

IB Language Policy

New Westminster Secondary
IB World School



International Baccalaureate (IB) World Schools are required to have a written language policy that supports the needs of students and coincides with the philosophy and tenets of the IB programme. What follows are provisions for mother tongue enhancement and second-language acquisition available at New Westminster Secondary School (NWSS).

Philosophy

At NWSS we recognize that language is essential to learning and that it is the primary means of human communication. The effective use of language is central to acquiring, demonstrating and reflecting upon knowledge. In fact, Steven Pinker (author of *The Language Instinct*) adds, “language is so tightly woven into human experience that it is scarcely possible to imagine life without it.” Given the importance of language in all aspects of life, including the dissemination of knowledge, advice, or guidance, it follows that all those who teach in any discipline or interact with students in any way as part of their professional responsibilities are language instructors with “responsibilities in facilitating communication” (Guidelines 1).

Language of instruction

All students in the province of British Columbia must show proficiency in English in order to graduate. To that end English is taught as a subject in each grade. Moreover, English is the language of instruction throughout the school (with the notable exception of the French Immersion Program). The provincial curriculum is very broad and focuses on all four facets of language, although provincial examinations evaluate reading and writing. NWSS provides a well-stocked Library containing current and classic titles. Access to scholarly databases is provided. The school provides an advanced English Literature course. Within the IB Programme, English is taught as a Language A by qualified, experienced and IB trained instructors. Language A courses at NWSS focus text choices on the diverse backgrounds of our students, as well as offering an understanding of indigenous perspectives. Field trips to locally produced plays occur throughout the program if available, culminating in the four-day theatre trip to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

Additional language to mother tongue

Students at NWSS speak a wide range of mother tongues. In 2019, NWSS had 54 mother tongue languages represented in addition to English. On a recent language survey, more than 40% of students indicated a mother tongue other than English. Chinese in Mandarin and Cantonese dialects was the most commonly spoken language after English, followed by, Korean, Punjabi and Tagalog. The primary language of instruction at NWSS is English. French is the most commonly taught second language. Other languages taught include Spanish, Japanese, Korean, and Punjabi. While there is no second language requirement to graduate in the province of British Columbia, it is expected students will study a second language until grade 8. Most IB students will study French or be in French immersion. They will then study French B (SL or HL) in the IB programme itself or choose to take either our Spanish or Mandarin ab initio options.

Development and maintenance of mother tongue

Students whose mother tongue is French, Spanish, Japanese or Punjabi can enroll to study that language. However, generally speaking, and with the specific exception of French immersion, the level of these language courses is at a relatively low (ab initio) level. Students speaking these or other languages as a mother tongue, have the opportunity to challenge a language examination in a nearby school district and to receive course credit for so doing. Options exist for students to study their mother tongue online through Ministry of Education offered courses. Within the IB programme, students have the opportunity to take a self-study in Language A SL. This is a popular option for students speaking a wide variety of mother tongues with first-language proficiency. Self-study candidates are typically Diploma students and are co-registered in English Language A SL or HL. Self-study Language A SL has recently been offered in Mandarin, Korean, Serbian, Hindi, Punjabi, Romanian, Arabic, Spanish, and Filipino.

Inclusion and equity of access

In the week prior to classes, international students (NWSS has 300 currently) attend Orientation Week. During one day of that week they are tested in English reading, writing, listening and speaking. They are then placed into classes according to their English level where they receive direct English as an Additional Language (EAL) training or if placed at a higher level they take academic courses with indirect support such as extra time during testing, one-on-one tutoring, and other aid as may be appropriate. Similar sorts of indirect support are available for IB students, however as English is offered only as a Language A, significant English ability is a pre-requisite for entry.

The role of teachers, librarians, administrators and counselors

It is recognized that all professionals who interact with students are de facto language teachers. It is further recognized that there are a number of different and correct “Englishes,” and that English is a dynamic and ever-changing language spoken in various ways by various speakers. The role of teachers, librarian, administrators and counselors is to ensure materials and placements of students in classes are appropriate to not only the language ability of students but also to their maturity level.

Role of parents

Especially regarding self-study, parents have an important role in helping to assess the level of the candidate’s language and in providing ongoing language support and practice. Translation services are available at NWSS to facilitate communication in this regard. Parents need to be reminded of what appropriate assistance is in the coursework and assignments of the Language A self-study.

Works Cited

Guidelines for Developing a School Language Policy. International Baccalaureate Organization, 1 Apr. 2008. Web. 25 May 2015.

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Pinker, Steven. "An Instinct to Acquire Art." *The Language Instinct*. New York: W. Morrow, 1994. 3. Print.