

Mark Twain Elementary School

Language Policy

This document outlines the understanding and implementation of Mark Twain's Language Policy. It aims to state our school philosophy, define our beliefs about language, and articulate our pedagogy.

This policy reflects the attributes of the IB Learner Profile that Mark Twain strives to develop and are inherent in Mark Twain's Mission Statement:

Mark Twain is a community of life-long learners, built upon a collaborative spirit that fosters inquiry-based learning. Our purpose is to promote and develop responsible, active, and reflective citizens of the world.

Our practices employ the tools provided by the PYP curriculum framework – specifically,

- the **Learner Profile attribute of Communicators** – *We express ourselves confidently and creatively in more than one language and in many ways. We collaborate effectively, listening carefully to the perspectives of other individuals and groups.*
- the **Key Concept of Connection** – *the understanding that we live in a world of interacting systems in which the actions of any individual element affect others. .*
- the **Approaches to Learning** – self-management, social, communication, thinking and research skills - *an integral part of an IB education complementing the Learner Profile, knowledge, conceptual understanding, and inquiry.*

At Mark Twain, we believe that language plays an essential role in all aspects of a student's development. Appreciating that language expresses cultural diversity, in this role language also fosters intercultural dialogue, preserves cultural heritage and encourages collaboration and inclusive communities. Our philosophy and pedagogy supports our goal of developing internationally-minded students who are 'open to and curious about the world and people of other cultures, who strive toward a profound level of understanding the complexity and diversity of human interactions.' (paraphrasing Ian Hill, former Director General of IB)

Our core beliefs are:

- Language and literacy is central to all learning.
- Language is an expression of personal and cultural identity.
- Language enhances our understanding of others.
- Diversity in language and literacy is honored, respected and celebrated.
- Language is integral to cognitive development for the construction of meaning.
- Language is spoken, written and non-verbal.
- Literacy in and across all disciplines is essential.
- All teachers are language teachers and language learners.

In support of these beliefs, we use language to discover truth and determine meaning. We use language to communicate, learn, and express our beliefs and values. We use language to distill ideas, hear different points of view, and reconsider our own conceptions. We realize the importance of sustaining one's First Language for personal and educational development and therefore, honor the 31 home languages in our school community.

The language of teaching and learning at Mark Twain is English. In addition, Mark Twain teaches Spanish through two interwoven opportunities that support our philosophy and pedagogy of language learning and demonstrates our local and global engagement:

- The Dual Language Program, a Spanish/English immersion program, develops academic fluency in both languages and promotes intercultural understanding throughout the school community. Its goal is for its students to obtain Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in both languages.
- The Spanish Language Program provides language acquisition skill development and develops an appreciation of Hispanic culture. Its goal is for all our students to attain BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) in Spanish.

First language. The Mark Twain learning community is linguistically and culturally diverse. While over 30 languages are represented in our student population, English predominates at 70% of the population. Spanish speakers represent 11% and the next most populous – Arabic, Mandarin, Korean and Japanese, combined - represent 10% of our student population. The remaining languages, with less than 1% of the population or 1 – 6 students are: Farsi, Vietnamese, Portuguese, Urdu, Tamil, Cantonese, Hebrew, Hindi, Russian, Hungarian, Serbian, Albanian Tosk, Bengali, Greek, Gujarati, Ilonggo, Kannada, Konkani, Marathi, Swahili, Telugu, Thai, and French.

Our faculty and staff reflect our student diversity - we are conversant in English, Spanish, Arabic, and Vietnamese and can call upon parent translators for our other languages, as most of our parents are multilingual.

We promote and celebrate our linguistic and cultural diversity through various events and initiatives – namely, International Festival and Potluck, a parent run event that has been ongoing since the 1980s, a parent and faculty Diversity Committee, and our First Language Initiative. The First Language Initiative provides specific information for developing and maintaining a families' home language. Although our parents' expectations are for us to teach their children English, we emphasize the importance of keeping their home language for both, social and academic progress. Additionally, our multilingual population provides opportunities for students to help one another creating an interconnected learning community.

Upon enrollment, students are given a Home Language Survey in which the parents identify the student's First Language. Once the students are identified as English Learners, their progress is monitored and assessed annually through TELPAS (Texas English language Proficiency Assessment Survey). Our students generally exit the EL identification within three years through effective classroom differentiation strategies for their various language learning needs. Additionally, our multilingual library and extensive digital media resources support our multilingual population.

As our students develop language in and across the disciplines or subject areas, we recognize the relationship between language and learning. Our curriculum is designed to include all three aspects of language development – learning language, learning through language, and learning about language – for all students, all ages, ability and proficiency levels. We integrate discrete skills, basic communicative skills, cognitive academic language, literary analysis and critical literacy into our curriculum through authentic learning experiences.

Our goal is for our students to become effective communicators, appreciate the beauty of language, and apply their creativity in various aspects - writing, listening, speaking, reading, presenting and viewing. Our Primary Years Program transdisciplinary curriculum develops the skills and conceptual understanding of

language learning throughout all grades and classes, including the specials classes in music, art, Spanish, physical education, environmental and science labs, and technology.

Our commitment to students is to enhance their ability to communicate clearly, concisely and persuasively, to be able to listen open-mindedly and objectively with respect and tolerance for the multiple perspectives of others, and to integrate the application of language arts for cultural expression. We recognize and honor the difference between creative communication and mastering the mechanics of language. We realize that we, as teachers, also learn by listening to our students' use of language. To fulfill our commitment to our students, we provide a range of meaningful experiences within authentic contexts in both written and oral language.

Ongoing professional development for effective methodologies and strategies in language arts is recognized as a key factor in accomplishing our goals. We maintain a collaborative environment to facilitate sharing and improving our instructional practices, as we seek to empower the voices of our students. By working together and following our programs and methodologies, we can empower this generation of students to master the art and science of language.

Glossary

First Language – first language that a child acquires, but may not remain their dominant or strongest language

Home Language - languages spoken in the home

Languages of instruction – languages used for teaching and learning in a school setting

Academic language – language in which you have literacy (reading and writing) and can function at an age-appropriate academic level

Mother tongue – the language that a person has been exposed to from birth or the language or dialect of one's ethnic group

TELPAS - Texas English language Proficiency Assessment Survey

BICS - Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills

CALP - Cognitive Academic language Proficiency

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