



La Scuola International School

LANGUAGE POLICY

This document outlines the beliefs, practices, roles, and reporting procedures that guide practices at La Scuola. It should be read in conjunction with our Student and Family Handbook, Personnel Handbook other Learning Policies: Assessment, Inclusion, Admissions, and Academic Integrity.

This document was reviewed by La Scuola's community in the Spring of 2024, and is applicable to the school year of 2024-2025 and beyond until another review is necessary.

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Language Philosophy

Language plays a vital role in students' experiences in constructing knowledge and serves as a medium for students' curiosity, inquiry, and identity formation. Multilingualism enhances international-mindedness, offering greater opportunities to actively contribute to our dynamic global society. Language is fundamental to all learning, and language learners thrive best in a positive, stimulating environment.

The Italian immersion program in the Primary Years is a core aspect of our curriculum. At La Scuola, pre-literacy skills are nurtured in the Early Years through Italian, using play and rich language interactions to build essential foundations like vocabulary, phonological awareness, and narrative skills. As students progress, literacy is developed in both Italian and English in grades K-3 and expanded to include Spanish from grades 4-8. In the Middle Years, in addition to instruction in English, students will select an advanced language track (lessons daily) to further develop Italian or Spanish proficiency.

Our balanced language program integrates oral (listening and speaking), visual (viewing and presenting), and written (reading and writing) components, utilizing a diverse array of teaching and assessment strategies. Literacy encompasses more than just decoding and writing texts; it involves inquiry, making connections, and reflecting on learning. We encourage and promote language development in students' mother tongues, recognizing its importance for cognitive growth, cultural identity, and support for acquiring additional languages.

Families play a crucial role in supporting their children's language development and are expected to be active partners in this journey. Recognizing that each student learns language uniquely, we accommodate a wide range of social, cultural, historical, and cognitive profiles, allowing students to progress at their own pace and in their own style.

Our team is a diverse group of professionals, each a native speaker of various languages. They are all proficient in at least Italian or English to align with our immersion and multilingual program. Multilingualism is explicitly in upper elementary with the introduction of 1-2 hours of Spanish language learning. In middle school, we offer parallel tracks in Italian and Spanish for the second language of study. All students in upper elementary and middle school study the three languages of our school. Our language philosophy strives not only to cultivate effective, multilingual communicators but also to encourage life-long language learning.

At La Scuola we learn in, through, and about language to better understand the relationship between language, identity, and collaboration. We encourage our students to become internationally-minded global citizens through our belief that all language learning fosters acceptance and understanding of diverse cultural values, therefore Italian

language acquisition is equally valued alongside the cultivation of the mother-tongue and all other languages spoken at home. Each student has a unique path of learning that is supported holistically through meaningful social experiences and non-verbal communication before arriving at speaking, listening, reading and writing. Older students extend language learning beyond verbal communication to analyze, organize, produce text and use their different languages to demonstrate learning.

Language Beliefs

At La Scuola we believe:

- Language is fundamental to all learning and best takes place in a positive, stimulating environment, through multisensory and multimodal inquiry.
- Students are capable individuals who acquire language differently according to their wide range of social, cultural, historical, and cognitive profiles.
- Language plays a vital role in the construction of meaning and provides a vehicle for curiosity, inquiry and the construction of identity.
- Language is fundamentally embedded in culture and identity.
- Language is authentically integrated with other subject areas.
- Teachers work collaboratively to provide a well-designed, differentiated, and inclusive inquiry-based program that meets the individual needs of all language learners.
- Mother-tongue language cultivation is crucial for cognitive development, maintaining cultural identity, and supporting second language acquisition.
- Multilingualism promotes international-mindedness, providing greater opportunities to make an active contribution in our ever-evolving global society.
- Teachers are lifelong learners who should receive periodic professional development in order to stay current with recent research and teaching methodologies in language learning and developmental pedagogy.
- Families are fundamental in supporting their student's language development and are expected to be active partners in the language acquisition journey.
- Multilingualism and the overall ability to communicate effectively using various platforms unites individuals by highlighting their similarities and appreciating differences, and provides a means of meaningful connection and collaboration.

