Roberts Elementary Language Policy

Language Philosophy

All students are language learners, regardless of what language they speak. Each student has his or her own background and their unique contributions, which is crucial for defining their cognitive development and in maintaining their cultural identity. At Roberts Elementary we make a commitment to our students and parents to provide a learning community that promotes and supports language development in a multilingual environment, which fosters confident, creative and responsible learners through inquiry-based instruction. As an IB World School, the Learner Profile is an integral part of who we are and what we do on a daily basis. In particular, we emphasize the importance of being communicators. The necessity of understanding and expressing ideas and information confidently and creatively in more than one language and in a variety of modes of communication; working effectively and willingly in collaboration with others.

We believe that all teachers are language teachers and that teachers and parents play a significant role in the language development and learning of each student. Through language development, students are given the tools they need to interpret the world around them. Language is also a major component in encouraging understanding and tolerance of other culture groups and perspectives. Language is taught in context and addresses the following modalities: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and media literacy. Language teaching occurs with the understanding that students bring their own unique cultural backgrounds to any new situation.

Roberts Elementary offers a language education for real life, which places importance on children's achievement and knowledge. At Roberts we acknowledge that language is fundamental to learning and permeates all subject areas. Our program equips children to communicate successfully and happily in a global society. By learning language, as well as learning about and through language, we nurture an appreciation of language.

Roberts Elementary serves a very diverse student population from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures. Our students and families come from over 40 countries, speaking over 25 languages. At Roberts, English is the primary language of instruction; however, 22 percent of our student population is identified as English Language Learners (ELL) requiring additional language support. We recognize that we must provide for these students the language of instruction and at the same time stress the importance of mother-tongue development and maintenance. Through the strong emphasis on language, the school's goal is to foster a deep understanding about language and a love of literature in all children.

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We believe that language acquisition is supported by a language-rich environment. Language is learned in a context where risk-taking is encouraged and mistakes are considered inevitable and necessary. Talk in the classroom is fundamental to learning. Discussions, rehearsed talk and social talk all play a role in language acquisition. Language skills are acquired most effectively from using language in meaningful contexts, for real reasons and from experiencing real, multicultural literature. Teachers are models of language usage and attitudes to language and literature. Language is seen as a transdisciplinary element throughout the curriculum.

Language Teaching and Learning
A rich development of language and literacy for all learners is critical. Language provides a way for learners to engage with the world and to construct meaning of the world around them. Language is taught in context and addresses the following modalities: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and media literacy.

Listening and Speaking
Listening and speaking are both academic and interpersonal skills essential to learning. The ability to speak coherently and listen intelligently is affected by the understanding of language of instruction. A balance between listening and receiving ideas and expressing ideas orally is necessary to teach language proficiently. Students must understand the connection between spoken words and the expression of their ideas, emotions, and opinions. While proficiency in the language of learning is preferable, it does not equivocate an ability to assimilate information in academic language. This sometimes leads to an inability to access the curriculum being taught. There is a difference between academic language and interpersonal language, which leads to the necessity to explicitly teach listening and speaking to our students.

Listening and speaking are essential for communication and expression. Therefore, these skills must be taught both explicitly and implicitly throughout the curriculum for maximum student growth and achievement. Purposes for teaching listening and speaking include communication, comprehension, and expression. This includes the ability to participate in daily conversation, learning to voice opinions clearly and precisely on a variety of topics, learning, using, and retaining new information. Further these skills build confidence, widen perspectives, and build critical thinking skills.

A wide variety of skills and concepts are taught to build and enhance students' listening and speaking abilities. These abilities are developed by teaching students about listening comprehension and purposes of listening. By learning about interpersonal skills, expression through body language, verbal expression and ethics of communication, fluency of speech, voice, and presentation of speech students develop as effective communicators.

Because listening and speaking are intertwined through every discipline, teachers must make a concerted effort to include the opportunities to develop and strengthen listening and speaking skills throughout the curriculum. Some of the ways in which teachers provide these opportunities include modeling, vocabulary instruction, songs, rhymes, poems, predictable text, read alouds, reading with partners, small group work, peer to peer interactions, reader's theaters, interactive technology activities, role-play, oral presentations, re-telling experience and direct teacher instruction *Drafted*

It is important to allow for a variety of assessments in order to ensure that students are given multiple opportunities to show their listening and speaking abilities. It is imperative that teachers recognize that a single assessment cannot provide the complete picture of a student's ability.

Therefore multiple assessments should be used when determining a student's listening and speaking proficiency level. These assessments frequently include: oral presentations, one-on-one teacher student interactions, anecdotal records, informal and formal observations, reading inventories, reading responses, re-telling assessments, whole-group discussions, small-group discussions and standardized achievement testing. We firmly believe that partnership with others in the development of students' listening and speaking skills is essential to the depth and complexity of listening and speaking abilities. Progress in listening and speaking is reported to parents through self-reflection, teacher and student-led conferences, performances, graded work, progress reports, report card, and standardized tests.

