

Conant - Elementary School and Bloomin' Preschool

Language Philosophy and Practices -

A Statement of Purpose Outlining Our Goals for Language Teaching and Learning

Last Reviewed and Updated: 08/2014

The Conant School mission is to foster inquiry and innovation while preparing active citizens to participate in a global community.

School Language Philosophy:

It is the goal of Conant's language practices to provide students with the support and opportunities necessary to become competent and confident readers, writers, speakers and viewers/listeners of language. The school respects that each child comes to us with individual competencies and experiences, and the staff is committed to honoring student differences and providing materials and support appropriate for each child. Language development is fostered throughout the day through our transdisciplinary units of study and is supported within the entire school environment through the use of common language. In addition, our 21st Century Skills and "1: World" technology initiatives, provide students with the tools and experiences to develop their media literacy skills as well.

School Language Resources:

Common Language - IB Learner Profile, Essential Agreements, and PBIS: One aspect of language development that we believe strengthens the opportunities for success within our students is the use of "common language". We use common language to establish a learning environment that supports the needs of all students. At the heart of our common language is the IB Learner Profile. From the moment a student/family enters our building, they will be immersed in our school-wide Learner Profile and PYP Attitude language. Additionally, we have a school-wide system of supports for behavior, known as Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS), which functions through the guidance and leadership of our School Social Worker. To support PBIS, many classroom teachers utilize the "Second Step" program to have students role play and discuss how both verbal and nonverbal forms of communication can positively (and negatively) impact the learning experiences for all. Throughout our hallways, classrooms, and common areas, one will see our school-wide essential agreements and common language posted as reminders to all of those who spend time in our building; there are signs reminding everyone to be respectful, responsible, and safe no matter where they are within our learning community. We have systems in place for introducing, reviewing, and celebrating the behaviors we expect to see in our school community. We believe establishing this common language and our essential agreements are important first steps to setting all of our students up for success in our shared learning environment.

English Language Arts: All Conant students receive language instruction based upon their individual needs. Language instruction is varied in delivery and structure and may include whole group, small group or individual instruction. English language instruction is an integral part of the total curriculum and is incorporated throughout the units of inquiry. Our PYP units allow students multiple opportunities to read, speak, write, view and listen to the English language. Each grade level uses a research-based program, or combination of programs, to support language instruction and experiences.

Additional ELA Support: Elementary students needing support beyond classroom instruction can receive additional, more individualized instruction through Reading Recovery services, the support of the General Education Resource Teaching (GERT) staff, and/or support from our English as a Second Language Teacher.

Second Language (Spanish): In addition to English Language Arts, students in kindergarten through fourth grade receive 30 - 60 minutes of Spanish instruction per week, with Spanish instruction available to our preschool students for 20 - 40 minutes per week, depending on the child's enrollment.

Support for Mother Tongue: With the introduction of iPads in each classroom, students now have direct access to Google translate to help develop and build specific content area vocabulary words within their mother tongue. Whenever possible, classroom teachers provide time for students to share their cultural and linguistic experiences as a means for promoting international-mindedness and supporting the cultural heritage of our students and their families. We further promote and maintain language development in the mother tongue of our students by encouraging and supporting our students who attend local Japanese, German, Arabic, and Chinese learning programs after school and on the weekends by adjusting their schedules and workloads as necessary.

School Language Practices:

1. *Integration of Language Instruction*

Narrative and expository texts that support the inquiries within each unit are an integral part of the curriculum. At team planning sessions, teachers reflect on the language materials available for their units and research new materials that may be available. In addition to books, the school uses computer software, laptops, iPads, internet resources, online video streaming, books on tape/CDs and DVDs to support the units of inquiry. The Spanish Teacher integrates lessons that support the units of inquiry as appropriate and the English as a Second Language (ESL) Teacher, General Education Resource Teachers (GERT), and Special Education staff work alongside the grade level teachers to help students develop an understanding of the concepts within each unit. When available, students and their families help provide an international perspective to the units of inquiry. The most common approach to English Language instruction is the "Workshop" model, as teachers have found the "Workshop" model most lends itself to differentiated and individualized instruction, while also supporting our inquiry-based philosophy.