- At La Scuola, literacy is developed in Italian and in English in grades K-8, in Spanish in grades 4 to 8, and is viewed as a set of skills that go beyond decoding and producing written texts.

The following definition of literacy (and digital literacy) is quoted from the National Council of Teachers of English (2017):

“Literacy has always been a collection of cultural and communicative practices shared among members of particular groups. As society and technology change, so does literacy. Because technology has increased the intensity and complexity of literate environments, the 21st century demands that a literate person possess a wide range of abilities and competencies, many literacies. These literacies are multiple, dynamic, and malleable. As in the past, they are inextricably linked with particular histories, life possibilities, and social trajectories of individuals and groups. Active, successful participants in this 21st century global society must be able to

- *Develop proficiency and fluency with the tools of technology*
- *Build intentional cross-cultural connections and relationships with others so to pose and solve problems collaboratively and strengthen independent thought*
- *Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes*
- *Manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information*
- *Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts*
- *Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments.”*

At La Scuola, we actively promote the use of inclusive language across all mediums of communication and in every language spoken within our community. This commitment is a testament to our core values of diversity, equity, inclusion, and a sense of belonging for all.¹

¹ Please refer to La Scuola's Inclusion Policy for more information on our Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging values.

Mother Tongue

We believe it is important for students to maintain their mother tongue to ensure continuous cognitive development and to support their learning across the curriculum. In addition to learning Italian and English (and Spanish in grades 4 to 8), La Scuola is committed to helping students develop appropriate language skills to become proficient communicators in their mother tongues, and we offer various opportunities throughout the academic year for families to participate in school events to highlight languages spoken at home and integrate language and culture. Explicit language instruction seeks to evidence the relationship between languages to expedite language learning and maximize learning outcomes. Our aim is that students should become confident in their own language, value their heritage and celebrate their individual culture while increasing their intercultural awareness.

All students' family languages, including but not limited to English, Italian, and Spanish, are valued in partnership with families and members of faculty or staff who are also fluent in that language. Families are invited to collaborate with the school in units of inquiry, ateliers, the library, and cultural celebrations. Our library, classrooms and atelier spaces include books and digital resources in different languages. If there are two or more students who share the same language, the school provides the use of the school premises and materials for language club activities during after school hours. The language club can be organized by families, members of faculty and staff, and or other members of the community. Students' family languages and cultural heritage are also valued in celebrations like Dia de los Muertos and Diwali, with participation of the families, and in family affinity spaces, like Somos La Scuola.

Language Profile

Students: The families of La Scuola currently speak over thirty different languages at home, including Italian, Spanish and English.

Faculty: La Scuola's team of professional educators and staff come from multiple countries in different continents. All teachers and staff maintain the level of proficiency in Italian, Spanish or English that is required of them in their particular role and/or in the age-group they teach. With language being central to learning, all teachers are considered language teachers and are responsible for imparting as much.

English Proficiency Requirements for Visa Sponsorship

La Scuola hires faculty and staff from overseas and sponsors the J-1 Visa for some of them. The U.S. Department of State requires Exchange Visitors to demonstrate English language proficiency prior to receiving a visa sponsorship from La Scuola.

Acceptable evidence includes citizenship from an English-speaking country, academic credentials where English was the language of instruction, passing scores on recognized tests like TOEFL or IELTS within the last 2 years, previous successful participation in a J-1 exchange program, or a conversational interview assessment by La Scuola staff. The goal is to ensure the visa holder can engage in meaningful dialogue in English for professional success and well-being in the United States. More specific requirements are detailed in the personnel handbook.