Reading

Reading is a culmination of bringing prior knowledge and an array of materials to construct meaning from text. It's an interactive process that includes a variety of interesting, informative, and creative materials. Reading has the power to shape, form and change thinking.

We teach reading to develop and emphasize empathy, personal identity, self-esteem, and self-independence. Reading is widely regarded as a gateway to wealth for national economies, organizations and individuals. If that is correct, the distribution of poverty in the future will be closely linked to the distributions of reading. Reading has a vital role not only in strengthening cultural identity and language competencies, but also in contributing to intercultural understanding in multicultural contexts. We teach the genres, structural elements, printed codes and symbols, text being used to convey meaning, reading for understanding, the relationship between reading, thinking, and reflection, extending the reader's world both real and imagined, understanding the author's strategies and purpose, establishing the reading routines, and the foundations of vocabulary, comprehension, phonological awareness, and fluency. We also teach the students what strategies and skills to use based on their purpose for reading. We directly teach strategies for instructing meaning, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and accuracy through whole group/ small group instruction. We use modeling, checking for understanding, giving time for students to practice, and involving the students in their individual goal setting. We gather and use instructional leveled material that is available to us through the leveled library, centers of inquiry, technology, and a variety of diverse text. We include the use of higher-level thinking, questioning, and the opportunities individual inquiry. We incorporate the units of inquiry and the key concepts throughout our reading instruction to help deepen the students' understanding.

We assess a student's reading ability through diagnostic reading assessments, observations and conferencing, and progress monitoring. We report student's reading abilities to parents through portfolios, parent-teacher conferences, progress reports, graded work, report cards, and standardized tests.

Writing

Writing is a form of communication and expression that develops individually over time. It is a student-driven, personal act, and should be integrated across the curriculum. We believe students should be taught that writing is purposeful, can be influential, and is an authentic expression. Students learn to write by writing. Great writing should be modeled and mentor texts should be used.

Writing is a life-long skill that is a form of expression to be enjoyed. It is a means of recording, remembering, and communicating. Writing can be structured in different ways to express different purposes. We teach how to write a variety of structures (personal narrative, expository, essays, poetry, and realistic fiction). Students are taught various writing strategies using the Writing Workshop framework (leads, small moments, hooks, pre-writing webs, etc.) Through the Writing

Workshop, students learn writing techniques including spelling, grammar, punctuation, and voice, while increasing skill and effectiveness. Through the Writing Workshop framework, we teach the writing process through modeling, mini-lessons, conferencing, peer revising and editing, using mentor texts, and celebrating all writing. Writing techniques (mechanics) are not taught in isolation; instead they grow out of the process of producing meaningful communication.

We assess all stages of writing using rubrics, conferencing, teacher/self/peer editing and revising. Writing progress is reported to parents through portfolios, self-reflection, teacher and student-led conferences, writing celebrations, graded work, progress reports, report card, and standardized tests.

Media Literacy

Media literacy is an essential skill in the 21st century. It should be considered the fifth language skill along with reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The ability to find, analyze, and use media wisely and legally is critical to a student's education and career. To excel in life, one must be able to comprehend, evaluate, and use the media for productive purposes.

We are bombarded by media of all kinds (music, advertisements, television, print, radio, Internet, cell phone communication, etc.) twenty-four hours a day. Much of this is slanted, misleading, or even false. Students must be able to identify, analyze, and synthesize valuable, valid, and relevant information. Because of the accelerated influence of media on children, it is essential to teach children how to manage the information in a responsible way. This is a skill that must be taught in order for them to be educated consumers of mass media.

Furthermore, the ability to use the media is an essential skill. Thus, students must be taught how to create various forms of media, such as videos, presentations, blogs, etc. to inform and persuade others. It is incumbent upon educators to ensure that students do so in a skilled, informed, and responsible manner. Students are taught to differentiate between biased and unbiased sources, and to consider the purpose and perspective of each source. Students are also taught to investigate what the sources want us to believe or do; identify which tools of persuasion are being used; recognize bias or spin; discover the part of the story that is not being told; and evaluate the media messages based on the students' own experiences, beliefs, and values. Students are taught to create, communicate, collaborate, organize and become responsible digital citizens by advocating a position in which they believe strongly in using the tools that modern technology provides. Students are taught to understand that messages are not all accurate; communicate their beliefs; differentiate between fact and opinion; look at commercials geared toward children; and look at subtext of messages. Students exemplify their media literacy by checking references; using integrity when creating products; recognizing perspective of sources; and understanding that other people, with their differences, can also be right. These skills are assessed during projects such as fifth grade Exhibition and third grade Business Fair. *Drafted July 2011; Approved September 2011; Revised July 2012, July 2015*

Parents are informed of their children's media literacy skills through a variety of projects throughout their child's education at Roberts Elementary. Fifth grade Exhibition, Carnival advertising, Business Fair, and the Habitat persuasive letter are just a few examples of student projects. Parents are encouraged to discuss media literacy and perspective with their children. In addition, students at Roberts complete a media literacy training offered by Houston ISD.

