



Language Policy

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Charter Oak International Academy Language Policy

“Language is fundamental to learning, thinking and communicating, and permeates the whole curriculum. It is necessary not only to learn language, but also to learn about language and through language. Learning best takes place in authentic contexts, and literature plays a special role in enabling this to happen. The strands of oral, written, and visual communication are learned across and throughout the subject areas. Each aspect is only relevant in relation to the whole.”

IBO 2007, Making the PYP Happen: A curriculum framework for international primary education, pg. 68

At Charter Oak International Academy, we believe:

- language is central to learning in all areas of the curriculum
- students must be immersed in a language-rich environment
- academic discourse, written language, reading skills and use of technology are essential components of all curricular areas
- every teacher is a teacher of language and IB philosophy
- learning in multiple languages enriches personal growth, deepens international perspectives, and better prepares students for their futures
- students’ mother tongue should be celebrated and supported
- high expectations for all learners support academic growth
- students should be knowledgeable about global issues and diverse perspectives
- teachers collaborate to support the needs of each individual student
- the language policy is reflected upon, revised, and promoted annually

At Charter Oak International Academy, we believe children learn best when they:

- have multiple opportunities to speak, to read, to write, to listen, to view and to think critically
- are surrounded by literacy opportunities at home and in school
- work in child-centered learning environments
- are provided differentiated literacy instruction that meets their individual needs
- are engaged in meaningful and relevant work
- use the writing process for authentic tasks and communication with others
- integrate technology in a meaningful way as part of the learning process
- have parents and teachers working collaboratively
- inquire about and research global issues
- feel their language differences are respected
- are able to use, interpret and produce visual literacy formats

The Language of Instruction:

English is the language of instruction at Charter Oak International Academy. Language is taught throughout the curriculum to give students authentic opportunities to think critically and read, write, speak, listen, view and present their ideas with the help of technology. Using an inquiry approach, students are encouraged to question and explore a variety of genres. The Key Concepts are guiding questions in the inquiry learning process. Students inquire into the lives of authors to learn to be more proficient themselves. Children then study author's craft and apply this learning to their own work. Students also apply their knowledge of globally-significant issues through research, writing inquiry questions and presentation in real-world situations, such as videoconferencing, field studies, interviews, community speakers, Inquiry Gallery and Exhibition. Students choose to take action in a variety of ways based on their learning and their interests.

At Charter Oak, each student is an active participant in daily reading instruction. Although the focus for the teacher directed mini-lesson is a key reading skill or strategy from the ELA Common Core State Standards, the materials utilized come from all disciplines. Materials used include the core reading program, trade books, and other authentic sources of literature such as plays, non-fiction magazine articles and web content. Often times, reading material is linked to topics being studied in the content areas. These short lessons involve a great deal of teacher modeling and thinking aloud to show students how strategies can be applied. Students have countless opportunities to engage in learning within meaningful contexts, in addition to being presented with the learning of language as an incremental series of skills to be acquired. Teachers often utilize technology to present and supplement their lessons.

Students are encouraged to listen attentively and communicate clearly throughout their school day. One of the goals of our language program is to develop student presentation skills. Students are afforded multiple occasions where they can practice these skills. In addition to daily communication and in-class projects, these opportunities might include student-led assemblies, daily video announcements, chorus, band, orchestra, Suzuki, Inter-El, art shows, Art Quest, dance performances, FRC-supported play, Student Council, Esteem, Quest, Odyssey of the Mind, Junior Achievement, Career Day, Explorations, Inquiry Gallery, Exhibition and more. Additionally, students' lessons are intended to bridge the key reading skills of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Students participate in Inquiry Circles, reading buddies, three summer school programs, and our Achieve after-school support/enrichment program. We understand that language involves the building of background knowledge. Students at Charter Oak take part in numerous field trips at each grade level, and have the chance to converse either directly, or by videoconference, with experts in many fields of study. To promote visual literacy, students utilize graphic organizers, diagrams, graphs, illustrations, maps, ads, websites and more.

Teachers analyze a variety of assessments to form small guided reading groups based on reading level or skills that need additional instruction. Small group lessons reinforce and strengthen the objective taught during the mini-lesson, while also providing additional teaching at the students' instructional levels. There is a great deal of collaborative conversation occurring during these small group lessons and during

the independent or group practice. Based on the progress of students, guided groups are flexible and fluid within the classroom.