Italian Proficiency Requirements

La Scuola requires most faculty and administrators to demonstrate Italian language proficiency within one year of employment to facilitate student success. Acceptable evidence includes citizenship from an Italian-speaking country, academic credentials where Italian was the language of instruction, passing scores on recognized proficiency tests like CELI or CILS, or an interview assessment. The goal is conversational ability, not just phrases. La Scuola provides language training support. More detailed information on the specific procedures and requirements can be found in the personnel handbook.

Library

The library is our repository of resources available to students, teachers, and families. At La Scuola we carefully choose appropriate resources to support the curriculum, aiming for a multimodal inventory to offer access to different cultures, perspectives and languages. There is a strong emphasis on developing the mother tongue collection to reflect our international student population.

Primary Years Program (PYP) homerooms have weekly school library visits in their class schedules. Students have the opportunity to experience, and check out, books from a range of collections. The school-wide library database system tags literature that links to units of inquiry and IB Learner profile attributes.

Students and families are encouraged to set up their own [San Francisco Public Library](#) memberships to access their wide range of physical and digital literary and research materials in a wide range of languages.

Our classrooms and atelier spaces include books and digital resources in different languages. These classroom libraries contain subject-specific reference materials for research and reference. Teachers also utilize a range of online databases with students and provide opportunities for students to use their own mother tongue when conducting independent research, as appropriate.

Language and Curriculum Standards

At La Scuola we follow best practices and standards advised by the International Baccalaureate (IB, 2008b, 2009, 2011), *Indicazioni Nazionali per il Curricolo della Scuola dell'Infanzia e del Primo Ciclo d'Istruzione* (Italy, 2012), California Common Core State Standards (California, 2013), which are aligned and complementary documents that inform our language curriculum and are in sync with La Scuola's mission.

Communication in the mother tongue and communication in foreign languages are two of the eight key competences for lifelong learning recommended by the Council of Europe.

[The European Reference Framework of Key Competences](#) for Lifelong Learning defined eight key competences²:

- Communication in the mother tongue;
- Communication in foreign languages;
- Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology;
- Digital competence;
- Learning to learn;
- Social and civic competences;
- Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship;
- Cultural awareness and expression."

At La Scuola we are committed to offering to all of our students ample opportunities for developing these competences.

Languages of instruction

Primary Years

In the Primary Years Programme at La Scuola we follow the Montreal Model, a two-way immersion bilingual program which starts close to 100% Italian in early years and a graduated rate of immersion towards 50% Italian/50% English as the students enter their adolescent years. In fourth grade Spanish is introduced as a third language and specialist subject.

² Proposal for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on Key Competences for LifeLong Learning - (June, 2018) p. 15

Grade level	Language prevalence	Percentage aimed for
Preschool (Piccoli, Grandi, Grandissimi)	Italian immersion environment, English spoken by assistant teachers and in emergencies	90% Italian 10% English
Kindergarten	Equivalent to three 45 minute periods of direct English instruction per week	80% Italian 20% English
Grade 1	Equivalent to three 45 minute periods of direct English instruction per week	80% Italian 20% English
Grade 2	Equivalent to four 45 minute periods of direct English instruction per week	70% Italian 30% English
Grade 3	Equivalent to five 45 minute periods of direct English instruction per week	50% Italian 50% English
Grade 4	Equal time given to Italian and English Spanish as a specialized course	50% Italian 50% English
Grade 5	Equal time given to Italian and English Spanish as a specialized course	50% Italian 50% English

All faculty and staff whose language of instruction is Italian must speak to students in Italian at all times, except in the case of an emergency. **Students are expected to always address their teachers in Italian**, yet code-switching is accepted as it is part of the student's bilingual development.

Middle Years

The Middle Years Programme at La Scuola is a multilingual program with parallel tracks in Italian and Spanish. All students in the MYP study English, Italian and Spanish at different levels ranging from Phase 1 of Language Acquisition to advanced levels in Language & Literature courses.

