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Tuscaloosa Magnet Schools - Middle Language Policy (Last update: May 2026)

School Language Philosophy:

The Tuscaloosa Magnet Schools-Middle is a program for the sixth through the eighth grade serving English-speaking students. We believe that all learning takes place through linguistic means; therefore, TMS-M has created a language program that centers on both native English support and instruction, as well as the introduction of Spanish as a second language. Additionally, TMS-M has in place a support system for those students and families whose mother tongue is not English.

At TMS-M, language is the conduit for learning throughout the curriculum. Students will utilize language in order to solve problems, explore their environment, influence change in others, and identify their own self-concept. All students will be surrounded by the English language in visual, oral, and written ways. Spanish, our second language, will also be explored in this way.

In addition, TMS-M recognizes math, the fine arts, and technology as valuable, tertiary languages to be respected and promoted as a means of interpretation and expression.

At TMS-M, we teach language in a systematic, research-based way exploring both modes (receptive and expressive) in the primary areas of linguistics: visual, oral, and written. Students will utilize all three areas and both modes to express the ways that they understand the world in which they live. The Common Core standards for language and technology inform our policy:

Visual: Visual Arts, as they pertain to the language policy, will take place primarily through students' exploration and creation of graphic art samples in addition to the study of the various art media throughout the history of world art. In a similar manner, students' emulation of famous artists, for example, will also show students' understanding of concepts such as artistic style, technique, form, and function. New technologies will allow for an expanded role within the classroom and beyond as they pertain to a growing digital presence. This may take shape in the form of the Google suite of apps, including Google sites, slides, forms, docs/portfolio creation; the Schoology LMS collaborative and learning tools; animation and avatar creation programs/websites; Scratch and other code programming; video production, using WeVideo software; other collaborative platforms, such as Flipgrid, Canva, and Padlet.

Oral: Speaking and listening skills continue to develop through:

- daily classroom collaborations and discussions (student and teacher-led)
- Literature Circles or Say Something Strategies (student-directed book talks)
- speeches

- debates
- Reader's Theater
- TED talk-styled reports
- Passion Project (Community Projects for Year 3) presentations
- talk shows
- poetry slams
- dramatic arts (yearly school musical and classroom plays; filmed *telenovela* dramas and restaurant dialogues in Spanish)
- podcasts
- traditional classroom reports

Being productive members of conversations requires that students compare, contrast, analyze, and synthesize a multitude of ideas in various domains. New technologies have broadened and expanded the role that speaking and listening play in acquiring and sharing knowledge and have tightened their link to other forms of communication. Digital texts confront students with the potential for continually updated content and dynamically changing combinations of words, graphics, images, hyperlinks, and embedded video and audio.

Written: For students, writing is a key means of asserting and defending claims, showing what they know about a subject, and conveying what they have experienced, imagined, thought, and felt. To be college- and career-ready writers, students must take task, purpose, and audience into careful consideration, choosing words, information, structures, and formats deliberately. They need to be able to use technology strategically when creating, refining, and collaborating on writing. They have to become adept at gathering information, evaluating sources, and citing material accurately, reporting findings from their research and analysis of sources in a clear and cogent manner. They must have the flexibility, concentration, and fluency to produce high-quality, first-draft text under a tight deadline and the capacity to revisit and make improvements to a piece of writing over multiple drafts when circumstances encourage or require it. To meet these goals, students must devote significant time and effort to writing, producing numerous pieces over short and long time frames throughout the year.

Integration with Concurrent School Policies

The Language Policy at Tuscaloosa Magnet Schools-Middle operates as a collaborative framework alongside our broader International Baccalaureate and district mandates. We acknowledge that cultivating linguistic proficiency is a collective endeavor for our entire community, permeating

every facet of our instructional practices, evaluative methods, inclusive strategies, and enrollment procedures.

Consistency is maintained through the alignment with these key institutional documents:

Admissions Policy

Our approach to admissions facilitates fair entry into the IB Middle Years Programme, respecting that incoming students possess diverse linguistic foundations and academic histories. Data collected regarding a student's primary language during registration enables TMS-M to better coordinate necessary linguistic interventions, classroom modifications, or tailored teaching strategies for those in need.

