

# Metropolitan School of Panama

## Language Policy

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## **I. Introduction**

This language policy is based on the language principles and practices of the Metropolitan School of Panama (The MET) and the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO). It has been developed collaboratively by members of the Metropolitan School of Panama community in an endeavor to ensure alignment in our philosophy and practices regarding language learning and usage. It is reviewed yearly and is published for all stakeholders on The MET website.

The aim of this policy is to:

- educate the school community on the importance and value of language;
- promote language practices that effectively support our unique population of learners;
- promote a school culture that actively encourages the learning and celebration of multiple languages;
- ensure that all stakeholders understand their role in supporting language development.

### **a. Our Mission**

The MET is committed to each child reaching their personal level of excellence through a balanced academic program that nurtures their self-esteem and potential and engages them in the world that surrounds them.

### **b. Our Vision**

To set a new standard of excellence for private schools in Panama by providing a world-class academic program in an educational environment that stimulates the development of talent, the formation of moral character, and a sense of civic responsibility.

### **c. Language Philosophy**

With our mission and vision in mind, we believe language to be central to our understanding of self, others, and the world in which we live. Language and our approach to language learning form an integral and significant part of our world-class academic program. We value the learning of language as a discipline and appreciate its importance as a medium and catalyst for learning in other areas.

At the MET we embrace our responsibility to ensure that our approach to the multi-dimensional nature of language fully reflects and promotes international mindedness within and beyond our immediate school community. We believe that we have an obligation to promote and develop awareness of the ways in which language defines who we are, including our self-esteem and potential, and to ensure that this is embedded in our school culture.

#### **d. The MET Language Profile**

The MET community is made up of families from all around the world, though a considerable number are from Panama and other Central American countries. Approximately 70% of MET students speak Spanish as their first language, while 15% speak English and the remaining 15% speak one of a range of other languages including Portuguese, French, Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese), and Arabic. Thus, most of our students are English language learners.

## **II. Language in Practice**

The MET places importance on language learning. Our aim is to ensure that:

- The school provides a stimulating and safe environment in which our students can actively and positively engage in language learning.
- The school curriculum is guided by the IB Primary Years Programme (PYP) scope and sequence, and IB Middle Years Programme (MYP) and Diploma Program (DP) subject guides, which ensure that students receive a complete and balanced language education.

#### **a. Roles and Responsibilities**

All community members have a role in implementing our language policy's objectives.

##### **Students will:**

- work actively to develop both their home language and the languages of instruction;
- support and respect their peers in their language learning.

##### **School leaders will:**

- understand the importance of professional development in language development and teaching;

- create opportunities for professional development to equip teachers with effective practices that promote the academic language proficiency of bilingual and multilingual learners;
- provide the resources to ensure an effective implementation of our language policy;
- facilitate collaborative planning time for language specialists and teachers to address differentiation;
- Ensure the language policy remains up to date and in line with current research.

**Teachers will:**

- actively promote language instruction regardless of their subject;
- assume responsibility for our students' continued language development across the range of our daily interactions, be they informal exchanges or intentional teaching/learning moments;
- provide meaningful language learning experiences for our students in speaking and listening, reading, writing, and viewing and presenting.

**Parents or guardians will:**

- develop and maintain the home language of their child;
- value language development to support the cognitive academic language proficiency of their child;
- collaborate with teachers to support their child's language development.

**b. Language of Instruction**

Our school community is multilingual, and we support and celebrate the wide and diverse range of home languages and cultures within it, with English being our chosen language of instruction.

We aim to provide a quality education for our students in English and we ensure that all PYP classes are taught in English except for Spanish Language classes. In the MYP and DP, classes are taught in English, except for Group 1 Spanish Language and Literature, Group 2 Language Acquisition classes and Estudios Nacionales (National Studies).

Accessing the curriculum requires proficiency in the English language. Given the high percentage of non-native English speakers, faculty is required to implement English as an Additional Language (EAL) strategies in class to instruct students (see III. Informed instructional practices below). EAL teachers also collaborate with classroom teachers to support students who need additional assistance with English.

### **i. Support for English as an Additional Language (EAL)**

During the admissions process, information about students' linguistic and educational background is collected to gain a better understanding of students' strengths in their home language, English, or any additional language. Students are also interviewed by an EAL specialist to measure oral language proficiency and a writing sample is assessed using the WIDA writing rubric to determine eligibility for EAL support. EAL specialists administer WIDA MODEL Online during the first weeks of school to determine the level of language support each student needs. Any student whose WIDA literacy score is below 4.5 must receive EAL support. Students from grades 9 to 12 are expected to have an adequate level of English language proficiency to access the school curriculum without EAL support.

#### **a. Host Country Language**

It is important to us that all our students and teachers learn about, and engage positively in, the culture of our host country, Panama, including its language. We believe that learning Spanish contributes significantly to our appreciation of Panamanian culture, supports our philosophy of being internationally minded, and allows all our students to become bilingual, if not multilingual.

### **i. Support for Spanish as an Additional Language (SAL)**

Spanish as an Additional Language is a program for students in the PYP who are beginning the process of learning Spanish and who need to develop their communication skills in this language. Students are taught by teachers who are native speakers of the language and receive classes that follow a curriculum adapted to their communication needs. Students are divided into small groups that allow for better monitoring of each student's progress.

In order to support Spanish language learners in the MYP students are grouped into Spanish

A and Spanish B classes according to their language proficiency. Spanish B students are organized by level of proficiency and the curriculum is differentiated to meet their needs. The curriculum develops language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing.

In the DP, students are required to take two language courses: Group 1 subjects (English A and Spanish A) are for language and literature analysis while Group 2 subjects (English B, Spanish B, and Spanish Ab Initio) are for language acquisition. Where the students are placed depends on which level of each language they took in the MYP. Students also have the option to take French or Mandarin Ab Initio courses from an IB accredited external provider (Pamoja).

## **b. Informed Instructional Practices**

To support the development of multilingual learners, teachers utilise the instructional practices outlined below.

- **Explicit language instruction** at each grade level is informed by school-developed scope and sequence documents based on IB guidelines and a range of other international standards.
- **Translanguaging** is used strategically to access knowledge. Students can use their full linguistic repertoire to make meaning and produce language, eventually transferring the learning of the topic to the target language. This empowers students and allows them to deepen their learning.
- Regular **assessment** is used to guide language instruction. See assessment policy for further detail.
- Teachers use a range of strategies to **differentiate** learning experiences and meet the needs of all students. For example, sentence stems, teacher modeling, cognates, visual aids, small grouping, and graphic organizers allow students to organize and communicate their thinking.
- We promote **language rich environments**, where students can exercise their agency to access information (word walls, anchor charts, language manipulatives, vocabulary banks etc.).
- The media center offers students access to a range of physical and digital resources to support their language development.

- As a one-to-one device school, students have access to a range of apps and digital subscriptions to support their language development, including Epic!, RAZ-Kids, Kognity, InThinking, and Newsela.

### **III. Language of Communication**

All formal written communication for parents from The MET will be provided in English, including academic report cards. Parent interviews and consultations are conducted primarily in English, although provision for translation can be made depending on circumstances and/or requirements.

### **IV. Conclusion**

At The MET, we strive to support all students to become confident, multilingual communicators. We value the language diversity of our community and seek to support each of our students to move forward on their language learning journey.