- The first language of study is English (**Language 1** or Language A)
- The second language of study (**Language 2** or L2) may be recognized
 - as a second *Language A* (as specified in the IB Diploma Programme) when placement and competencies allow for Language & Literature coursework and assessment standards; or
 - as a *Language B* if coursework and assessment is designed within Phases 1-6 of the Language Acquisition Guide.
 - Language 2 comprises a total of five hours of explicit teaching and learning per week and is offered in both Italian and Spanish.
- Additionally, most students do coursework in a third language of study (**Language 3** or L3), either Italian or Spanish, and dedicate two hours per week to learning the third language.
 - Language 3 coursework falls within the Phases of Language Acquisition and is always designated as a *Language B*.

Students who elect to complete the L2 Spanish track must enter in Year 1 (Grade 6) at an intermediate to advanced level of proficiency. Students of all levels are admitted into the L2 Italian program. Students who require additional support in language learning may: a) supplement L2 Italian with additional L3 Italian (totaling 7 hours of instruction per week); b) be designated as “L3 Exempt” and receive additional support with English Language Learning (for non-native speakers) or general learning support from the Student Support Team.

Grade Level	Language Track	Prevalence	Percentage aimed for
Grade 6 (Year 1 MYP)	Italian	5 hours of explicit instruction in Italian Language 2 (Phase 1 - Lang & Lit) 2 hours of Spanish Language Acquisition in Language 3 (Phase 1-6)	60% English 30% Italian 10% Spanish

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International School • Preschool - 8th grade

		Some arts and small group work with atelieristas in Italian	
	Spanish	5 hours of explicit instruction in Spanish Language 2 (Phase 1 - Lang & Lit) 2 hours of Italian Language Acquisition in Language 3 (Phase 1-6) Some arts and small group work with atelieristas in Italian	60% English 25% Spanish 15% Italian
Grade 7 (Year 2 MYP)	Italian	5 hours of explicit instruction in Italian Language 2 (Phase 1 - Lang & Lit) 2 hours of Spanish Language Acquisition in Language 3 (Phase 1-6) Some arts and small group work with atelieristas in Italian	60% English 30% Italian 10% Spanish
	Spanish	5 hours of explicit instruction in Spanish Language 2 (Phase 1 - Lang & Lit) 2 hours of Italian Language Acquisition in Language 3 (Phase 1-6) Some arts and small group work with atelieristas in Italian	60% English 25% Spanish 15% Italian
Grade 8 (Year 3 MYP)	Italian	5 hours of explicit instruction in Italian Language 2 (Phase 1 - Lang & Lit) 2 hours of Spanish Language Acquisition in Language 3 (Phase 1-6) Some arts and small group work with atelieristas in Italian	60% English 30% Italian 10% Spanish

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	Spanish	<p>5 hours of explicit instruction in Spanish Language 2 (Phase 1 - Lang & Lit)</p> <p>2 hours of Italian Language Acquisition in Language 3 (Phase 1-6)</p> <p>Some arts and small group work with atelieristas in Italian</p>	<p>60% English</p> <p>25% Spanish</p> <p>15% Italian</p>
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Learning goals

The learning goals are established by the teachers based on the student's age and language profile.

- For students in preschool and Kindergarten, the goals for Italian are compatible with the Italian national standards and the International Baccalaureate (IB) language objectives, and adaptations in the instruction are made to reach such goals, considering the student's mother tongue and language profile.
- For students in grades 1-3, the goals for Italian are compatible with the Italian national standards for the curriculum, and adaptations in the instruction are made to reach such goals, considering the student's mother tongue and language profile. Literacy levels in Italian may be slightly lower than Italian standards (Prove MT), considering the phases of bilingual literacy and language acquisition. The goals for English are increased progressively; considering the percentage of instruction, teachers will raise the expectations for each year. By the end of third grade it is expected that most students reach literacy fluency compatible with monolingual averages (Fountas & Pinnel assessments).
- For students in grades 4-5, the goals for Italian are compatible with the Italian national standards for the curriculum, and the goals for English are compatible with the California Common Core Standards. Adaptations in the instruction are made to reach such goals, considering the student's mother tongue and language profile. Literacy levels in Italian may be slightly lower than Italian standards, considering the phases of bilingual literacy and language acquisition.
- For middle school students, the goals for English Language and Literature are compatible with the MYP subject criteria. The goals for Italian language acquisition are compatible with the MYP Language Acquisition criteria. The goals for advanced Italian Language and literature are compatible with the Italian national standards and with the Language and Literature subject criteria.

