



Northern Heights Elementary School

IB-Primary Years Program

School Language Policy



Northern Heights' Mission

Northern Heights Elementary School provides a balanced, engaging, and comprehensive education that prepares all students for success as global citizens. We strive to develop caring, principled individuals with a sense of community, who value individual differences and diverse perspectives. As reflective thinkers and inquirers, we are inspired to take actions that positively contribute to our ever-changing world.

School Language Philosophy

Successful citizenry in the 21st century requires that students develop strong language communication skills. The complex global society and technological workplace of the future will place significant demands on the use of written, spoken and visual communication, as well as media literacy. At Northern Heights we believe:

- Language acquisition is the foundation of all learning.
- Language is an integral part of social interaction, self-expression and effective communication.
- Language is learned all of the time; in all settings and through all experiences.
- Every adult within our school community is a language teacher.
- Language is best developed in a rich environment which includes modeling, sharing and demonstrating language tasks commonly expected in authentic, real world settings.
- There are specific conditions for learning that support language development for all learners.
- Language literacy includes reading, writing, listening, speaking and media skills.
- Language acquisition in the mother tongue and at least one additional language promotes cross-cultural understanding and enhances personal growth.

Language Instructional Program

(Aligned with Common Core State Standards)

Language of Instruction:

English is the primary language of instruction at Northern Heights Elementary School. All core curricula, instructional resources, units of inquiry and the Program of Inquiry are written and presented in English. This supports development of the host country mother tongue.



Reading Instruction:

At Northern Heights we believe that reading:

- is an essential competency for success as a literate adult in the world of the 21st century,
- has important purpose; to entertain or gather information that helps in our lives,
- is a meaning-centered process of constructing meaning from text,
- requires active engagement and intentional application of strategies for text comprehension, and
- is a requisite process that facilitates learning content across disciplines.

Northern Heights' teachers use the Reader's Workshop model and incorporate research-based instructional strategies to develop a student's knowledge and skills in five key areas of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary,

and text comprehension. Teachers embed instruction and skill development in a variety of reading experiences that include shared, guided and independent reading. Dynamic grouping allows children to support one another and to interact within a community of readers, while guided reading provides opportunity for focused skill development with children of like need. Primary grade students first learn the basics of letter-sound relationships in spoken and written language. Children apply this learning when interacting with a variety of leveled text. The **Benchmark Literacy** series and **Teachers College Reading Units of Study** serve as core instructional resources. Reading is taught using a variety of approaches including direct instruction and guided inquiry. Reading is taught within and outside of the units of inquiry at each grade level. Text selections are most frequently related to central ideas and lines of inquiry within the school-wide Program of Inquiry. Supplemental reading materials are purchased to provide additional text resources aligned with the Program of Inquiry.

Writing Instruction:

At Northern Heights we believe:

- competence in written language is requisite for success in the world of the 21st Century,
- writing is purposeful as a means of self-expression and interpersonal communication,
- reading and writing are complimentary processes that involve construction of meaning,
- the developing writer is supported by exposure to a wide variety of text during reading,
- children become effective writers by engaging in multiple opportunities to write for a variety of audiences and purposes,
- writing opportunities that incorporate the use of technology for drafting, revising, publishing and/or presentation are essential.

The writing program consists of two key components: the writing process and text forms and features. Each component is considered to be integral within a balanced, comprehensive writing program. The emphasis on each component changes as children move through the grades and their own naturally developing stages as writers. In preschool and kindergarten, early attempts to approximate writing are valued as first steps toward gaining control of letters and words. This leads to a more developed understanding that words convey meaning. Students in first and second grade are more formally introduced to writing processes: matching pictures with words, adding details and conveying meaning. Students at all grade levels learn to write in various forms, appropriate to their developmental readiness. Every child experiences multiple opportunities to write for a variety of audiences and purposes. Narrative, informational/explanatory and opinion writing are taught at various levels. The Program of Inquiry, student-generated questions and subsequent research provide rich opportunities for students to apply the skills and processes of writing in the context of their learning.



Core instructional resources include **David Matteson & Associates (DMA) Frameworks for Writing** and **Teachers College Writing Units of Study**. Teachers use a Writer's Workshop approach, including writing demonstrations, interactive writing, guided writing and independent writing. Students typically house their writing in draft books or writing journals. Technology is commonly used as a tool for writing, revising and publishing. Writing is an integral part of each transdisciplinary unit of inquiry at all grade levels as students gather information, write to share information and engage in self-reflection.

Listening and Speaking:

At Northern Heights we believe:

- communication is a requisite life skill that includes listening and speaking among and between individuals,
- competence in communication enhances personal relationships, the ability to gain and keep employment and an individual's effectiveness in influencing others and his/her world,
- feedback and self-reflection play an important role in the development of listening and speaking skills,
- communication is the vehicle for expression of discipline-specific, intellectual thinking.