2. Student Proficiency Levels

The state of Michigan provides Early Childhood Standards and Grade Level Content Expectations (GLCEs) in Science and Social Studies, and they have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) at each grade level in Mathematics and English Language Arts. (As the Next Generation Science Standards are finalized, we will be realigning our work with those as well.) These standards and GLCEs outline what students are expected to learn by the end of each grade level and provide a guide for teachers as they develop units of inquiry. With our transition to the CCSS, the State of Michigan has decided upon a new assessment tool for our students, which is better aligned with the CCSS; for the first time this spring our students will be taking the Michigan - Student Test of Educational Progress, including Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (M-STEP). In conjunction with the State required testing, Bloomfield Hills School District has developed common assessments that are to be completed by our students in grades Kindergarten through Fourth twice a year in Science and Social Studies, as well as the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Mathematics, Reading, and Language assessments. Common assessment data is recorded and managed using the Pearson Inform 5.1 system. The scores that determine student proficiency are determined by the district and based on the state GLCEs. The NWEA assessments are norm-referenced and aligned with the CCSS; student data is recorded and managed as part of the NWEA web-based system. Teachers are currently being trained on using the NWEA data and its DesCartes-Learning Continuum system to better use this assessment as a tool for differentiating and guiding their day-to-day instruction.

3. Language Support

Conant provides students with a variety of support services in order to enable all students to participate and succeed. The staff has been involved in professional development focused on differentiation and continues to look for ways to adjust lessons and materials to meet student needs. Materials and books are chosen to meet each child's independent or instructional reading level. The ESL teacher supports general education instruction with simplified directions, further discussion, vocabulary practice, and other appropriate activities. The GERT and Special Education staff assist classroom teachers with instruction, provide additional materials and help to differentiate for specific students. The support staff is knowledgeable about the scope of the PYP units and maintains the integrity of the units while providing this additional support.

4. Mother Tongue Support

Teachers at Conant encourage English Language Students to share vocabulary and phrases with classmates whenever they feel comfortable and it is relevant to the inquiry that is taking place. Signs are posted throughout the school labeling common locations in all of the languages spoken by families in the school. Conant families created these signs as a collaborative effort between the ESL teacher, PYP Coordinator, and families who speak a language other than English. As students arrive whose language is not represented, these signs are updated with the help of students and families.

- a. Resources: The Conant Media Center staff is continually updating and adding to its collection of materials in other languages. The World Language collection includes books at a variety of levels appropriate for preschool through fourth grade in the languages spoken by Conant students. Parents have also graciously donated materials from their own collections to be used as resources for instruction. The Intermediate School District (ISD) will provide a list of translators if they are needed during Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings.
- b. Information for Parents: Our English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher provides information to any family requesting additional support, along with the support of our ISD. Parents are trained by our ESL teacher on how to use Google translate to help translate information between home-school communications.
- c. Mother Tongue Development at Home: Students and parents are encouraged to continue to practice their mother tongue development through afterschool and weekend classes provided by outside agencies. Conant accommodates those students who might need to leave early on certain days for mother tongue language classes. Teachers are aware of the homework and responsibilities students have outside of the normal school day and work with them to ensure that they are able to be successful with their mother tongue class work as well as their grade level assignments in English.

5. Identifying Language Needs

All students are given a variety of formal and informal language assessments throughout the school year. These assessment tools provide information to help staff differentiate instruction and accommodate the needs of individual students. When a concern arises regarding the language development of a student, we have a Building Instructional Team (BIT) who meets weekly and is available to work with classroom teachers to design interventions and develop modifications for students.

Some of the language assessments used throughout the year may include but are not limited to: the Developmental Reading Assessment 2 (DRA2), the Michigan Literacy Progress Profile (MLPP), the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI), or the Classroom Reading Inventory (CRI). In first grade, Reading Recovery uses Marie Clay's Observational Survey to identify students who may need more support in reading. All grades administer the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) reading assessment in both the fall and spring. Formerly in October, third and fourth grade students took the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP) in English/Language Arts, or the MI Access if the MEAP is deemed not appropriate based on a child's Individual Education Plan (IEP); however, this year our students will be taking the Michigan - Student Test of Educational Progress, including Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (M-STEP) for the first time in the spring.

