

Merrill Middle School Language Policy

**2015 - 16**

Last Updated: March 2016

This assessment policy is meant to be read in conjunction with Merrill’s Academic Honesty Policy, Assessment Policy, and Inclusion Policy.

**Philosophy**

The Merrill Middle School community believes that language is fundamental to learning, thinking, and communicating. Merrill takes a holistic approach to literacy, supporting students to demonstrate language skills across all curricula.

We believe in the acquisition of more than one language as a means to enrich personal growth, enhance cognitive development, and promote intercultural awareness. In addition, Merrill fosters the use of mother-tongue languages to honor cultural identity.

**Dissemination and Review**

The Language Policy Policy was developed in conjunction with parents, students, community members, faculty, and staff. It is reviewed annually by stakeholders. The policy is posted at ***www.merrill.dmschools.org***, made available in hard copy form and provided to all Merrill community members as requested.

**Guiding Principles of Language Development at Merrill**

We believe that:

* All teachers at Merrill are language teachers, and language is an integral part of each curriculum.
* Languages are taught through the global contexts to allow for meaningful and relevant explorations.
* Students’ prior knowledge should be considered in order to inform literacy instruction.
* Engaging with literacy through inquiry leads to authentic experiences.
* Students’ learning is enhanced through metalinguistic skill-building, meaning that teachers encourage students to use varying strategies to reflect upon language.
* It is important to provide continual and timely feedback through formative and summative assessments to monitor students’ literacy skills.
* All students should have the opportunity to learn a second language in an inclusive environment.
* Parents and guardians are critical partners in the development of language.
* Students come to Merrill from different language backgrounds and with differing levels of language proficiency. With this in mind, teachers differentiate instruction to meet all students’ needs and learning styles.

**Language Profile**

Merrill Middle School’s population is comprised mostly of native speakers of English. The school community also includes students whose mother tongues are: Dinka, Somalian, Lao, Bosnian, Arabic, French, Vietnamese, Spanish, Nepali, Creole, and Karen.

The language of teaching and learning at Merrill is English, and the primary languages of communication are English and Spanish. The school works in conjunction with resources available through Des Moines Public Schools to communicate with families in languages outside of English and Spanish.

**Language Policy Steering Committee**

The steering committee includes the following members: Head of School, Vice Principal, IB Coordinator, one Language Acquisition teacher, one Language and Literature teacher, the school librarian, a member of the IB Parent Committee, the Des Moines Public Schools World Languages Coordinator, and a member of the Student Ambassadors.

The role of the committee is to monitor the implementation of the Language Policy and review the policy. During the review process, the steering committee gathers and presents community perspectives. These recommendations are made to the School Leadership Team for revision. The leadership team considers recommendations to make policy updates.

**Language and Literature Continuum**

The goal of the Language and Literature continuum is to have students achieve proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and viewing English, while meeting social and academic goals. The guiding principles and policies for Language and Literature are as follows:

* Students explore key and related concepts in order to attain deep understanding of the subject-area content. Further, students continually practice literacy skills in order to attain proficiency.
* Teachers assess student work using the Language and Literature assessment criteria and Des Moines Public School grading topics that align to Iowa Core Standards.
* The Iowa Core Standards, Des Moines Public School curriculum maps, and MYP aims and objectives will serve as a guide for English language instruction at all grade levels.
* Collaborative classes, classes co-taught by Language and Literature and Special-education instructors, are available to meet the needs of students with reading and/or writing goals.
* IEP and 504 accommodations are followed. (Please refer to Merrill’s Inclusion/Special-educational Needs Policy for more information.)
* Teachers use ongoing formative assessment and the Scholastic Reading Inventory to inform instruction. This allows for flexible grouping and differentiation of instruction and assessment.
* Teachers scaffold assignments to meet students at their current skill level in the reading or writing process to support appropriate growth and academic success.
* Teachers inspire a lifelong love of reading by providing book lists and a variety of activities to encourage reading outside of school.
* Students are offered multiple opportunities to show proficiency.
* Teachers instruct students on how to reference source materials according to MLA (Modern Language Association) format.

**Language and Literature: Assistance Outside of the Classroom**

Teachers are available for students before and after school to support student needs. In addition, frequent home-school communication takes place to ensure parents are informed about student progress or struggles.

**Language Intervention**

Reading interventions take place as part of general education classes, as well as in a pull-out format (Power Reading) designed to support general-education students who require additional supports in meeting literacy standards. Placement pull out interventions is determined by assessment data and teacher recommendation, and instruction is tailored to meet the specific needs of each student.

**Language Acquisition Continuum**

All students at Merrill receive instruction in Spanish during all three years of the MYP. The goal of the Language Acquisition Continuum is to have students achieve phase-level proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and viewing Spanish while helping them meet their social and academic goals. The guiding principles and policies for Language Acquisition are as follows:

* The DMPS curriculum maps and MYP aims and objectives serve as a guide for Spanish instruction in all phases of language development.
* Teachers assess student work using the Language Acquisition assessment criteria and ACTFL standards.
* Students are placed in courses according to Spanish language proficiency.
* Instruction is differentiated for the many levels of language skills in each course. Spanish teachers work with special-education teachers to design differentiated activities and assessments to meet the needs of special-education students.
* Incoming transfer students take a placement test to assess Spanish proficiency in order to be placed in the appropriate class.
* An entry-level course is available each semester to accommodate transfer and English Language Learners.
* If district resources are available, students who complete Phase 4 of the programme may exit and begin a new language.
* Teachers continually monitor students’ levels of achievement to ensure proper placement each year of the programme.