Learning experiences are designed to provide opportunities for children to listen and observe, collaborate with each other, make oral presentations and appropriately respond to the contributions of others. Common Core State Standards and performance expectations guide instruction in each of these areas. Oral/aural communication, collaborative learning and student presentations are solidly embedded in the learning experiences for each unit of inquiry. Listening and speaking skills are also explicitly related to student goals and self-reflection, based on the attributes of the Learner Profile.

Language and Technology Integration:

Technology and the language program at Northern Heights are integrated. Language learning is strongly supported when students use technology for brainstorming, sharing ideas, representing information, writing papers/reports, creating projects, responding to assessments, interacting with web-based curricula, and communicating with parents and others within their world.

We encourage students to be actively engaged as they use technology for individual and collaborative learning activities. Teachers provide students with opportunities to:

- create and use online resources to facilitate inquiry,
- engage in inquiry-based projects based on central ideas and lines of inquiry,
- research, analyze and problem solve in a global context,
- use modeling and simulations,
- write, develop and publish individual and collaborative products,
- invent products through programming and/or productions,
- use classroom-based assessments, self-reflect and evaluate their own work,
- initiate self-directed communication through web-based tools,
- use online library catalogs to create book reviews and recommendations, and
- collaborate with students around the world using web and video-based communication technologies.

Our students gain ability to use technology responsibly, creatively and effectively as they apply technology in real-world settings, adapt to changing technologies and personalize technology to meet individual interests and learning styles. Our students develop fluency in their use of technology when they communicate, integrate and evaluate information, solve problems, share knowledge, and improve learning across subject matter and in life experiences. Core instructional resources in the area of Information and Technology Skills are **Common Sense Media's Digital Citizenship Lessons**, the **Super Three (primary grades)** and **Big Six Models (intermediate grades)**.

Encouraging Mother Tongue and Access to Learning

Northern Heights Elementary serves families who speak more than twelve different languages in their homes. Supports for these students and their families are provided in a variety of formal and informal ways.

English Language Learning:

Northern Heights is home to a significant number of students who are English Language Learners. There are a minimal number of students who qualify for direct program services provided by trained ELL staff. These students are generally new to the United States, the English language and a formal school system. They acquire basic interpersonal communication skills and common conceptual vocabulary through the ELL Program. Students with more advanced English language development receive ELL services in their classrooms, integrated with the core curriculum taught to all students. Research-based instructional strategies are used to differentiate instruction and scaffold learning for these students.

In addition to direct services to students, the ELL consulting teacher works alongside classroom teachers in a mentoring/coaching capacity. The ELL teacher and classroom teachers are trained in sheltered language instruction (GLAD), as well as in the use of thinking maps and concrete-conceptual tools that support language learning.

Resources/Programs to Support Mother Tongue:

Home-school communications such as report cards, medical forms and other legal documents are formally translated and available in twenty-three languages. Board-approved interpreters are also available for parent-teacher conferences, as well as other school meetings and activities. In addition, staff access translation programs to assist with informal communications. School support staff, which includes an ELL specialist teacher, facilitates communication with families to encourage involvement in and understanding of school programs.

Library and classroom resources include a continuously developing inventory of books, pictures, auditory and visual media presented in the mother tongue languages of our students. Texts may be mono or bilingual, often incorporating English with other languages.

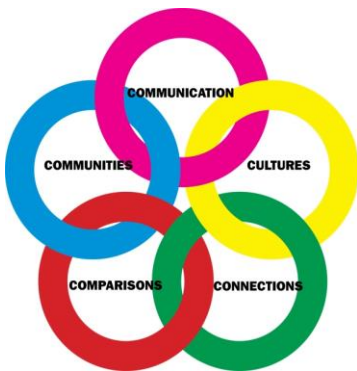
Teachers incorporate many rich opportunities for informal sharing of culture and language that exist within their classrooms. Students are encouraged to use their home language, teach the vocabulary of their mother tongue to peers, and to share literature, music and artifacts that convey aspects of their home culture. Family members are encouraged to visit the classroom and support their students in this endeavor. Additionally, cultural awareness is emphasized as part of the diverse learning that occurs within units of inquiry that are well-planned to encourage international-mindedness.



District-organized community-based learning and cultural events are scheduled periodically. These events typically involve members of the school and greater community in bringing together such things as visual and performing arts, ethnic cuisine, dress, story-telling and other aspects of language and culture. A variety of student projects and products developed within the Program of Inquiry may also be presented at this time.

