

Highland Park Elementary Language Policy

Philosophy

At Highland Park Elementary, every teacher is a language teacher, and language learning occurs in all areas throughout the school. We believe language acquisition occurs naturally if it is presented in an age –appropriate and understandable manner. A community is created in the school that honors each culture and what each child brings to the community. Using this prior knowledge assists in furthering language acquisition. We believe in a three-part language policy. The first part includes English, the language of instruction. Part two is Spanish, our additional world language. Third, we encourage the implementation and utilization of mother tongue, coexisting with English in our school community. Our language policy is comprehensive in that it does not focus solely on academics. We strive to assist each child in becoming an internationally-minded person who extends him or herself into the world in a positive and productive manner, helping the learner develop empathy, openness, and risk-taking.

Policy

Our language policy addresses the three-part philosophy of English language instruction, Spanish instruction and mother tongue support. The first component of our policy is English language instruction. We use Readers and Writers workshops to facilitate English learning. English Learner (EL) staff collaborates with classroom teachers to team-teach these workshops. Specialists and support staff are English Language instructors as well. The specialists and special education staff support the units of inquiry. Multilingual educational assistants support English by communicating with the students and their families in their mother tongue. This dialogue increases the rate of English language acquisition. Within this model, students work to meet their grade level standards in reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and presenting. The scope and sequence of specific skills is dictated by the Minnesota State Standards. We identify five essential components of literacy instruction; Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension. Teachers scaffold instruction using these five components to promote independent reading. Students receive differentiated instruction in these areas to learn important skills and strategies. Teachers use multiple texts and resources that link and expand vocabulary and concepts to promote critical thinking and reading/writing development.

Highland Park Elementary's EL (English Learner) program supports English learning students and families in a variety of ways. The EL teacher collaborates with the classroom teachers providing instruction in the mainstream classroom during units of inquiry, specifically during Reader's Workshop. EL students receive support in pull out and push in models. There are many practices that develop a student's language: English immersion, modeling, using visuals to support comprehension, peer partnering, scaffolding, differentiating, teaching non-verbal cues and supporting classroom content through vocabulary development.

Students are eligible for EL support service based on the district's eligibility criteria. Clustering EL students into fewer classrooms maximizes the EL service. By reducing the number of classrooms where EL students are placed, EL and mainstream staff have the opportunity to develop strong relationships thereby enhancing student achievement. The EL staff also provides translations of important school communications and makes arrangements for interpreters during conferences. The EL staff supports families in signing up for summer school and providing outside support services.

We believe in the importance of learning an additional language, particularly at an early age. The Programme of Inquiry is supported by instruction in our additional language, Spanish. Spanish is taught from Pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. The Spanish instructor collaborates with classroom teachers to tie language learning to the current unit of inquiry. Learning about Spanish culture is a focus in all grades. In addition, academic language and communication skills are taught. Second language acquisition occurs best in the elementary years by integrating a balance of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning activities. Students engage in many activities while learning concepts, including but not limited to; singing songs, playing games, participating in project based learning, interacting with literature, using manipulatives, and participating in cooperative learning groups.

Validation of the mother tongue is essential to our students. It honors the variety of cultures and experiences in our school community. In addition, it improves linguistic growth in both languages and academic achievement. Mother tongue use is encouraged through the following:

- One multilingual educational assistant works with our students of East African descent, our largest ELL population.
- Student-led conferences are implemented in the student's mother tongue. This offers a valuable opportunity to communicate with their families about academics.
- Our Parent Teacher Association (PTA) as well as our district literacy team, and our school media assistant have supported a growing collection of bilingual literature in the library and for guided reading in the classrooms.
- Students are encouraged to converse in their mother tongue both socially and academically.
- District and school communications are translated into other languages.