

This comprehensive policy contains aspects which apply to the North-Palmer Middle Years program as well as to the Palmer Diploma and Career-Related program. Please note commonalities as well as relevant distinctions.



## Who We Are

Palmer High School's students, parents and community place their trust in the school community of teachers and parents to prepare them for success in the years following graduation. Foundational to this success is the on-going instruction they receive in accessing information, thinking critically about information and communicating their developing understandings of a broad range of information presented in various subject areas. This journey is unique for each student. While some may continue their education in the Middle Years Programme with strong literacy skills in their best language, others continue to build foundational skills and depend on the supports of scaffolding in order to access grade-level appropriately complex texts.

The Palmer High School faculty is united in its belief that all educators are language teachers and support students' language acquisition and development in the students' best language. Explicit instruction in academic vocabulary and reading, writing, listening and speaking skills is critical to the success of each student. Therefore, the faculty seriously regards its responsibilities for integrating research-based best practices in literacy and language development into each course in every subject area and at all grade levels. Throughout different coursework, we expose our students to a variety of texts. Toward this end our school community follows a shared leadership model that includes professional learning communities in each department, a focus on literacy during whole-faculty professional development, and close alignment to district and state core standards of literacy and language development.

As all students prepare for rapidly developing realities of global citizenship, instruction in at least one additional language beyond their best language is of highest priority. This begins as early as possible in a child's formal education and continues with the finest of instruction and highest of standards for performance throughout high school and beyond. In keeping with Palmer's diverse student population, developing a school community that values and supports all best languages requires that faculty be educated in culturally-responsive teaching practices and that they hold deep commitments to developing strategies which support on-going language acquisition. Palmer's instructional staff models being a life-long learner by continuing their educational journeys of culturally-responsive instruction.

## Language Acquisition Opportunities

An important distinction is made at Palmer High School between language acquisition and literacy. Language acquisition is the natural process of perceiving, producing and using words in order to engage in comprehensible communications. According to Krashen's research, this process begins at birth and continues throughout life as increasingly sophisticated communications develop, both in the best language and in second language learning.

Literacy is generally described as reading and writing and involves a myriad of skills needed to access information from a wide variety of sources and to communicate ideas, values, and beliefs in various forms and to different audiences (Graham, 2007). Furthermore, current research shows that we need an ever-expanding definition of what it means to be "literate" in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In the National Council of Teachers of English's Policy Research Brief on Adolescent Literacy, they write "Students should see value in their own cultures and the cultures of others in their classrooms. ... Similarly, they should see their home languages as having value" (p. 5). This convergence of valuing a students' first language and the instructional language is conveyed in the NCTE's findings that "Multicultural literacy is seeing, thinking, reading, writing, listening, and discussing in ways that critically confront and bridge social, cultural, and personal differences." In short, all students benefit from effective literacy instruction that not only recognizes but embraces the diversity of language in today's classrooms.

Our challenging reality is that many of our students come to us with underdeveloped literacy skills in their best languages, which means that they have fewer transferable literacy skills from their best language to the second (or third) language they are acquiring at North and Palmer. We have integrated various strategies in order to support these students, and we continue to search for the most effective strategies to provide equitable access to all courses. We recognize that we have to continue our learning process in this area and that we must consider adapting some of our systems in order to be able to provide equitable supports for all students. We see the value of this work since we desire for all our students to achieve their best in our Middle Years, Diploma and Career-Related Programs and to have a profound impact on our world.

World Language instructors at Palmer High School integrate instructional strategies based on Stephen Krashen's *Theory of Comprehensible Input*, placing deliberate emphasis on scaffolding input in the target language comprehensible through various strategies (visual aids, circling, repetition, spiraling and many more). North-Palmer IB World Language course selections in MYP include French, Spanish, German and Mandarin. Palmer's Diploma Program offers Standard and Higher Level French and Spanish as well as *ab initio* and Standard Level Mandarin. Students in our Career-Related Program continue the study of a language other than their best language as an essential component of the CP Core.

Finally, North Middle School and Palmer High School offer a series of language acquisition courses for students who have been exposed to Spanish through their families, homes, and communities and who often have a stronger command of spoken Spanish than literacy skills. "Spanish for Proficiency" and Spanish Language Arts is a set of offerings directly related to the development of that specific language. We

believe that fostering the first language teaches students transferable literacy skills, which they can use in English. We currently do not have sufficiently large populations in other, non-English mother tongues to support similar courses. Students with advanced skills in their best language (particularly Spanish) have the opportunity to study for the Bilingual International Baccalaureate Diploma with two Language As instead of a Language A and a Language B.

