but also as writers inquiring into the strategies effective writers use. We grow our reading skills through:

- Selection of just-right books
- Teacher read alouds that demonstrate throughout interaction with text
- Books on tape
- Independent reading while being accountable for comprehension through reading conferences, construction of story maps, and note taking
- Literature circles that engage in text-based discussions
- Vocabulary study, including etymology and shades of meaning
- Reading in the content areas and units of inquiry, including research and note-taking
- Reading in all genres, appreciating how forms match the purpose

Writing

As we practice speaking and reading, we notice, develop, and practice the flow of language that we bring to our writing. As eighth graders, CMS students synthesize the components of the writing practice as they create their texts for Exhibition. We grow our writing skills through:

- Writer's workshop, using writer's notebooks to jot down and explore ideas, author and genre studies, and self-chosen seed ideas we grow into published pieces in appropriate genres
- Study of spelling, parts of speech, and sentence structure

- Matching genres to specific audiences and purposes: memoir, short story (historical fiction, realistic fiction, and fantasy), mysteries, essays, editorials, new articles, and feature stories
- Revision and proofreading strategies, practiced with every piece of writing

Spanish as a Second Language Instruction

The faculty, staff, parents, and students' value second language acquisition as well as understanding different cultures. Beginning in kindergarten, all students receive Spanish language learning. Through listening, speaking, reading, and writing students experience an interactive approach to second language learning. The program focuses on verbal skill development to help students gain confidence to use Spanish both in the classroom and outside the school. Connections are made with other languages (mother tongues) children speak at home. When possible, the Spanish language program blends the Houston Independent School District Spanish curriculum with the IB Learner Profile, the PYP attitudes, and the program of inquiry.

- Morning announcements feature a Spanish word of the day and a sentence for children to practice
- 7th and 8th grade students are given the opportunity to further enhance their Spanish speaking skills and participate in cultural and traditional experiences in an elective course for high school credit. Guest speakers are invited to share their first-hands experiences of visiting, working, or living in another country.
- Our school library features a large selection of Spanish only books, as well as bilingual books for students to check out.

ESL (English as a Second Language)

We support our English Language Learners (ELLs) in a print-rich environment with ESL certified teachers. Our teachers address listening, speaking, reading, and writing using strategies specific to ELLs. In addition, teachers use small group instruction and technology to support English language acquisition. As an internationally-minded school, we value our multi-lingual students by creating an awareness of and celebrating their cultures while supporting their mother tongue. We support ELL students through:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentors • State mandated Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC), and IDEA Proficiency Test (IPT) for screening and support of ESL students • Technology – websites, online games • Multi-lingual books in the library | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translator programs • Peer helpers – English natives helping ESL students with English, and Spanish natives helping English natives learn Spanish • Cultural celebrations embedded in units of inquiry • Study of folktales, songs, and stories from various cultures. |
|--|---|

Media Literacy

The technological advances of recent years have created the need for a type of language proficiency that was previously nonexistent. Students need facility with technology and the language of technology in order to maximize learning, support inquiry and research, develop products that express learning, and expand communication to international levels. To this end, students at CMS benefit from the following resources and practices:

- Direct technology instruction with school technologist
- Classroom computers
- SMART boards
- Laptop carts for classroom use
- iPod Touch labs for classroom use
- Blogging (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook)
- School website to support communication among the entire school community of students, teachers, administrators, parents, neighborhood

Assessment

The Cullen Middle School staff collaboratively plans lessons that allow the English Language Arts and Reading Curriculum to integrate into all disciplines. Evidence of this integration can be viewed in our PYP Units of Inquiry, teacher lesson plans, and in assessments, such as:

- **District and State Assessments**
 - District Benchmarks
 - STARR (State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness)
- **Teacher Assessments**
 - Running Records
 - Weekly comprehension assessments
 - Spelling dictation
 - Unit of inquiry summative assessments
 - Conferencing with readers and writers
- **Student Self-Assessments**
 - 6 Traits of Writing student rubric
 - Student discussion rubric
 - Student independent reading rubric
 - Proofreading checklists
 - Peer editing

***This policy will be formally reviewed and evaluated annually for revisions and/or updates by all staff members and shared with The CMS community*