- Students who join La Scuola and are not proficient in either English or Italian will have adapted learning goals, explained in detail on the [language support section](#).
- For Spanish, A1 (CEFR) level is the goal for end of 5th grade competency and A2 (CEFR) level is the goal for end of 8th grade competency. For students who are already learning English or Italian as a foreign language, Spanish goals may be adjusted based on specific assessment analysis made by the student, teachers, families and student success group (please see [language support section](#)).

Language Assessment

Assessment is integral to teaching and learning at La Scuola. By employing diverse methods and techniques, educators can assess learners' linguistic competence, capabilities, comprehension, and dispositions towards language acquisition.

In the **Pre-K grades**, language assessment is consistent and refers to daily basis interactions. Teachers take notes and make videos which document students' utterances; such documentation is used to assess the language development in the face of the predetermined learning outcomes for each grade.

In the **K-5 grades** teachers monitor and document the learning as an integral part of instruction, allowing teachers to track students' learning progress, provide feedback, and adjust instruction to meet the needs of the students. Measuring learning, on the other hand, typically occurs at the end of a unit to assess students' overall mastery of the learning goals.

Benchmark assessments: Teachers also use benchmark assessments for language designed and published by external research groups. Benchmark assessments may be conducted up to three times per academic year (at the beginning, middle, and end of the scholastic calendar). The following instruments will be adopted:

- Heggerty English Letter Identification and Sounds assessment is used in Kindergarten
- Prove Stella will be used in grades 1 and 2 to assess students' reading skills in Italian (phoneme-grapheme correlation).
- *Prove di lettura MT* will be used for the assessment of Italian reading skills (fluency, accuracy and comprehension) in grades 1-5.
- The Fountas and Pinnell English Literacy Benchmark Assessment System will be used to assess students' reading skills (ie. fluency, accuracy and comprehension) in 1st grades (in second semester) through 3rd grade.

- The Words their Way Primary and Elementary English Spelling Inventories are used in grades 2-5 for English spelling development and mastery.

Standardized testing: La Scuola administers the Comprehensive Testing Program (CTP5) designed by the Educational Record Bureau (ERB). All students in 4th through 8th grade participate in five English Language subtests that are multiple-choice and timed. The subtests are: writing mechanics, writing concepts and skills, verbal reasoning, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Accommodations such as quiet space, extended time and speech to text are provided for students with Student Success Plans.

Assessment results are analyzed by faculty and used to inform curriculum planning, to verify the students' place in the learning continuum, and to detect potential needs of changes in the program or instruction differentiation for specific groups or individual students.

Assessments are reported to students and families in different ways. At the end of each semester, students receive written report cards in which their language learning progress is included. Assessments are also used to convey feedback to students, in age appropriate ways. Families are invited to attend parent-teacher conferences twice a year. Students are progressively encouraged to assess their learning and, in grades 4-8, participate in parent-teacher-student conferences once a year.

Please see La Scuola's **Assessment Policy** for more details regarding assessments and reporting.

Language support

La Scuola will strive to ensure that students are offered sufficient language support to allow them to be successful in their learning and access the curriculum. This can take a number of forms, which will depend on the needs identified in the assessments.

To align with recommended practices from the International Baccalaureate (IB), the Italian national curriculum, and Italian guidelines for Special Educational Needs (Bisogni Educativi Speciali - BES), language lessons employ differentiated instruction. This can involve techniques such as dividing students into small groups, providing resources tailored to different language proficiency levels, varying the complexity of questions posed, and assigning tasks matched to individual students' abilities. The goal is to utilize instructional methods and materials that best meet the diverse learning needs present within the classroom.

