

## **Metropolitan Learning Center for Global and International Studies Language Policy**

### **Definition**

A language policy is an action statement...It is concerned less with where the students in a school are going, and more with how they are going to get there. *Language Policy in School*, Corson (1999)

A language policy is derived from the school's language philosophy and is a statement of purpose that outlines goals for language teaching and learning. It is constructed around pedagogical and learning beliefs and is therefore also a statement of action describing practices for achieving and evaluating goals. *Guidelines for developing a school language policy*, IBO (2008)

### **Philosophy**

At Metropolitan Learning Center it is our belief that the ability to communicate in more than one language is critical in fostering international understanding, intercultural awareness, intellectual growth and open-minded global citizens for the 21st century.

We believe learning language, learning about language, and learning through language are the most effective approaches to teaching students. We believe that the acquisition of language is a life-long process that permeates all learning and is a key factor in developing intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. We believe that all teachers are language teachers who share responsibilities in facilitating communication. Furthermore, we believe that all students should have the opportunity to learn and use a second language. This, in turn, enables students to have better understanding of the world in which we live, and promotes a global perspective and international-mindedness.

### **Language Profile**

Metropolitan Learning Center is public, interdistrict magnet school. Students enroll in MLC from over 30 sending districts through a state-run lottery system. The mother tongue of 97% of MLC students is English, but many need support with literacy. When students enter MLC, they are asked to complete a form indicating which Language Acquisition subject (Spanish or French) they would prefer to study. Students study one language continuously throughout all seven years at the school. This ensures continuous learning of a second language as well as fulfillment of both MLC's oral proficiency graduation requirement and the state of Connecticut's high school graduation requirement for second language acquisition.

### **Language and Literature (English)**

At the Metropolitan Learning Center, the language of instruction is English, the mother tongue of 97% of the students. MLC is a public school that must comply with all local, state and national regulations regarding language of instruction and services for English language learners (ELL). Additionally, MLC serves a student population that comes from over 30 school districts and who have had widely varying experiences with literacy in their mother tongue of English.

Language and Literature (mother tongue) classes are offered in both Reading and in Writing in Years 1-3; these follow the Teacher's College (Columbia University) "Reading and Writing Workshop" Model. This model's central feature is its focus on individualizing learning in reading and writing, which honors MLC students' diverse backgrounds and prior learning experiences. In years 4 and 5, core texts are supplemented with independent reading, which is a requirement for all students. Again, this honors students' individuality, but also prepares students for DP-level coursework and expectations. In all years of the MYP, Language and Literature courses are developed from district curriculum documents; teachers use these documents as they write MYP unit plans that follow the IB requirements for concept-based and MYP-aligned units of study.

For students who need additional supports in their mother tongue (English), as determined by both standardized/normed assessments and school-based assessment data, certified literacy interventionists instruct and support them. Students are grouped by area of need (fluency, decoding, comprehension, etc.), and those literacy interventionists provide both direct instruction to students and instructional support to content-area teachers. In this way, students' needs are addressed in terms of improving their individual skills and teachers' approaches to teaching and learning.

For the very small number of students whose mother tongue is not English, specialized ELL support is offered and provided by certified ELL teachers for those students who are identified by state and national mandates to receive it. The regular curriculum contains themed, interdisciplinary units. Language and Literature classes include works of literature, non-fiction texts, articles and poetry in support of the units and the Reading classes support literacy in the mother tongue through a variety of strategies. MLC students are expected to effectively communicate orally and in written form. Their understanding is demonstrated through individual, group, and whole class activities. Students are evaluated in a variety of ways including personal projects, self-reflection exercises, activities and assessments.

### **Language Acquisition (Spanish, French, Chinese)**

At the Metropolitan Learning Center, language acquisition plays a key role in students' academic profile. MLC allows students to select between French and Spanish for MYP year 1 beginning in sixth grade. Students have the first quarter of MYP year 1 to make a final choice in the language that best reflects their personal interest. Once a language is chosen, students study that language throughout MYP years 1-5. If a student would like to explore an interest in another language they may do so upon entering ninth grade (MYP year 4). MLC currently offers

Mandarin to students in MYP years 3-5. Prospective students entering MLC in MYP year 1 do not have the option of taking Mandarin.