When students are not working with the teacher in a small group, they are independently reading and responding to a “just right” book and practicing essential reading skills independently or in small groups. Classrooms have extensive libraries organized by level, interest, author, and genre; and include magazine choices as well. Students are encouraged to self-select books from these collections based on their interests and personal learning goals. Student literacy centers are also very exploratory and vary based on the grade level. Primary level students engage in collaborative conversations with their peers as they choose from a wide variety of materials at a writing center. In the upper grades, students may attend a research center and explore informational texts in order to determine the text structure or differentiate between facts and opinions. Other centers involve use of computer programs such as *Lexia* and *Raz Kids* in order to create individualized practice programs for children. Many students who need this support receive it during their independent work time.

Additional time is allotted each day for the instruction and application of writing skills across the content areas in a format similar to that of reading instruction. There is a mini-lesson in which the teacher focuses on key writing objectives based on the organization, content, purpose, audience, and development of narrative, opinion, and informative pieces of writing. This is followed by independent practice and application of the skills taught. The teacher pulls small groups based on student need and confers with individual students to help revise and refine their written pieces. Topics for writing are authentic and allow for students to connect learning and life experiences. Many times writing instruction helps students craft and create cumulative projects that utilize a variety of multimedia to display their work. Students are given opportunities to share their work with peers and the class in order to receive constructive feedback. Various opportunities for publishing pieces include author’s teas, writing celebrations, and student presentations. When possible, writing is directly linked to exemplar literature and informational texts and is often integrated into the content areas. Additionally, students have multiple spontaneous writing opportunities through personal journals, letters, open-response, and creative writing. Writing is a balance of free-choice and interest-driven pieces that take into account students’ prior knowledge, with text-dependent reader response.

Although we dedicate blocks of time to instruction in specific content areas to meet the Common Core State Standards and the district requirements at Charter Oak, we encourage a transdisciplinary approach in all learning. In math, teachers read literature and informational texts that connect to key concepts and encourage students to “translate” and “dissect” math questions. Students are expected to explain their thinking and problem solving orally and/or in writing. In the science and social studies units from the program of inquiry, authentic texts are used to build vocabulary and background knowledge, and students are encouraged to seek out resources to further their understanding of key concepts and topics that engage them. Teachers integrate reading, writing, speaking and listening skills into each unit they develop.

Additional Language Support:

Charter Oak offers a variety of tiered levels of support to students who are struggling with language development and literacy skills. Teachers, along with the Student Success Team (SST), carefully monitor progress in reading at the student, class, and grade levels. Computer software helps to track and analyze student performance data. Teachers share needs for their specific classes and grade levels and collaborate with their colleagues in order to create an instructional plan that addresses these needs. The Student Success Team consults closely with teachers and determines targeted, research-based interventions, as well as instructional strategies and materials as needed. This results in high-quality classroom instruction for all students.

Students who are flagged on universal assessments receive additional diagnostic testing to determine their areas of strength and weakness. Students whose data and observations show a weakness with literacy skills are provided with additional intervention. The type of intervention is determined by a triangulation of data, including district-wide, school-wide, and universal assessments. Students who display difficulty on these assessments are considered for additional reading support. Tier 1 instruction is provided within the classroom. Tier 2 and 3 support is provided by the reading specialist, early intervention teacher, or a literacy tutor. Intervention teachers use scientifically research-based programs and methods of instruction and carefully monitor student progress. If a student does not make progress with the intervention over time, they are considered for more intensive intervention in the next tier.

An additional literacy support at Charter Oak is our Early Intervention reading program. Our Early Intervention Teacher and Early Intervention Tutor provide one-on-one instruction for students in first grade. The Early Intervention lessons follow Marie Clay's Reading Recovery model very closely. The students actively work on sight words, spelling, phonics, fluency, reading strategies, and writing in each 30 minute lesson. Lessons are 5 days a week. Early Intervention is a Tier 2 intervention and student participation is determined by the SST, based on collected student data.

Literacy enrichment and support for teachers to differentiate the curriculum is provided. Teachers/tutors work with small groups of students on a flexible schedule to provide enrichment such as: book clubs, writing groups, or interest-based explorations. Students who demonstrate a desire to further study a concept with student-led action can also gain support with this type of model. These teachers also work with classroom teachers to differentiate instruction in the area of literacy and find opportunities to integrate concepts across the curriculum.