**Language Acquisition: Assistance Outside of the Classroom**

Students are provided resources to practice outside of class to reinforce academic performance in class. Teachers keep parents informed about homework assignments and, further, teachers are available before and after school to assist students. Students may also use Realidades, an online resource, to reinforce understanding of Spanish.

**Mother Tongue Support**

Merrill honors and promotes mother-tongue literacy of our students. We define “mother tongue” as an individual’s first language; the language known best; the language used the most; and, the language acquired in infancy to communicate, regardless of the language spoken in the country of birth.

To support our students’ mother tongues, we:

* Engage in a partnership with the Des Moines Public Library to support students with access to Pronunciator and to hold conversational meetings for parents and guardians to practice English, get questions answered, etc.
* Invite Cultural Ambassadors from CultureAll to work with our students.
* Provide resources in the library that promote the languages and cultures of Merrill students.
* Offer school communications in both English and Spanish and other languages as needed.
* Provide translators for parent meetings, Parent Communications, and registration.
* Use the DMPS Welcome Center to help us translate documents.
* Offer an immersion Spanish class that includes both native and non-native speakers.
* Provide instructional support in the classroom by scaffolding meaning in order to build relevant connections between the mother tongue and general language.
* Promote a school environment that welcomes all cultures and perspectives.
* Encourage community members to volunteer with translating, mentoring, and promoting literacy in the mother tongue.
* Provide proper services to our English Language Learners (those who have a mother tongue other than English) based on levels of language acquisition. Depending on the number of students served, Merrill’s program differs from year to year. Merrill’s program for 2014-2015 consists of one class of Intermediate and Advanced Intermediate students directly served. ELLs who are transitioned or exited from the program are still considered on the ELL roster, but progress is monitored by consulting with teachers in their core classes.
* Participate and promote opportunities for our students to celebrate their backgrounds and cultural heritages through activities fostered by the community e.g. Latinas/Latinos al Exito.

**ELL (English Language Learners)**

The English Language Learners program provides English instruction for students whose mother tongue is not English. Merrill’s program is designed to look at the holistic development of each student, and we aim to support and challenge each English Language Learner at their appropriate learning level, serving students at the Intermediate and Advanced level, according to district curriculum standards. This program fosters progress in reading, writing, listening, and speaking English, using resources such as *Bridges* and *INSIDE*, as well as supplementary materials to support Language and Literature classes for all grades.

English language acquisition is assessed on a regular basis within the performance expectations of each level of proficiency. Students who enter the program (including those who are still in transition), undergo a summative assessment annually, within the domains of reading, writing, listening and speaking English. The Iowa English Language Development Assessment (I-ELDA) exam meets state and district requirements for placement and proficiency.

When students are transitioned from the ELL program into general education classes, we evaluate the student’s Spanish proficiency in order to assure correct course placement. The ELL teacher consults with teachers on a regular basis about students who are both directly served (DS) or whose progress is being monitored (MP). The ELL program reevaluates those who are directly served before the start of each term, based on progress shown in formative and summative tasks, cumulative assessments, and leveled reading progress e.g. the Basic Reading Inventory.

The English Language Learner program provides direct service and support to students with a mother tongue other than English. The ELL teacher meets with elementary teachers within the district each year to discuss the progress of specific ELLs before entering middle school. At Merrill, students are classified in the following ways: direct service in a large group environment (DS), in-class support through collaboration with classroom teachers (ICS), progress monitoring without direct service due to I-ELDA proficiency (MP), and consultation with teachers about sharing strategies and materials to support students (CWT). In order for students to transition out of the program, they must have parent approval by letter of transition, meet criteria standards for levels of proficiency in reading, writing, listening and speaking English, receive the highest level of proficiency on most recent I-ELDA, and receive consent from other core classroom teachers in the building based on academic progress.

**Special-Educational Needs**

Merrill Middle School believes that all students can learn in the Middle Years Programme (MYP). Students with special-educational needs may have difficulties or conditions that are a barrier to learning and therefore need specialized teaching strategies for success in the classroom. The goal at Merrill is to place students in the least-restrictive environment, while still allowing students to find academic success. This includes participating in all facets of the MYP unless students are legally required by their IEP to participate in non-MYP programming.

Please refer to Merrill’s Special-educational Needs Policy for more details about how Merrill supports students with special-educational needs.

**Professional Development**

Teachers continually attend professional-development workshops on effective practices relating to language teaching and learning.

**Language and the Media Center**

* The library offers a variety of materials, instruction, and technology to encourage language development and media literacy.
* The library provides resources that promote the languages and cultures of Merrill students.
* The librarian pairs resources with current units of inquiry and makes those resources available to teachers and students.
* The librarian sends out emails to the staff regarding literacy, instructional, and technology resources.

**Resources**

A variety of texts, resources, and supplemental language materials are used within classrooms to meet the needs of all learners. We also offer resources for students to work on their literacy skills outside of the classroom. Some of the resources are as follows:

* Realidades—an online personalized learning system for improving Spanish proficiency
* Duolingo—an online language instruction site
* Achieve 3000—an online system that provides differentiated instruction for improving reading and writing skills
* Tutors, when available

**Communication to all Stakeholders**

This document will be made available to all stakeholders via the school website and in printed form in the main office.

Sources:

"Guidelines for Developing a School Language Policy." Cardiff: International Baccalaureate

Organization, 2008. Print.

"Guidelines for School Self-Reflection on its Language Policy." Cardiff: International

Baccalaureate Organization, 2012. Print.

*MYP: From Principles into Practice*. Cardiff: International Baccalaureate Organization, 2014.

Print.