Inclusion Policy

This policy ensures that learners with varied requirements, such as those acquiring English as a second language, receive the necessary scaffolding and academic modifications. At TMS-M, we view language acquisition as a vital prerequisite for full engagement in the curriculum. Faculty members work in tandem to offer specialized support and accessible resources to empower every individual learner.

Assessment Policy

We recognize that a student's level of fluency directly influences their achievement across all MYP subject groups. Educators employ diverse formative and summative techniques to nurture linguistic growth, allowing students to express their knowledge through visual, oral, and written channels. These evaluative insights are utilized to track growth and refine our pedagogical approach.

Academic Integrity Policy

Our commitment to ethical communication is upheld through the Academic Integrity Policy. Students are mentored to utilize language responsibly by properly acknowledging sources and respecting intellectual property in all linguistic contexts. Teachers provide active modeling of credible research habits and clear, cogent reporting of findings to ensure authentic expression.

Mother tongue support:

TMS–M recognizes that multilingualism is a resource that enriches the entire school community. While the majority of students are native English speakers, the school values and supports students whose mother tongue is a language other than English.

The school collaborates with district English Language Learning (ELL) personnel to provide support services that may include:

- language proficiency screening and monitoring;
- instructional accommodations and scaffolding;
- translated communication when available;
- family support resources;
- consultation with classroom teachers.

The school also seeks to expand multilingual resources through the library/media center, classroom materials, technology platforms, and culturally responsive instructional practices. Teachers are encouraged to recognize and honor students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds within classroom instruction and school activities.

Parent - school partnerships in supporting students' language development:

In addition to meeting with our Parent Action Committee (our PTA) monthly to review our MYP policies and procedures and to plan for school-wide events, the whole school community is informed through digital school newsletters about the policy process and how they might make contributions to our policies, including our language policy. All members of the school community are invited through our school website and newsletters to reflect on and give input about their thoughts and practices regarding language instruction and enrichment in the school.

In the second semester of each school year, parents are invited to our Literacy Day to participate in many activities that support literacy. In the past, students have volunteered to read short stories and teach greetings to students in their native languages. Our flex period (FOCUS) class has been visited by the University of Alabama Italian department in an effort to bolster parent-student involvement and as a community outreach initiative to strengthen language enrichment and to foster intercultural understanding.

Spanish Instruction: The Tuscaloosa Magnet Schools - Middle approaches second language instruction using Communicative Language Teaching and Task-Based Instruction. In Communicative Language Teaching, students are encouraged to learn through interaction, not only with the teacher but also with other students and people outside of the classroom. The rationale behind this approach is that students can learn language only by being active participants and risk-takers. Communicative Language Teaching also allows students to see themselves in the language and prepares them to use language beyond the classroom by building communicative competence. Task-Based Instruction complements this approach by teaching students to use language while completing authentic tasks such as writing directions for someone or introducing themselves to someone new. Authentic texts, such as novels, are also included. In this approach, using and understanding the language perfectly is not as important as being able to accomplish the task. Our ultimate goal with both CLT and TBI is for students to build proficiency in the second language by making learning meaningful and by affording students ample practice opportunities.

In addition to Communicative Language Teaching and Task-Based Instruction, second language immersion at Tuscaloosa Magnet Schools-Middle is always framed by the 5 C's as outlined by ACTFL (The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages): communication, connections, communities, comparisons, and cultures. Students are taught to be internationally-minded and are given opportunities to think not only about language but also about the people and situations that produce that language. They use previous knowledge, personal experience, and new learning experiences to place language within the greater context of culture. This not only teaches students to be open-minded towards others, but it also encourages them to look critically at their own culture.

Students in grades 6-8 are instructed in Spanish through traditional and creative means. The goal of the language program is to build proficiency in the second language. Intercultural awareness and international mindedness are integral to the instruction practices. The use of second languages is a continuum, not a mastery-laden program. Students will all learn and progress along the continuum, but at varying rates.