For students demonstrating a proficiency level higher than the language level into which they were placed (e.g., a new student to MYP year 1 phase 1 showing language proficiency at phase 4), a placement test is administered that analyzes the student's skill level in all IB language acquisition criteria. The proficiency test consists of:

- A direct interview in the target language (Criterion C)
- Oral comprehension (through audio) (Criterion A)
- reading comprehension (through text) (Criterion B)
- Visual analysis (Criterion B)
- Presentation (in written and spoken form) (Criterion D)

Depending on the results of the placement test, language acquisition teachers, administration and school counselors get involved in the decision-making process for appropriate placement.

In keeping with the Metropolitan Learning Center's mission statement, language acquisition classes are taught with the goal of fostering open-minded global citizens. We aim to create students with an intercultural and an interdisciplinary understanding. To these ends, our teachers strive for immersion in the language being learned. Classes are conducted primarily in the target language, and students are expected to participate and interact with each other using the target language.

At MLC, language acquisition faculty work to develop units that create authentic situations in which students explore other cultures' products, perspectives and practices in an effort to foster empathy for other cultures. The MLC community hosts a Hispanic Heritage Festival along with an International Fair during the school year, allowing students to demonstrate their skills and knowledge of other cultures. MLC also offers opportunities for international travel where students apply their communication skills in the target languages.

Within the language acquisition department, MYP years 1 through 5 have been mapped out to ensure that each MYP year contains the following:

- At least one interdisciplinary connection per unit.
- An exploration of a key cultural tradition, custom or practice.
- An opportunity to communicate in the target language outside the classroom setting.

In preparation for the DP Language program, language acquisition department teachers are given opportunities to meet and collaborate in order to adjust planning, instruction and assessment. These vertical meetings ensure consistency through norming and best practices that ultimately benefit all students as they look forward to continuing their readiness for the DP program.

### **ELL (English Language Learner) & SEN (Special Education Needs) Support**

The English Language Learner (ELL) Program is a service provided to students who speak a language other than English as the mother tongue. MLC also provides comprehensive services

for students with special educational needs that allow them to participate fully in mother tongue and Language Acquisition instruction.

The Metropolitan Learning Center, as a public school, is required to comply with state and national requirements regarding services for students whose home language is not English as well as for students who are identified as needing special educational services.

All parents of incoming students complete the Home Language Survey, which consists of three questions. When two or more answers indicate a home language other than English, a screening letter is sent home, and then, if necessary, the student is assessed using the Language Assessment System (LAS) to determine English proficiency. Should the student show limited English proficiency, ELL services may begin after parents/guardians are notified of the results. According to state law, parents are entitled to interpretation and translation services as needed. ELL students are given the LAS annually in order to track their progress.

English Language Learners are supported by support staff in the learning of the required skills in classes taught in Language and Literature as well as Language Acquisition classes and receive support in their mother tongue as resources allow. Students are exited from the ELL Program when they have achieved a 4 (Proficient level) on the LAS and have met other mandated criteria.

Students identified as having special educational needs with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are served by both regular education and special education staff; modifications in Language and Literature and Language Acquisition may be included in IEPs as necessary. Both ELL students and students with special educational needs are supported through inclusion in the content areas, including Language and Literature and Language Acquisition, with specialized individual and small group instruction guided by the appropriate staff as necessary. Student support staff members (ELL teachers and Special Education teachers) deliver the majority of services in the general education environment by working directly with all teachers to ensure that all students have full access to the MYP program and curriculum. Student support staff members work directly with the students to ensure full participation and engagement in the International Baccalaureate programme of studies while meeting the needs of the identified learner.

## **Sources**

- Guidelines for developing a school language policy* IBO, 2008
- IB PYP Language Policy* Handley School (Saginaw, MI), 2009
- IB Language Policy* Rufus King International School (Milwaukee, WI), 2008
- Language Policy* Atlanta International School (Atlanta, GA), 2008
- School Wide Language Policy* Anglican International School (Jerusalem, Israel), 2008
- Language Policy* International School of Latvia (Jurmala, Latvia), 2008
- Language Policy* International School of Western Australia (City Beach, Australia), 2009