After-school language support and enrichment opportunities are offered through our Explorations and Achieve sessions. The Explorations classes are based on student interest, and children sign up for classes that appeal to them. Attendance at Achieve classes is determined by a team that looks at student needs. Students may need extra language support – or be identified as needing enrichment in a particular area.

Language is supported across the curriculum by a variety of individuals who work closely with the classroom teacher. The Speech-Language Pathologist provides support to students through inclusion in the classroom setting and in pullout formats to directly support specific skills. Speech skills such as articulation, voice, and fluency may be supported through activities in small groups in the classroom or

by providing direct instruction in techniques and strategies to aid in the acquisition of age appropriate skills. When students are in need of support for language skills, observations and assessments are conducted in order to determine if it is content, form, or use of language that is causing the student to struggle.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT):

ICT is a tool and valuable life skill for our students that uses a variety of approaches to help empower learning and connect students with their local and global community. Charter Oak uses ICT to enhance the curriculum with technology tools and resources to investigate, create, communicate, collaborate, organize, and become responsible digital citizens. To promote the receptive aspect of language, students develop targeted literacy skills with individualized software, instruction, and reflection that is administered by classroom teachers, the ICT teacher, the IB coordinator, the library media specialist, and myriad support staff. Using technology, students explore current events, geography, and science concepts; perform research; and create new understanding through close reading of text, skimming articles, and note-taking. They learn to critically evaluate a variety of sources, make connections between on-line and print materials, organize ideas, analyze and synthesize information, and graph data. The expressive aspect of language is developed as students critically think and share new learning with dynamic technology-enhanced presentations. Students collaborate with peers on shared documents and provide feedback to one another, they connect globally with experts to enhance curricular topics and gain new cultural perspectives using video conferencing technology, and promote a home/school connection through interactive practice which does not stop when the school day ends. Both at school and at home, students practice word processing skills, and they learn how to create and incorporate video and photography to enhance learning. Charter Oak students utilize green-screen technology to create student-centered daily video announcements while focusing on school writing goals, editing and revising, and oral reading fluency. Digital literacy competencies are developed as students edit video content and incorporate multimedia components to their original content before publishing work to the internet to connect with authentic audiences. Students are empowered to be responsible for their actions, to value others' rights, and to practice safe and legal behaviors when accessing technology.

Students utilize SMART Boards, iPads, laptops and personal computers to manipulate information and interact with content on educational websites. Following the interactive whole class lesson, teachers meet with small groups of students in guided reading and skill groups while the rest of the class applies their literacy skills in independent reading or center work. Students also use technology to create and publish their own information through writing.

Library Media Program:

The Charter Oak Library Media Program is designed to support all learners, at all levels of instruction. It promotes the belief that learners must have the opportunity to read for enjoyment, as well as for information. The Library Media Specialist works collaboratively with classroom teachers to teach language acquisition and comprehension by using background knowledge, posing and answering

questions appropriate to the task, determining the main idea, using robust content vocabulary, and monitoring reading comprehension as well as the research process by means of the Big6 research model. The Library Media Specialist and grade level teams have dedicated time each week to discuss progress on, or develop, units.

The Library Media Program provides students, staff and the community open and unrestricted access to a variety of high-quality materials of varying formats. The collection reflects academic and personal interests, maintained in alignment with district and national standards, and responds to the individual requirements of the diverse learners within the school community. The Library Media Program works to foster a love of reading within all children and provide necessary materials for successful independent and shared reading experiences. We own Lifesize video-conferencing equipment and use it at all grade levels throughout the year to allow our students to converse with experts and authors.

Library Media Center:

The Charter Oak Library Media Center is a place of exploration, inquiry and discovery. It houses approximately 10,500 titles, including books in our language of instruction, world languages and mother tongues. Three percent of all titles are bilingual in Vietnamese, Spanish and Korean. The collection also has a large percentage of informational books in English which support the study of countries and cultures other than that of the United States. When new students enter the community, it is a priority to provide, if not books in their mother tongue, then books about their home country and culture. The library's collection is culturally responsive to global perspectives through its literature and picture-book collections.