If the needs identified in the assessments suggest specific learning disorders and/or language specific disorders, the teachers will inform the Student Success Group and follow the guidelines provided in the Inclusion Policy.

For students who join La Scuola above grade 2 and encounter barriers to mastering the Italian or English language, a Student Success Plan will be created. This plan is collaboratively crafted by language educators and Student Support Group (SSG), and reviewed with the family, identifying goals and related supports at school and home, with the primary objective of facilitating the social and academic integration of these students into our school community. The language centered Student Success Plan may contain the following actions:

Students with no Italian or English who join La Scuola at:

- Age 2.5 to 5 are given 4-6 months in the immersion program to reach the average proficiency expected at their developmental level. Progress and inclusion strategies will be closely assessed and designed by the teachers and pedagogical leaders.
- Age 5 to 7 are given 6-12 months in the immersion program to reach the average proficiency expected at their grade level. Progress and inclusion strategies will be closely assessed and designed by the teacher and the student support team.
- Age 8 to 11 receive additional in school support of at least 40 minutes per week in the target language typically, though not universally, for up to 18 months to reach the average proficiency expected at their grade level.
- In grades 3 and up, If there is a group of three or more students with similar language profile, a separate track can be offered for the group (Italiano intro or Intro to English). For this age, the goal is to achieve at least a level A1 (CEFR) within the first year of instruction. Progress and inclusion strategies will be closely assessed and designed by the teacher and the student support team.
- Age 11 to 15 will attend a separate track and learn the new language through a foreign language learning perspective (not as language immersion). For this age, the goal is to achieve at least a level A1 (CEFR) within the first year of instruction, and at least a level A2 (CEFR) by the end of 8th grade. Progress and inclusion strategies will be closely assessed and designed by the teacher and the student success group.

Admissions

Students are not required to speak Italian to enroll at La Scuola, nevertheless all families are encouraged to make sure that the student understands their choice for a bilingual school and are motivated to learn Italian. La Scuola recommends that all families increase their student's exposure to the Italian language outside of school, during leisure activities, so that Italian is not seen as a language of school only. Students applying to 3rd - 8th grade may need extra support to acquire the Italian and/or the English language. Support will be provided at school (see "Language Support" above), yet extra support outside of school, such as private tutoring, might be recommended (at the family's expense) to expedite the learning process and improve the student's transition to the new curriculum.

Professional Development

La Scuola is committed to ongoing professional development for faculty and staff. To reflect our school's identity as an International Baccalaureate, Reggio Emilia inspired and language immersion school, every year, La Scuola provides opportunities for staff to deepen their knowledge in language acquisition and their skills in language teaching and learning through:

- New faculty and staff training, focused on sharing La Scuola language philosophy, beliefs, values and experiences with new members of staff
- Dedicated Professional Development sessions during in-service PD days, focused on sharing best practices in a language immersion setting and on developing effective strategies to use with students in class.
- Optional Professional Development webinars and courses (virtual or in person) on language available to teachers

La Scuola also hosts a series of events, annually, for the school community, called the Parent Educational Series (PES). One of the educational series events, *Gift of Bilingualism*, focuses on language acquisition, bilingualism, multilingualism, language teaching and learning.

Policy Revision Procedures

This document undergoes regular reviews involving educators, administrators, and other stakeholders. The date of the most recent review was March-May 2024, the participants included our PYP and MYP Coordinators, Pedagogical Leadership Team, and our teaching staff. The date of the next review will be February 2025 to ensure ongoing relevance and effectiveness. The policy will be submitted for board approval once a year,

in the spring. However, there might be minor changes between approval times to clarify any points when needed. Additionally, parts of the Family and Student Handbook, as well as the Personnel Handbook that are pertinent to this policy, might be added or linked to this policy, if considered to be relevant and improve ease of reference and transparency in our processes.

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