Language Across the Curriculum

At TMS–M, all teachers are language teachers. Language development occurs across all subject groups through reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and presenting.

Teachers collaborate across disciplines to:

- integrate academic vocabulary into instruction;
- support literacy development in all content areas;
- incorporate opportunities for discussion, reflection, and inquiry;
- connect language acquisition to authentic interdisciplinary contexts;
- strengthen intercultural understanding and international-mindedness.

Where appropriate, Spanish language learning may connect to concepts and units studied in science, mathematics, social studies, fine arts, and design in order to deepen student understanding and application of language in meaningful contexts.

We believe that students are best served through opportunities to utilize language in the following ways:

• reflection on learning and self

• writing across the curriculum

• responding to constructed response prompts/questions

• participation in school-wide enrichment

• using the fine arts to increase vocabulary

• using technology to increase communicative circle

• reflecting on language through the use of comparisons to Spanish and languages from alternate cultures

We believe that teachers teach language best through the following methods:

• presenting language in authentic contexts

• integrating language across varied curricula

• helping students to identify language structures

• encouraging students to reflect on language structures beyond form and audience

• embracing alternate forms for student expression including mother tongue development

• providing a physical space which enriches language development

• supporting positive attitudes toward improved communication skills and providing opportunities to do so

• providing authentic challenges that encourage students to reach their highest potential

• acknowledging differences in student experiences, skills, and learning styles

• utilizing a variety of assessment strategies

Facilitation of language instruction will take place by:

• collaborating across subject areas to support language development in all disciplines

• incorporating culturally responsive teaching practices and multilingual perspectives

• using student feedback to evaluate language learning experiences and support needs

• implementing a writing progression through each grade

• encouraging Socratic discussions among student groups

• modeling effective language use

• implementing MYP units that utilize a Global Context, a global exploration, and specific Approaches to Learning Skills explicitly taught in the formative and summative tasks of the unit

• providing authentic learning experiences with student-created presentations

• providing opportunities for student-centered, student-selected research

• modeling expression of thoughts and feelings

• actively taking part in the acquisition of a second language

• encouraging parent involvement

• publishing student work for real-world contexts

• facilitating student-led conferences

Policy Review and Communication

The TMS–M Language Policy is a living document that reflects the evolving needs of the school community and the principles of the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme.

The policy will be reviewed every two years by a Language Policy Steering Committee composed of administrators, teachers from multiple subject areas, the librarian/media specialist, language acquisition teachers, inclusion/support personnel, parents, and student representatives.

The committee will:

- review current instructional practices and student needs;
- analyze school language demographics and support services;
- gather feedback from teachers, students, and families;
- evaluate alignment with IB standards and practices;
- ensure consistency with the Admissions, Inclusion, Assessment, and Academic Integrity policies;
- recommend revisions based on reflection and school growth goals.

The updated policy will be communicated to the school community through:

- faculty meetings and professional development sessions;
- parent communication platforms and school websites;
- student orientation and advisory activities;
- shared access through digital school resources.

Language in the Learner Profile

In alignment with the Learner Profile and the MYP, TMS-M utilizes a language-specific Learner Profile as it pertains to the students and teachers.

Inquirer: use language to gain new information or knowledge in order to make sense of the world

Thinker: able to express thoughts and ideas clearly, succinctly

Communicator: competent users of oral and written language in variety of situations; listen attentively to details; speak confidently; read and write with fluency and comprehend what is conveyed

Risk Taker: willing to attempt to read, write, and speak in all situations

Knowledgeable: have acquired vocabulary and understanding to discuss literary styles

Caring: show caring in use of language and the effect language has on others

Principled: aware that language is powerful and has a profound effect; must use it responsibly

Balanced: express themselves orally, visually, and in written form; balance listening and speaking when communicating with others

Reflective: reflect on their language usage and development and consciously work toward proficiency

Open-minded: respect the differences and similarities in languages, dialects, and personal communication skills

Language Leader: Laura Stephens, Instructor of Language Acquisition (Spanish): Years 1, 2, 3