English Language Students are assessed upon enrollment using the WIDA screener, and every spring thereafter using an English language proficiency assessment called WIDA (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment). The WIDA consortium provides a

concise, global overview of language expectations at each level of proficiency through three Performance Definitions. The Performance Definitions are: linguistic complexity, vocabulary usage, and language control, and they describe the increasing quality and quantity of students' language processing and usage across six levels of language proficiency.

6. Parent Support

Elementary parents attend intake conferences at the beginning of the school year to set goals for their child with the classroom teacher and to provide the teacher with information that may be helpful in tailoring instruction to meet student needs. Additionally, preschool and elementary parents attend a beginning of the year Curriculum Night or Open House where they are provided with the grade level standards in each content area and an overview of the Programme of Inquiry. Parents are encouraged to explore the concepts and ideas from the units of inquiry with their child at home through literature, discussions, and experiences. Within our PYP units opportunities are provided for students to showcase their learning for audiences beyond their classroom, often this includes parents and family members. In addition to authenticating students' learning experiences, these opportunities promote a home-school connection by allowing students to share their learning with their loved ones. In addition, teachers highlight the current unit of inquiry on classroom bulletin boards and in classroom newsletters/websites. The PYP coordinator provides parents with suggestions for supporting their child's learning and growth via the school listserv. Parents are encouraged to serve as a resource for inquiry, and parents who speak a different language or have lived in a different country frequently share their culture and experiences with our students.

7. Staffing and Professional Development

The staff at Conant has been involved in a wide variety of professional development in an effort to improve student performance in speaking, writing, reading, and listening and viewing language. Classroom teachers have attended training on Lucy Calkin's Writer's and Reader's Workshop model, Adolescent Accelerated Reading Initiative, 6+1 Traits of Writing, Developmental Reading Assessment 2 (DRA2), and NWEA's data and instructional resources. In addition to classroom teachers, Conant has a part-time Reading Recovery teacher and a full-time General Education Resource Teacher (GERT) who provide language support to students; as well as one part-time English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, one part-time Speech and Language Pathologist, and one full-time Resource Room Teacher who work with students on language skills as determined by school assessments. A number of resources are used to support students' language development, including Fountas and Pinnell's Leveled Literacy Intervention, Reading A-Z, Raz Kids, and Read Naturally. Our Speech and Language Pathologist has found great success in using an Expanding Expression Tool (EET), and co-teaches this program with our general education classroom teachers to our 2nd and 3rd grade students.

The State of Michigan has specific course requirements for teacher certification and renewals, which now includes a reading diagnostics component. To obtain a permanent

certificate, teachers must complete a specific number of credits within a given time frame determined by the State; these credits include language teaching and learning. The District requires professional development throughout the school year. The teacher must complete some of this training on his/her own time. The District will also bring in experts and/or send teachers to conferences related to language learning.

Language Assessment Profile:

Teachers will monitor individual student progress with learning maps and profiles, including the ESL Accommodations Checklist when appropriate. (Any teacher who is assigned an English Language Student receives an "Accommodations Checklist" in order to best support and differentiate for the various English proficiency levels, which range from 1-6.) We use a cumulative student profile that follows students from grade to grade, in addition to the student portfolio (of work). Most recently this profile consisted of the student's Maximizing Academic Potential (MAP) form and the student's DRA folder. The specifics of our student profile is currently under review and being updated as we explore electronic student portfolios, move to an electronic MAP form, and realign our language assessment tools (to NWEA and the new Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium's M-STEP). In the past the student's profile included MEAP scores, DRA scores, and student work. As we move forward, we want to prioritize student self-reflection and goal setting as part of the profile. We will continue to analyze and monitor student, class, and school data against standardized and norm-referenced assessments in order to ensure the successful learning and growth of our students.