West Hartford Public Schools supports the education of all students digitally with subscription services to several research databases and a dynamic, powerful online library catalog which can be translated into Spanish and French. Destiny, the catalog, provides vetted web resources and public databases, as well as available titles in the physical library space. Specifically, *Encyclopedia Britannica* is available in English and Spanish and has a read-aloud component, which is helpful for ELLs and accessible to all levels of learners. Also, for our ELLs and varied learners, we subscribe to BrainPOP (BrainPOP Jr and BrainPOP Español are included). Its animated curricular content covers many academic areas. We also use PebbleGo, a research tool for our youngest learners. It uses video and read-aloud options to engage and teach science and social studies content. We expose students at all ages to opportunities to write their own stories, record their voices and respond globally to others' work via several Web 2.0 tools, such as Kidblog, Voicethread, and Littlebirdtales.

The Library Media Center is the hub of Charter Oak International Academy, offering students a place to enjoy quiet reading, discuss books and explore individual interests. It is staffed by one certified Library Media Specialist. Programs to excite and engage families include One Book One School, two Book Fairs each year with evening family events, and a comprehensive Summer Reading program. Inquiry Night and Globe newsletter articles are also ways in which the library media specialist stays in touch with families of students.

World Language Program:

The World Language Program teaches Spanish at Charter Oak International Academy to address the linguistic needs of our global society. The model is a partial immersion program in Spanish that provides a strong educational foundation, beginning in preschool and continuing through fifth grade. The students acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to communicate in Spanish, make academic connections with the subject areas of study and become aware of the customs and similarities of the Spanish-speaking world. The goal of the program is for students to reach their highest potential and become responsible, respectful, caring members of our global society and competitive members of the 21st century workforce. The program is aligned with the National, State and West Hartford standards for the study of World Languages.

The goal of our world language program incorporates the national world language goals of the **5 Cs**:

- **Communicate** orally and in writing in Spanish at the appropriate developmental level.
- Gain knowledge and understanding of the Spanish **cultures** and demonstrate positive cross-cultural attitudes and behaviors.
- Make **connections** at grade level with other areas of study through authentic sources in a variety of media, including technology.
- Understand the nature of language and cultures through **comparisons**.
- Participate in multilingual **communities** within a variety of contexts.

In addition to these goals, our world language program aligns itself with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects. The learning of the Spanish language follows the natural approach to language acquisition: listening, understanding, speaking, reading and writing. These skills tie into CCSS' three modes of communication: interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational. The world language curriculum supports and reinforces the core academics with an emphasis in literacy and numeracy skills through the learning of: a) different parts of speech; b) cognates (vocabulary that comes from Latin and Greek and resembles their Spanish equivalents); c) prefixes and how to identify word meaning through them; d) sentence structure and punctuation; e) numbers; and f) geometric shapes and their properties.

The students learn Spanish in a variety of ways, including songs and poems, games, short plays, questions and answers, worksheets and projects. Great emphasis is placed on the use of technology. In the primary grades (PreK through second), students learn a variety of early language concepts such as: greetings, emotions, colors, numbers, weather, body parts, the family, the community, clothing and food. Students in 3rd through 5th grades learn about more advanced concepts related to sports and pastimes, the Spanish alphabet, the house, Latin American geography and holidays, time and travel plans. In addition to these topics, our program integrates Spanish instruction within many IB units of study at every grade level.

Through the transdisciplinary units, the world language students acquire communicative skills in Spanish while learning about science and social studies. To that end, connections are being made with each

grade level curriculum such as: politeness words and expressing feelings in Pre-K and Kindergarten; animals in first grade; types of communities in second grade; currency types and values in third grade; ecosystems in fourth grade; and Spanish-speaking countries in fifth grade, among others.

Outside the classroom setting and throughout the year, the students have multiple opportunities to utilize their world language skills. Within the school and in community-related events such as the daily morning announcements, monthly Star Assemblies, International Peace Day, Cultural Celebrations and Inquiry Gallery Night, the students greet each other, recite poems, sing songs, role-play and present culturally-related topics in the Spanish language. Outside the school setting and in their daily lives, they practice and share their world language skills with their families, neighbors and friends, in restaurants and other community settings, and during their vacations to Spanish-speaking countries, to name a few.

English Language Learners:

We believe it is our responsibility to ensure that all English Language Learners (ELLs) acquire the English skills necessary for academic success and ultimately for success in a global, multicultural and multilingual society.