World Language Program-Spanish Language Instruction

Spanish is taught to all students, kindergarten through grade five. Program design and implementation is a reflection of teacher, student and parent input. Program details follow:



Philosophy: The World Language Program at Northern Heights is philosophically aligned with that of the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Language (ACTFL). It is recognized that language and communication are central to human existence, as is the importance of developing proficiency in the mother tongue and at least one additional language. Learning any language involves much more than the ability to simply speak and converse with others. Students must also develop cross-cultural understanding, apply varied language skills across cultures and disciplines, and integrate languages within their communities.

*Graphic from ACTFL
Standards for Foreign Language Learning*

Curriculum: Curriculum standards are those established by ACTFL; communication, cultures, connections, comparisons and community. Students engage in learning experiences that develop knowledge and skills in each of these five standards.

Instruction: Classroom instruction is provided by a certificated Spanish teacher who meets with students weekly. A sequentially based curriculum is delivered through direct instruction, a TPR approach, story-telling and music. Opportunities for students to listen, speak, read, write, and engage in projects and performances using Spanish are embedded during language instructional time and throughout the school day. Classroom environments also reflect Spanish language learning through posted vocabulary and available literature.

Instructional Resources: *A variety of instructional resources are used to support Spanish Instruction.* These include the ***Teach Them Spanish*** and ***Cuentame TPRS*** materials. Supplemental resources available to students and their families include *Reading A-Z-Spanish version* (primary grade students only), varied Spanish-English library resources and additional materials as contributed by students and our school community. Locally purchased materials, games, literature and music will serve as the core resource for kindergarten and 1st grade students.

World Language Program-Optional Language Instruction

Our Spanish teacher also hosts an optional after school club **Cultura Latina**. Students explore Mexican, Latin American, and Spanish culture. Depending on student interest, topics include: food, music, art, dance, film, geography, indigenous groups, animals, festivals, stories, games... and more! The class meets weekly as part of our after-school enrichment programs.

In addition to Spanish language instruction for **K-5** students, taught during the school day and optional after school opportunities, Northern Heights provides opportunity for students to learn additional languages through an optional fee-based enrichment program hosted by our PTA. Languages taught may include French, German, Mandarin Chinese and American Sign Language, depending on student interest and instructor availability. The Northern Heights PTA provides scholarships for all students who wish to participate but need financial assistance.

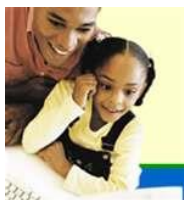
Library-Media Program

The Northern Heights Library is a vital resource for language learning and student-centered inquiry. An evolving inventory of text resources provides literature, non-fiction text and audio-visual resources to enrich each student's reading and learning experiences. The library also houses digital cameras and video equipment, as well as software for editing and video-production. The school has a 1:1 device ratio for 3rd-5th grade students as well as laptop carts and an iPad cart available for PreK-2nd grade, making web-based resources easily accessible to students working on research and presentation products.

The Library-Media Specialist (LMS) has an instrumental role in the full implementation of the PYP. The LMS teaches library and research skills that support student inquiry. Ongoing collaboration with classroom teachers enriches the development and teaching of units of inquiry at each grade level, as well as the school Program of Inquiry. The LMS serves as a resource for materials and programs. Using Internet Connected Technologies (ICTs), the LMS is also a facilitator of cross-cultural learning experiences. In these capacities, the LMS not only provides a resource for student learning, but is a significant source of professional development for staff.

Parent Involvement in the Language Program

Northern Heights' parents and community members are encouraged to take an active role to support language development of our students. Parents are encouraged to volunteer to provide one-to-one and small group tutoring for students who need help in writing, spelling, completing research or other projects. The annual Book Fair engages parents and students, together, in selecting reading materials for home and classroom libraries. Parents are asked to support their children as they complete reading, writing and project-based homework assignments. On an individual needs basis, parents participate in conferences and work with teachers to garner skills and materials to support their children at home. This may be through the ELL or Special Education Programs, or through interactions with the classroom teacher.



Professional Development

Professional development is recognized as an essential component of a dynamic language program at Northern Heights. Time and resources are allocated to professional development in several key areas: reading, writing, inquiry, assessment, technology integration and concept-based learning. Professional development is a shared responsibility,

with some training sponsored by the Bellingham School District and other training provided at the school site. Bellingham School District provides time for professional development and collaboration through Early Release schedules, Non-student Professional Days, building-based in-service days, and individual staff development options.

Language Policy Review Process

This Language Policy is a working document that requires ongoing review and revision to reflect changes in practice, as well as the progression of PYP implementation at Northern Heights. To formalize the timeline and process for review and revision the following will be adopted as follows:

- Annual review of content and working agreements, to be conducted in the spring of each school year by the leadership team.
- Subsequent sharing of revisions and review with all staff to be completed during the fall of the following school year.
- Involvement from stakeholder representatives in the review, revision process (i.e. grade level, support staff, parent/community, IB Coordinator, administration)
- Consensus support from all instructional staff and support staff charged with implementing the policy.