

# CIMS Language Policy

Corwin International Magnet School  
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*Corwin International empowers all students to be globally minded life-long learners through meaningful, rigorous learning experiences that result in academic growth, social-emotional development and success in all future endeavors.*

## Language Philosophy and Purpose

Corwin International Magnet School believes that language is the vehicle for all learning. Students read, write, speak, and listen in order to relate to the world around them. Corwin International believes that language is used in constructing meaning and is intimately connected to a person's relationship with the world and how they come to feel about that world. According to *Learning in a language other than mother tongue in IB programmes (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2008)*, language development through the language and learning continuum is constructed through these three aspects: learning language, learning through language, and learning about language.

The purpose of this document is to outline how Corwin International Magnet School addresses language learning. This document will be used to inform all stakeholders of federal, state, district and school responsibilities. This policy is a "living" document that will change based on updates in federal, state or district regulations and/or best practices identified by the school or IB organization.

## School Obligations: Current Practices Relating to Language Teaching and Learning

### Development and Maintenance of Mother Tongue

Federal guidelines do not require testing PHLOTE (Primary or Home Language Other Than English) students in their native (home) language, nor can the results of such testing be used to determine whether students are English language learners. Nevertheless, PHLOTE students may be tested for native language proficiency in addition to English. Knowing the first language level is especially helpful when identifying students for English language classrooms and supports or being considered for special education services. Upon entry into a school district, first language proficiency and academic assessment are important for English language learners who have been receiving instruction in their native languages. Native language proficiency and academic assessment provide information that helps do the following:

- Determine language dominance and strength
- Preview language learning abilities as a pre-assessment for special education consideration
- Measure students' initial academic knowledge in content area subjects
- Measure students' growth in academic knowledge when instructed in the native language
- Predict students' ability to meet/exceed state standards at selected grade levels

A comparison of performance in both languages provides a more valid profile of the English language learner. For example, if a student has grade-level literacy skills in their native language and will be receiving all instruction in English, instruction would focus on transferring skills already learned rather than on initial development of these skills (Colorado Department of Education, 2016, p. 24).

## **Guidelines for Instruction**

Corwin International Magnet School seeks to “develop inquiring, knowledgeable, and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.” (*International Baccalaureate Organization, 2022*). In order to support development of the mother tongue, Corwin International Magnet School’s English language learners are supported in many ways. Through articulation and specific and targeted teaching, students who are learning a language other than their mother tongue are receiving scaffolding of their language development.

As cited in *Learning in a language other than mother tongue in IB Programmes (2008)*, Cummins (2007) proposes that the four dimensions of teaching that are particularly important in ensuring learner participation and promoting engagement are:

- to activate prior understanding and build background knowledge
- to scaffold meaning
- to extend language
- to affirm identity

CIMS has adopted these four principles as good practice and outlined instruction in the Language Policy to match these four areas.

## **Activation of Prior Knowledge**

In order for new learning to take place, instruction needs to happen with the learner’s prior knowledge in mind. General education teachers work collaboratively with specialists in the building to communicate student’s previous learning experiences and prior knowledge. Prior knowledge is considered for differentiation of learning. Differentiation and strategies for building or extending background knowledge is documented in the IB unit planner.

With the given information about the student, teachers use best practices and strategies to activate the prior knowledge of all students. These research based activities may include, but are not limited to the following: activating prior knowledge through video or text, cooperative learning structures, image brainstorming, K-W-L Charts, video clips, and cross curricular connections.

## **Scaffolding**

Teachers at CIMS strive to use best practices that allow them to scaffold new learning in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) to support students’ understanding of texts and tasks. According to *Learning Diversity and Inclusion in IB Programmes (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2020)*, scaffolding is a temporary strategy that provides support which enables learners to accomplish a task and is diminished over time promoting independence (p. 12). Ways in which teachers at CIMS may scaffold learning include: visual aids, cooperative learning structures, modeling thinking, dramatization, common writing planners across disciplines, small structured group instruction, and use of mother tongue or best language to develop ideas and initial plans. The Approaches to Learning skills have also been strategically articulated to provide structure to the implementation of important skills.