Support for Students Whose Mother-tongue is Other than English

Roberts Elementary values diversity and believes that we have a responsibility to address the language needs of all students, regardless of their mother-tongue. The primary language of instruction at Roberts Elementary is English, however significant support is provided to those for whom English is not their mother tongue. Specifically, we provide for the ongoing needs of English language learners by addressing their affective, linguistic, and cognitive needs:

Affective- English language learners will be provided instruction using second language methods in English to introduce basic concepts of the school environment which instills confidence, self-assurance, and a positive identity with their cultural heritages. Methodology shall address the history and cultural heritage associated with both the students' home language and the United States.

Linguistic- English language learners shall be provided intensive instruction to develop proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and using language effectively in a variety of content areas in English. The instruction in academic content areas shall be structured to ensure that the students master the required essential knowledge and skills and higher order thinking skills.

Cognitive- English language learners shall be provided instruction in English in mathematics, science, health, and social studies using second language methods. The instruction in academic content areas shall be structured to ensure that the students master the required essential knowledge and skills and higher order thinking skills.

All English language learners are placed in an English-speaking classroom with a teacher who has additional training and the certification for English as a Second Language (ESL) methodology. These students are provided the same core and enrichment courses as students whose mother tongue is English, but instruction is modified to include second language teaching strategies. All classroom teachers are requested to have English as a Second Language certification, which prepares teachers to use the SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) model and adapt content to meet the needs of every learner in the classroom. Additionally, Roberts Elementary utilizes peer helpers-multilingual students helping to translate and communicate with English Language Learners in their mother tongue. This allows English Language Learners to feel comfortable and supported in their English language acquisition. Roberts Elementary provides opportunities for teachers to meet these goals, in addition to teachers working collaboratively to keep current on best practices.

Additional support for students who are English language learners is provided through an emersion based online curriculum and software support. We concentrate on developing these students' oral and visual language through discussion, role play, illustrations, gestures, symbols, and modeling of

proper spoken and written language in order to raise the students' proficiency level in the English language to make gains in their academic achievement.

Support for Mother-tongue(s)

Roberts recognizes the crucial importance of students developing and maintaining literacy in their mother tongue, for their personal and educational growth. This supports them in becoming a literate member of their own community and to re-enter their home educational system at any point. Roberts *Drafted July 2011; Approved September 2011; Revised July 2012, July 2015*

maintains a mother tongue library collection for each of its language communities and supports home language literacy.

Spanish as an Additional Language
We believe that the ability to communicate in a variety of modes in more than one language is essential to the concept of an international education. Therefore, all students beginning in Kindergarten learn Spanish as an additional language. Students study Spanish to gain the communication skills, both in oral and written language, to deal with familiar and practical needs for future study, work and leisure. In addition, through the teaching of Spanish, and through links to various cultures across the curriculum, students develop an appreciation of cultures other than their own, as well as an awareness of different perspectives.

Roberts strives to make every student multilingual. All students will have the knowledge and ability to use two languages, but not all of them to the same extent. Students vary in their ability to learn a second language; some will achieve proficiency in the target language while others become truly bilingual. The acquisition of language must be seen as a continuum along which each individual student progresses at his/her own speed.

To implement the overall purpose of learning Spanish at Roberts Elementary, a variety of teaching methods and strategies are used. Students will learn the discrete skills, basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS), and the art of the Spanish language through classroom activities with a certified Spanish teacher. These strategies are in keeping with the pedagogy of the PYP. Spanish instruction gives students practical real life language skills which they can use outside of the classroom. Students are provided with meaningful and authentic listening, speaking, reading, and writing tasks. Through these tasks, students develop confidence to use the language in their daily lives.

Assessing Language
Roberts Elementary assesses students in an ongoing and collaborative manner through the use of formal and informal assessments. When students enter the school, they are screened using Benchmark Running Records to determine reading ability and comprehension. Students are assessed regularly during the year using a range of appropriate assessment methods such as portfolios, conferencing, writing sample analysis, and self and peer assessment. Students maintain language samples in their student portfolio, which demonstrates their continuing language development. Students receive feedback from their teachers and peers through conferences, individual assignments, rubrics, formal assessment results, and peer coaching and editing. Additional information regarding assessing language can be found in the *Roberts Assessment Policy*.

Our Responsibility
As a school community, the Roberts Elementary faculty has been involved in the development and agrees on this language policy. This language policy will be reviewed and revised annually.

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