Central Role of the Media Center:

The Conant Media Center provides a variety of materials to support students, staff, parents, and our learning community as a whole. There are many fiction and nonfiction texts, magazines, reference materials, and electronic devices (e.g. a computer lab, laptops, netbooks, and iPads) to support language experiences in all content areas. We have a PTO sponsored literacy library housed in our Media Center, which includes 6-packs of leveled readers for our kindergarten through fourth grade teachers to check out and use during guided reading. Our Teacher-Librarian, in partnership with our public library, established extensive "World Language" collections in both our school and public libraries to ensure we have the most popular children's books translated into the mother tongue languages of our students. Our English as a Second Language Teacher works closely with our Teacher-Librarian to ensure the languages in our World Language collection are updated to reflect the languages of the students currently enrolled in our school.

The Teacher-Librarian and building administrator, with input from the classroom teachers, are responsible for the school Media Center's resources. Classroom teachers work together as grade level teams to determine which resources would best support their grade level units of inquiry; when appropriate these ideas are given to our Teacher-Librarian. In addition to the Media Center resources, each classroom has a budget for supplies and resources, which allows for each teacher to maintain his/her own classroom library. Teachers will often supplement

classroom libraries with paperback books from the various book clubs. Teachers add to their resources through purchases and donations from parents. Book Fairs are held each school year to offset the cost of author visits. Conant's Literacy Library, of course, continues to be generously supported and funded by our PTO and provides a large selection of leveled books for teachers to use with their guided reading groups. In addition to these print resources, we have a great deal of technology available to our teachers and students, especially with our new "1 to World" initiative. Decisions regarding our electronic resources are made at all levels – within individual classrooms, as well as at the building and district levels.

Staff Roles and Responsibilities:

Conant keeps informed and committed to the IB Programme standards through our PYP coordinator, our MYP colleagues in the neighboring middle school, colleagues in other schools/districts who are authorized or working toward authorization, and our Conant curricular teams.

Our PYP Leadership Team meets twice a month throughout the year to review all aspects of Conant's curriculum and to monitor their alignment with State, District and IB guidelines. Grade level teams meet weekly throughout the year to reflect on their units of study as part of the Programme of Inquiry; our PYP coordinator and Media Specialist/Teacher-Librarian meet with those teams weekly and are involved in all aspects of language development as well. Our Spanish Teacher is involved with team planning whenever possible. While the Spanish Teacher has her own curriculum to follow, she is familiar with the Units of Inquiry at each grade level and supports the units in various ways as evidenced in "Box 5" on the grade level planners. The Spanish Teacher works to help classroom teachers incorporate Spanish into their units.

Leadership Team updates and decisions are shared with the staff. The faculty meets as a whole at the end of the year to reflect on successes and review changes for the following school year. All staff members have access to the IB World website and the OCC for information and inspiration, as well as Atlas Rubicon for curriculum alignment and additional resources.

A variety of resources provide teachers with current research and best practices in language learning. Teacher university work, Oakland Schools consultants and workshops, online resources, in-services and the expertise of our ESL and Spanish teachers, are a few of the ways that Conant staff members keep themselves informed and up to date.

Teachers continually search for effective strategies and programs. Our resources are constantly growing and evolving. The following are some of the resources that are currently used at Conant to implement the language policy: Reading Recovery, Oakland School's Units of Study, Developmental Reading Assessment, Writer's Workshop, Read Naturally, Literacy Library, Language!, Reading A to Z, MLPP (Michigan Language Proficiency Profile), internet resources, Promethean Planet resources, Activboard shared lessons, Media Center resources, teacher designed lessons and units, diagnostic testing, classroom libraries, classroom novel sets, and

classroom informational reading texts. Many of the classrooms also have listening centers. Lastly, the best resource for implementing the school language policy is the open, collaborative sharing of resources by the entire staff at Conant.

Review of the Language Policy:

This is a working document, scheduled for annual review by the Conant Leadership Team, with additional input needed from the ESL Teacher, Spanish Teacher, and General and Special Education Resource Staff. After the Team has edited this policy, it should be shared with Conant faculty for final approval. Once approved, the Language Policy will be made available for the entire Conant community. Please plan to review annually in June/August to ensure the policy is ready to publish and share with the public at the beginning of each new school year.

The responsibility for communicating the language policy to all stakeholders is that of the administrator, the PYP coordinator and the teachers and paraeducators in our building.