Since language is central to learning, all of CIMS teachers are considered teachers of language. Teachers may implement the following strategies to help scaffold learning within the student’s ZPD:

## **Reading**

- Learning about language such as word roots and learning how linguistic genres work, giving learners access to a rich diversity of sophisticated texts (*International Baccalaureate Organization, 2008, p. 7*)
- Using school wide language strategies that all teachers implement such as: Cornell Notes, reciprocal teaching, coding the text, and CLOSE reading.
- Interacting with digital and printed text.
- Explicitly teaching ATL skills to support reading acquisition.

## Writing

- Using the Document Based Question (2022) structure in every year of the programme helps students complete an expository essay defending their answers to an analytical question. This is one way in which teachers are building transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary connections. In the MYP, the Individuals and Societies teachers work on the analysis and debate (thrash out to verbally debate the content), and the language arts teachers help students complete the writing portion. In the PYP, teachers work with students on transdisciplinary topics connected with their units of inquiry. Other activities that accompany the DBQ and support language development are peer editing, a communication tool with parents walking parents through a checklist for revision, and bucketing strategies helping students to organize information into analytical categories. Many CIMS teachers have been trained and use this strategy.
- Adopting the ACES (answer, cite, explain, summarize) method of responding to short constructed response questions like those seen on state tests. Mathematics teachers are also using an adapted version that requires students to respond to the reasonableness of answers and reflect on the thought process when coming to an answer.
- Using Cornell notes, science and mathematics teachers improve students' organizational skills and encourage inquiry through questioning. Students not only take notes, but are encouraged to track questions that come up as a result of instruction. Artifacts from lessons are often taped in notebooks for easy reference. At the end of each lesson students are given time to summarize lesson importance and reflect on goals.
- Instructing on the writing process and setting many school wide goals to support all students in becoming better writers. Common use of vocabulary and planners has helped to standardize instruction in all content areas.
- Using process journals to give students the opportunity to complete written reflections and track their learning process.

## Oral language

- Using Kagan Cooperative learning strategies to support students in language usage and acquisition. All students are actively engaged in speaking. These strategies focus on the positive interdependence of all students supporting each other to do well, individual accountability so that all students feel like they can't hide, equal participation so all students feel like they have equal status and their answer is just as important as the rest of the class, and simultaneous interaction so all students feel engaged. Through the systematic use of structures, students learn the social and communication skills needed to be successful members of the world community (Kagan, 2017).

## **Extending Learning**

- Striving to instruct students at a level that affords them the opportunity to interact with rigorous curricula through inquiry-based education.
- Using learner-centered practices and interaction with rich materials and experiences are combined with high expectations in an environment of inclusion to help all learners be successful.
- Using assistive technology, where needed, to guarantee access to content and materials.
- Utilizing School District 60's one-to-one technology, allowing all students access to the internet and technology resources.

## **Affirming Identity and Building Self-Esteem**

CIMS staff strive to create an inclusive environment where social and emotional conditions value all languages and cultures and affirm identities of each learner to promote self-esteem. This goal is primarily met through the intentional focus on inquiry, the learner profile, action, and international mindedness. Building programs and practices that strive to affirm identity include:

- Creating a school and class climate and culture that welcomes and embraces the diversity of learners through the use of Kagan Cooperative Learning Structures. This method of cooperative learning builds collaboration and values diversity. Heterogeneous groupings allow for all learners, low and high to be challenged, supported, engaged and participate equally as valuable team members (Kagan, 2017).
- Monthly student recognition identifies students that embody the learner profile attributes.
- Parent relationships are a top priority at CIMS. It is the belief that when parents are present and accepted as part of the school culture, students feel more a part of the school community. Parents are looked at as partners in the education process and are included in student education plans like IEP, RTI and ALP's. In addition, parents have a volunteer requirement of 18 hours per year per family.

## **Mother-tongue Identification and Support**

The Colorado Department of Education (2022) states that "Proper identification of English Learners (ELs) helps ensure that the district's English language acquisition program is best designed to meet the needs of its students. In Colorado, the English Language Proficiency Act (ELPA) requires all districts and schools to identify English learners (Procedures for the English Learner Identification, para. 1)

### **Step 1—Identification of Students Whose Primary or Home Language is Other Than English (PHLOTE)**

A Home Language Survey must be completed for each student; it should be provided in the language most frequently spoken in the local community. It is advisable that this be the first form filled out in the registration process for all students. The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) suggests that the Home Language Survey contain, at a minimum, the following three questions:

- Is a language other than English used in the home?
- Was the student's first language other than English?
- Does the student speak a language other than English?

