

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: BELIEFS, AND PRACTICES AGREEMENT

Adopted June 2018



Introduction

This document describes the history, beliefs, and practices around the acquisition of languages at the Regional Multicultural Magnet School (RMMS). It was developed and adopted by school staff. As knowledge of world language is a key component of being a globally-minded citizen, clarifying our practices ensures that the language programs we offer at RMMS are high quality, rigorous and aligned with the International Baccalaureate PYP program as well as state and national standards.

Language programs and history of RMMS

RMMS has a rich history of honoring the diverse linguistic background of its learners as well as promoting world languages as part of the curriculum. Since the school's inception in 1991, the school has actively promoted the Spanish language curriculum in addition to the English language curriculum. There are two separate language programs at RMMS.

In the monolingual program, students are taught primarily in English and receive Spanish as a second language, approximately 80 minutes a week Kindergarten through grade 3 and 90 minutes a week in 4th and 5th grades.

The dual-immersion Spanish-English program is offered to one class per grade level. Puentes which means Bridges in Spanish, serves about twenty-five percent of the school population. Puentes is one of the longest running dual immersion programs in the state of Connecticut. Students in this program receive approximately 50% percent of their instruction in English and 50% in Spanish.

For over a decade, we have offered an after-school World Language Program in collaboration with Connecticut College. University students teach students languages such as Chinese, Russian, Arabic, Italian, French, Spanish and Japanese, while also introducing elements of culture and geography. The school also hosts a yearly World Language Conference for students.

Language of instruction and communication

At RMMS, the language of instruction is English for the monolingual program and English and Spanish in the Puentes Program. We value and respect all the languages spoken by our community. The use of other languages is always welcomed and honored. Students may use their native language during instruction as well as in social situations. All communication is sent home in both English and Spanish as well as other languages needed by families.

Language profile at RMMS

The language profile at RMMS is diverse and ever changing. During the 2017-2018 school year, about 40% of our students came from homes where Spanish is the primary language, some of whom are completely bilingual and some who are heritage speakers of Spanish. Approximately 17% of our student population are English learners. Some of the additional languages spoken by RMMS students, families and staff are: Russian, French, Tibetan, Haitian Creole, Arabic, Kurdish, Turkish, Tagalog, Portuguese, Albanian, Greek, Hindi, Telugu, Marathi, and Bengali.

Our staff is composed of native English speakers and native Spanish speakers from eight different countries and Puerto Rico. We also have native speakers of other languages that are part of our staff.

Language Learning at RMMS

Phases of Language Development

RMMS recognizes the different areas of language development: listening, speaking, reading, writing and viewing. Within each area, skills progress along a continuum. All teachers support students in the ongoing development of language skills. Since RMMS works with students at their developmental levels, students may be working at different levels of literacy within each class setting.

Students within the Puentes Dual Immersion program work on language development in Spanish as well as in English.

Heritage Language Speakers at RMMS

Heritage language speakers of Spanish at RMMS receive support in their language either through Puentes or the Spanish as a second language program.

Mother Tongue Language Preservation at RMMS

At this time, there are only two languages taught, English and Spanish. Students who have another mother tongue are encouraged to use their language whenever they like. Additionally, students are encouraged to talk about their home mother tongue and to it to teach others.

Puentes: The Dual Immersion Program at RMMS

The Puentes program at RMMS serves approximately 130 students Kindergarten through 5th grade.

Goals of the Puentes Program

Students in the Puentes Program will:

- Achieve a high level of proficiency in understanding, speaking, reading, and writing in both English and Spanish.
- Attain academic achievement levels equal to or exceeding state standards.
- Develop positive cross-cultural attitudes and behaviors throughout the school and community

The Puentes program offers diverse methodologies that provide students with opportunities to discover their own potential while respecting diverse learning styles. Respect for each child's level of language ability is fundamental to student growth and as such all Puentes staff are bilingual and trained in second language acquisition. Some instructional strategies used with the program are:

- Hands-on learning
- Technology integration
- Songs and Drama
- Cross-age and peer learning
- Small group instruction

The Puentes Program Model

The Puentes Program uses the Content Connected Language Instruction Model. Each content (literacy, math, unit of inquiry integrated science and social studies) is instructed through one language at a time. As such, instruction is not repeated in each language, but is built on knowledge from prior lessons. Literacy is developed concurrently in both languages.

The Spanish as a Second Language Program

All students at RMMS participate in Spanish classes. Students in the Puentes program use this time to enrich their Spanish learning. Spanish classes adhere to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) standards and use the proficiency guidelines for assessment. Students are taught Spanish literacy as well as cultural aspects of countries where Spanish is spoken. The Spanish curriculum is currently being revised to correlate with the PYP units of inquiry at each grade level. Additionally, IStation, a new online program, is being piloted to enable students to work independently on their Spanish skills in school and at home.

English Learners (EL) at RMMS

Depending on the level of language need, students identified as ELs at RMMS receive support services either in their class or in small groups. The English Language Coach services these students and helps classroom teachers modify their teaching strategies so that these students are successful in the classroom. ELs are assessed yearly with the LAS Links test of English language proficiency as mandated by the state of Connecticut. Students exit EL status when they attain the state mandated benchmarks. All teachers at RMMS have received training focusing on methodology and strategies of teaching students who speak a language other than English. Teachers at RMMS recognize and celebrate that they are all language teachers.

Language Acquisition Practices Review:

This document will be reviewed triennially by staff and The Steering Committee which includes parents, administration and staff.