The goals of Charter Oak's ESOL program are:

- to enable ELLs to become competent in speaking, reading, writing and comprehending the English language
- to provide the instructional support needed for ELLs to master the English language and to participate effectively in the mainstream curriculum
- to set high expectations for all English Language Learners
- to place value on the mother tongue language and culture of all students
- to assist teachers in teaching content effectively to English Language Learners while developing the students' language ability

Charter Oak welcomes students from many home language backgrounds. Our largest non-English home languages are Spanish, Vietnamese, and Portuguese. A large portion of these students qualify for support with their English language skills through the English for Speakers of Other Languages Program (ESOL).

Students qualify for placement in this program based on their results on the LAS placement exams (Language Assessment Scales). Hours of support are determined by their level of language proficiency and their grade level. Incoming students' mother tongue language and literacy skills may also be assessed in Spanish if this is deemed useful.

Through the use of small instructional groups, lessons are implemented based on the ESOL curriculum and grade level units, supporting students' growing proficiency in all four language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing). The ESOL curriculum is based on the five stages of language.

Resources utilized to support second language acquisition include picture dictionaries, Big Books, leveled readers, songs, games, plays/reader's theater scripts, online resources, and trade books, among others.

The LAS Links assessment is administered annually to evaluate students' progress in speaking, listening, reading and writing. Additional information is gathered regularly about student progress from district assessments, as well as a variety of other formal and informal assessments.

The curriculum is continuously being adapted to include research-based effective teaching strategies, such as inquiry-based teaching, implementation of the Common Core State Standards, and the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol model (SIOP).

The Family Resource Center, housed at Charter Oak International Academy, provides many opportunities for home language support. These include early childhood playgroups, Spanish and Vietnamese parenting materials available for borrowing, adult English language classes held at Charter Oak during the day, and a variety of dual-language backpacks available from the local branch of the West Hartford Public Library.

Literacy Center and Book Room:

The Charter Oak Literacy Center supplies a variety of teaching materials and resources for classroom teachers to differentiate instruction and provide materials at the appropriate instructional level for small group reading instruction.

Articles and texts for professional reading are available on a variety of topics including effective comprehension strategies, fluency instruction, phonological awareness, phonics, spelling and word work, as well as texts to support effective teaching strategies, assessments and writing process resources.

In addition to the plethora of in-classroom reading material and extensive classroom libraries, Charter Oak also has a book room. The book room provides a large collection of guided reading materials organized by reading level for teachers to use for small group instruction. These books represent a variety of genre, topics of interest, and perspectives. These books also include leveled informational texts that support both the IB and CCSS units and curriculum. The Literacy Center reviews all unit planners and informs teachers in advance of the unit-related book choices available for checkout.

The Literacy Center also encourages a home-school connection through participation in Kindergarten registration and by providing parent education and home resources.

Family and School Partnerships:

In conjunction with The Bridge Family Center, The Family Resource Center (FRC) at Charter Oak offers an integrated system of family support services that enhance parenting, promote family involvement with the schools, and help children to succeed academically, socially and emotionally. The Family Resource Center partners with Charter Oak International Academy to support the literacy development of all our

students. Special events such as author visits and presentations are celebrated throughout the year as well as weekly caregiver meetings and family literacy workshops. Twice a year, the FRC offers a Saturday Family Academy, where families are invited to participate in workshops connected to the IB themes.

Charter Oak offers a variety of parent education programs such as early literacy workshops, Family Literacy Night, literacy workshops for incoming kindergarten parents, and special in-class reading and writing celebrations that promote a love of reading at home and the tools required for parents to support their child's literacy development.

Mother Tongue:

At Charter Oak, we communicate with parents to identify various mother tongues so that we can promote those languages through daily announcements/assemblies, nursery rhymes, songs, poems, extended activities for families to do at home, visual displays, books and materials, partnerships with community members, and after-school Explorations classes.

Professional/Staff Development:

Many of the district's weekly professional development opportunities center around the teaching of language. Since language spans all subject areas, Common Core and IB professional development support the teachers in planning, instruction, and assessment. Charter Oak staff continue to seek outside professional development opportunities with experts in the field, at IB training sessions, and using IB webinars. Additionally, the school has a Language Arts Committee that meets monthly to discuss what's going on in language instruction at the school; and how we can improve our practice.

All teachers at Charter Oak are teachers of language. We believe that the teaching of language should be in response to students' previous experience, needs and interests. We provide opportunities for students to engage in learning within meaningful contexts, so that they can participate fully in the academic program and social life of the school, as well as to develop as individuals.