



2019 - 20

# Merrill Middle School Language Policy

**Philosophy**

Merrill Middle School 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 subject areas. 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 supports the use of mother-tongue languages to honor cultural identity.

**Language Profile**

English is the primary language of instruction and learning at Merrill Middle School, with each student participating in English (Language and Literature) and Spanish (Language Acquisition) courses each day. English accounts for 85% of our students' home language but overall, we have 21 languages spoken in our school community, with Spanish, Arabic and Dinka making up the next 10% of our students' mother tongue. The school works in conjunction with resources available through Des Moines Public Schools to communicate with families in languages outside of English.

**Guiding Principles of Language Development**

- All teachers at Merrill are language teachers, and language is an integral part of each curriculum.
- Students' prior knowledge should be considered in order to inform literacy instruction.
- Engaging with literacy through inquiry leads to authentic experiences.
- 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.
- During class, learners are expected to speak the language of instruction. Outside of class, the language of their choice may be used.

**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 and is a cooperative effort between families, communities and the DMPS staff.

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 English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA-21) meets state and district requirements for placement and proficiency.

### **Mother Tongue Support**

Merrill honors and promotes mother-tongue language skills of our students. To support our students' mother tongues, Merrill provides the following services:

- Library resources that promote the languages and cultures of Merrill students.
- School communications in both English and Spanish and other languages as needed
- Translators for parent meetings, parent communications, and registration
- Use of the DMPS Welcome Center to help us translate documents
- A welcoming school environment that honors all cultures and perspectives
- Participation and promotion of opportunities for our students to celebrate their backgrounds and cultural heritages through activities fostered by the community

### **Language and Literature**

The goal of the Language and Literature continuum is to have students achieve proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and viewing English. The courses are designed and assessed around the Iowa Core, DMPS Language curriculum standards, and the MYP Language and Literature Criterion. Through the exploration of key and related concepts, students can attain deep understanding of the content and further their practice of literacy skills in order to reach proficiency.

Teachers use ongoing formative assessment and the MAP test, given three times a year, to inform instruction, create flexible grouping and differentiate instruction. Assignments are chunked and scaffolds are provided to meet students at their current level of development and support appropriate upward growth. Teachers provide instruction on referencing material using the MLA format and encourage students to seek out books and activities outside of school that will further hone their language skills.

### **Language Acquisition**

All students at Merrill receive grade level 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 listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing and interpreting Spanish. The courses are designed and assessed around the DMPS standards, ACTFL standards and the MYP Language Acquisition criterion. The study of language acquisition aims to encourage an appreciation for and understanding of other languages and cultures; and to provide a skill base for further language learning.

### **Language Support Services**

Specialized support for language development is available within general, special education and intervention classes.

- Co-taught classes in which a Language and Literature and special education instructor are both present, are available to meet the needs of students with reading and/or writing goals.
- Co-taught classes in which a Language and Literature and English Language Learner instructor are both present, are available to meet the needs of students who do not speak English as their first language and require extra support in English acquisition.
- IEP and 504 accommodations are followed. (Please refer to Merrill's Inclusion Policy for more information.)

- Reading interventions take place as part of general education classes as well as in a structured intervention-specific class, in which instruction is specifically tailored to meet the needs of each student.
- Teachers provide extension opportunities for advanced students to further demonstrate their language development, using tasks above and beyond the articulated standards.
- Various online resources are available for student use outside of the Spanish classroom to further practice and accelerate language acquisition.
- All teachers, from all subject groups, are available during before and after school office hours to provide assistance with tasks and assignments related to language development.

### **Professional Development**

Merrill is fully invested in building-wide professional development related to disciplinary literacy. Our Instructional Leadership Team has been engaged in this work and currently leads staff development sessions in an effort to implement in every classroom. Through disciplinary literacy instruction, we are better able to engage students in inquiring, learning and reflecting across all subject groups. DMPS offers on-going professional development for all teachers in the district in content-specific teams. Other professional development related to IB and the development of language within this framework occurs each year for targeted teachers.

### **Language and the Media Center**

All students have access to Merrill's library before and after school and during the school day as offered and allowed by teachers. The library offers a variety of materials, instruction, and technology to encourage language development and media literacy. Merrill houses many resources that promote the languages and cultures of Merrill students, providing opportunities to engage with text that encourages varied perspectives and an international minded approach. Our librarian pairs resources with current units of inquiry and makes those resources available to teachers and students as well as regularly sends out emails to the staff regarding literacy, instructional, and technology resources. Merrill and our community demonstrate a financial commitment to ensuring ongoing and regular additions of relevant and meaningful texts to the media center through family/PTA book donations as well as allocated monies from both district and IB funds.

### **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.