The district must ensure that all students have a completed home language survey on file (including monolingual English speakers). If any response on the home language questionnaire indicates the use of a language other than English by the student or another person in the home, further investigation must

be conducted to determine the student's English language proficiency. The use of a language other than English does not signify that the student is not a competent and proficient English speaker.

The school district must establish an effective and systematic procedure to identify all English language learners. The identification, assessment and placement procedure must include the following:

- Home language surveys (HLS) completed as part of the registration process to identify PHLOTE students. Surveys should remain on file, easily accessible to school and district staff and available for state audits
- WIDA-ACCESS Placement Tests (W-APT) administered to all new-to-district students identified as PHLOTE, within first 30 days of school to determine English language proficiency -- If student enrolls after the first 30 days of school then W-APT is to be administered within 2 weeks of arrival.
- Notification to parents of students identified for English language services
- Placement in English language services for students identified as English language learners.
- Ongoing Assessment to monitor language and academic growth (including the ACCESS for English language learners proficiency test)

## **Step 2—Assessment of English Language Proficiency (confirmation of the HLS)**

When all HLS responses indicate that English is the only language used by the student and all individuals in the home, the student is considered an English only speaker. Procedures established by the school district for placement in the general student population should be followed.

The Colorado Department of Education (2022) says that “to develop comprehensive English language acquisition and academic programs for English Learners, districts, schools, charters and facility schools must first have accurate knowledge regarding student's English Language Proficiency level. In addition, Colorado Senate Bill 109, CRS 22-24-106 requires the use of one common assessment to identify EL students” (Procedures for the English Learner Identification, para. 1).

The district will use the WIDA-ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT) to assess the English language proficiency of all PHLOTE students enrolled in its schools. Based on the results of the assessment and a body of evidence (BOE), each PHLOTE student will be identified as Non-English Proficient (NEP) or Limited English Proficient (LEP). Program placement and instructional decisions will be based on the student's English language proficiency designation and the BOE. Colorado has identified cut scores and guidelines for classifying English language learners as NEP or LEP. Districts should use a district body of evidence including the W-APT results when determining language proficiency classification.

## **Purposes of Language Proficiency Testing**

A well-planned, appropriate program of language proficiency assessment is critical to ensure that the instructional program complies with legal requirements and the educational needs of English language learners are being met. The district assessment plan should include provision for a timely 30 days (2 weeks if student enrolls after the first 30 days) screening placement assessment (W-APT) as students enter the district, as well as an ongoing program of assessment (to include ACCESS for English language learners) of student progress to support educational planning and monitor student achievement. Information provided through language proficiency assessments can be used for several purposes impacting the educational programs of English language learners: 2017-2018 program services procedural/decision making, program planning and evaluation, reporting and instructional planning. It is essential that all five language proficiency areas are assessed in English and in the student's native language when possible:

- 1. Comprehension**—Understanding the content of oral/written materials at age- and grade-appropriate levels.
- 2. Speaking**— Using oral language appropriately in the classroom and social interactions.
- 3. Listening**—Understanding the oral language of the teacher, extracting information and following the instructional discourse.
- 4. Reading**—Comprehending and interpreting text at age- and grade-appropriate levels.
- 5. Writing**— Producing written text with content and format in classroom assignments at age- and grade appropriate levels.

## **Professional development**

Every year, opening school professional development is held over all of CIMS staple language strategies. CIMS teachers take advantage of regionally offered official IB trainings. Trainings specific to support staff such as ELL teachers and librarians are taken advantage of when offered. Continued research into best practices happens to educate teachers on a continuous basis. As part of the state evaluation process, all teachers are evaluated yearly on their ability to teach and promote language in the classroom. In addition, “Effective Sept. 1, 2018, the state board requires 45 contact hours of professional development regarding English Language Learners (ELL) for teachers who hold an elementary, English, math, science, social studies or middle-level endorsement. This is a one-time requirement for licensure renewal for these educators” (Colorado Department of Education, 2022).

## **Foreign Language Learning**

Spanish is offered to all students at CIMS. The decision to offer Spanish instruction was based on the large number of citizens in the local community who speak the language.

## **Communication and Review of the Language Policy**

All policies in relation to the implementation of the IB program are available on the school’s website. Review and revisions of the Language policy will take place annually. This document will also be reviewed by the PYP and MYP Education Team based on the School Policy Review Cycle. This policy is a living document that may be updated due to change in laws or policies as needed.

## References

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