All students entering Colorado Springs School District #11 complete a survey on their best and home languages. Results of these questionnaires inform our faculty on students' language background and skills, particularly when the home language and the best language listed are not identical.

Students whose first languages are not English receive structured support from highly-qualified English Language Development (ELD) instructors who are trained to facilitate early exposure to English. The ELD faculty works closely with other instructors in creating a structured framework leading to full student integration in subject-area classes. All faculty members integrate subject-specific vocabulary development into their instruction, using strategies tailored to assist developing students' proficiency with the language of the discipline (Biancarosa, 2006). One of the instructional strategies that our ELD instructors employ is the one of giving students an opportunity to process content in the students' best language to allow for transfer of skills and honoring the best languages. Through this process, our ELD students often also acquire subject-specific vocabulary in other students' best language. Our ELD students' language progress is assessed yearly using the WIDA assessments, which provide us with insight into their language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in Social & Instructional Language, the Language of Language Arts, the Language of Mathematics, the Language of Science and the Language of Social Studies.

Since our ELD program does not offer sheltered courses in most content areas, our English Language Learners (whose best language is not English) learn side-by-side with peers whose best language is English. While this allows students to be exposed to rigorous content, it also means that all instructors have to know how to make input comprehensible to our students. Our state's licensure expectations now require professional development in the area of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse populations, indicating that we need to expand our toolkits to support our English Language Learner students.

As part of Palmer's robust community life, students may choose to engage in a variety of language-related clubs.

## School Resources

Palmer High School's commitment to fostering instructional practices that promote literacy development is evident at every level of organization. Individual instructors participate each week in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). The aim of PLCs is to review and respond to on-going data about student achievement and develop intentional plans for integrating research-based best practices in daily classroom instruction. Typically, achievement data is directly connected to communication and literacy skills.

Additionally, Palmer's media center is available to support language acquisition and literacy development for individual students as well as for whole classes. Two full-time Library Technology Educators (LTEs) provide professional development for teachers on assisting students with accessing information and using technology to support language learning. Computer labs, including one equipped with Mandarin characters, are available for whole-class use. The school's electronic access to the EBSCO database provides access to articles, periodicals, newspapers in German, French and Spanish, with similar resources available in other languages as well.

Our District's High School ELL Community Liaison supports many of our students whose best language is not English through community outreach, communication with parents and community partners, and interpretation during parent-teacher conferences.

### **Accountability and Review**

The language policy is formally reviewed as part of our IB program's five-year self-study and evaluation. Substantive changes can occur more frequently as changing demographics or other circumstances warrant.

#### **2020 Language Policy Review Team**

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## Works Cited

- Biancarosa, Gina, and Catherine E. Snow. *Reading Next - A vision for action and research in middle and high school literacy: A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York (2<sup>nd</sup> ed)*. Washington, D.C.: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006. Print. The Carnegie Corporation's "Advancing Literacy" program serves to report on research findings regarding adolescent literacy issues in an effort to invigorate discussions about and reformed practices regarding classroom instruction of literacy.
- Graham, Steve, and Dolores Perin. *Writing Next: Effective strategies to improve writing of adolescents in middle and high schools - A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York*. Washington, D.C.: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007. Print. This report examines issues central to the success of written communications in secondary students, identifies "eleven elements of effective adolescent writing instruction," and provides detailed support for schools working towards whole-school reform of writing instruction across disciplines and grade levels.
- Heller, Rafael, and Cynthia L. Greenleaf. *Literacy Instruction in the Content Areas: Getting to the core of middle and high school improvement*. Washington, D.C.: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007. Print. The Alliance for Excellent Education is a national policy and advocacy group that believes that every child is capable of graduating from high school and prepared for further studies in college, work and citizenship. To this end, this report examines the data available about current literacy achievement in schools across the country and publishes suggestions and strategies for improvement and reform.
- Jacobs, Heidi Hayes. *Active Literacy Across the Curriculum: Strategies for reading, writing, speaking and listening*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education, Inc., 2006. Print. Active Literacy Across the Curriculum is intended for instructional leaders at any grade level and in any subject area. The book provides support for teachers and planning teams who are interested in mapping curriculum and integrating literacy skills across disciplines and throughout the school.
- Krashen, Stephen D. *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*. internet version ed. 1981. N.p.: Pergamon Press, 2002. *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*. Web. 31 Dec. 2010. <[http://www.sdkrashen.com/SL\\_Acquisition\\_and\\_Learning/index.html](http://www.sdkrashen.com/SL_Acquisition_and_Learning/index.html)>.
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