

WVSS Language Policy

Context

WVSS services a diverse multi-cultural population. Approximately 50% of the student population speak English at home, 13% speak Chinese, 16% speak Farsi, 4% speak Korean and 4% speak Spanish. The other major languages spoken by a small percentage (3 or less) are French, Arabic, Bulgarian, Danish, Dutch, German, Greek, Hindi, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Kurdish, Tagalog, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Serbian, Slovak, Thai, Turkish, Ukranian, Urdu, and Vietnamese. Most staff have English as their first language. The Chinese and Japanese language teachers are native speakers. Most staff are Canadian born with a variety of backgrounds including European, South Asian, Vietnamese, Russian, Korean, and Chinese. The language needs of our population are broad and complex. Many of our students are multi-lingual in that they speak their first language at home, use English at school, and study a third language.

Philosophy

It is the philosophy of WVSS that the development of multi-literacies empowers students and society. Every teacher is a teacher of a subject and of language. Students at WVSS are encouraged and supported in the learning of English, the learning of another language, and the maintenance of their mother tongue. In supporting and facilitating students' multi-literacies, the students' identities are affirmed. It is the belief that the development of multiple literacies is a pathway to intercultural awareness and international-mindedness.

Pedagogical beliefs and learning beliefs

WVSS teachers use a variety of pedagogical approaches in their classrooms. All WVSS teachers recognize that they are teachers of language as well as content. Language teachers understand the important role of comprehensible input in language acquisition. This is reflected in the TPRS (Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling) methodology that is used widely throughout the Languages Department. Through the co-creation of class stories, the language used in lessons is highly personalized, contextualized, compelling and comprehensible to all learners. This allows teachers to scaffold the acquisition process from comprehension to production in a natural way. This process is also supported by a wide variety of readings in the target language, which again accelerates the acquisition of the target language. This also allows the class to be conducted almost 100% in the target language. There is an emphasis on the relationship between language and culture in all language classes, encouraging the comparison and reflection on one's own culture and the culture studied. Language activities and lessons are always situated in the culture of the language studied to provide a cultural context. While maintaining one's mother tongue while acquiring English and other languages can create tension for both teachers and students, WVSS teachers are committed to supporting students in both the maintenance of their mother tongue and the acquisition of English and other languages.

Teachers also recognize that learners bring a variety of beliefs about language learning to the classroom and a variety of learning styles. Teachers actively work with students to accommodate their learning styles and challenge beliefs that may be inhibiting their acquisition of another language

English language learners at WVSS

All students who are coming from a school in which English was not the primary language of instruction are assessed by the English department on arrival and, if necessary, are placed in courses for English language learners. There is an ongoing assessment of these students throughout the year and clear exit criteria for these students.

English language learners and access to the IB Diploma Programme

WVSS recognizes that students' language profiles are complex. The IB Programme works to accommodate students and their complex language profiles. For some English language learners, the Diploma Programme is the best fit while, for others, the Course Programme is more suitable. While it is the general belief of the school that students need to have cognitive academic language proficiency to be successful in the Diploma Programme (this is particularly important in courses like TOK and the EE), experience has indicated that, with the right program, English language learners can flourish in the IB Programme. For these students, the school strives to support development and maintenance of their home/personal language and the development of their additional language.

The IB Coordinator, in collaboration with the counsellors and English teachers, individually evaluates students who apply for the Diploma Programme in June of their grade 10 year (see Admissions policy).

Meeting the needs of learners with diverse language profiles – What's the best fit

The IB Coordinator reviews all students' language choices in April, before the timetable for the following September is built. The IB Coordinator meets personally with any new students and any students who request to switch their Language B. The IB Coordinator consults with both students and parents to determine what is the best choice in the development of the student's language profile. The Diploma Programme Language Placement Guide is used to determine the best fit for the student.

Literature Self-Taught

Students new to the school and country who have been accepted into the IB Diploma Programme will be given the opportunity to pursue their first language self-taught. Generally, these students arrive in Canada in the 9th, 10th or 11th grade. These students must be self-starters as they will work independently with the help of the Self-taught Coordinator. Self-taught is available to IB Diploma candidates who are proficient in their first language and have no background in the languages taught in the school.

Language and Literature or English B

Many of these students, because of cognitive abilities, acquire English quickly and choose to take Language and Literature. If their English is not at the level required for Language and Literature, these students take English B in their Diploma.

Language B –ab initio

Students who are new to the school and not proficient enough for self-taught are given the opportunity to take ab initio Mandarin, Japanese, or Spanish. Some students also choose to pursue an ab initio language in the Diploma Programme rather than continue with the second language they have been studying. While students are encouraged to continue with the second language they have been studying, students are allowed to make this choice. Ab initio is for beginning students, so students should not have studied the language for more than one year. Students who have had two years of instruction in the language are programmed into Language B SL.

Language B – Standard versus Higher level

The IB Coordinator works with students and their families to find the best fit. Most of our students are studying a DP language which is not their mother tongue. With these students, exposure to the language and the DP language placement guide is used to determine which level is appropriate.

Many of our students have a mother tongue other than English and speak that language at home and/or have been schooled in their mother tongue in elementary school. These students are keen to develop their mother-tongue with their DP language course. With these students, the DP language placement guidance is used to determine whether HL or SL is suitable in that language. In most cases, if the student has been studying in English in high school, HL or SL is appropriate. In a few cases, self-taught Literature is suitable. This is seen as supporting the student's mother tongue.

School Practices

Students who have developed productive, receptive, and interactive skills in their mother tongue and are too advanced for senior language classes are encouraged to challenge these classes with the BC Ministry of Education. Applications for challenge are due in October and students write the challenge exam in January.

It is the goal of the school that language teaching is integrated into every subject and the belief that all teachers are language teachers. Two support teachers are given time to support teachers and offer strategies for English language learners

Teachers recognize that good strategies benefit all learners, and these include but are not limited to activating prior knowledge, building background knowledge, scaffolding learning with visual aids, demonstration and graphic organizers and encouraging students to extend their learning beyond the classroom. Students are also given a variety of tasks to facilitate the development of their language skills.

There are support courses that students may be taken as electives including Composition 11.

Peer-tutoring is available for students.

In-class silent/free voluntary reading programs encourage literacy and reading for pleasure in the second language.

The library has a multi-lingual fiction collection and newspapers. Databases are available in a number of different languages.

Students are encouraged to search out additional opportunities to make real-world connections with the language and culture outside of school, from exploring and participating in social media to interviewing native speakers of the language.

Students are allowed to interact in their mother tongue in the school and, when appropriate, in the classroom. Students are allowed to use translating dictionaries if appropriate.

Students are given opportunities to celebrate their mother tongue in the school. One of the biggest events of the year is the Asian New Year celebration. This takes the form of a dinner and show. All performances in the show are in the students' mother tongues. Students are also given opportunities outside the classroom to develop their second language. There is a Spanish Club and a French Film Club.