

SMMHS Language Policy

Policy Purpose/IB Standard: The school implements, communicates and regularly reviews a language policy that helps to foster intercultural understanding through communicating in a variety of ways in more than one language (0301-04)

Culture 4.1: The school implements and reviews a language policy that is aligned with IB language policy guidelines. (0301-04-0100)

Understanding that language is central to all learning, the teachers at SMMHS recognize that all teachers are language teachers and responsible for facilitating communication across and through all curriculum areas. Language learning at SMMHS includes not only the developing, maintaining, and refining of English, our community's language, but also the acquisition of a second language. Through language, our students acquire the ability to think and to learn, to develop social skills and values, and to acquire knowledge.

Culture 4.2: The school describes in its language policy the way that the school recognizes multilingualism as a fact, a right and a resource for learning. (0301-04-0200)

Second Language Acquisition

Through the learning of a second language, students not only acquire additional skills for communication, but also gain awareness, acceptance, appreciation, and enjoyment of other cultures thereby developing a more global understanding. In addition, by examining and reflecting on another culture, students can also gain insights about their own culture. Competency in a second language can only be achieved by sustained, continuous instruction in the same language for 4 years of the Middle Years Programme. The aims for Language Acquisition in the Diploma Programme extend this language acquisition further to the ability to communicate effectively in a number of situations and within the culture(s) where the language is spoken. In effect, the goal is to develop and acquire the four primary language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Language of Instruction

Signal Mountain Middle/High School is a public school in Tennessee with a homogeneous population of English speakers. Our language of instruction is English. Only three percent of our students are non-native speakers or children of non-native speakers. Students are required to take Language Arts and/or English in each year of their school career, and state-administered achievement tests and writing assessments are required at designated grade levels.

As a whole school, SMMHS has adopted MLA style conventions for all research papers, which are required in some form at all grade levels. A research inquiry cycle based on the MYP design cycle is being developed by Language and Literature teachers to be used to guide all research papers and projects.

Second Language Choices and Paths

Beginning in the 6th grade, the students will enter the Language Acquisition Carousel. During three trimesters, the students will be introduced to the 3 languages offered at SMMHS: French, German and Spanish. Students are required to choose a language to study in the 7th grade and are required to take the **same** Language Acquisition course for the remaining 4 years of the MYP in order to reach the highest level of fluency and proficiency in a second language. At the current time, MYP Language Acquisition pre- phase 1 criteria will be used for assessments for students who enter

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in the 6th grade. Students who enter in later grades will be accommodated with the appropriate phase criteria in the first year of their study in the MYP. Students entering after the 7th grade will be placed in the level that is most appropriate to their language skills after taking a placement test.

Currently, SMMHS offers the following:

- 6th grade Language Carousel of French, German, and Spanish
- 7th grade French 1a, German 1a, or Spanish 1a
- 8th grade French 1b, German 1b or Spanish 1b (according to county policy a language credit may be awarded at the end of the 8th grade year)
- 9th grade French 1b or 2, German 1b or 2, Spanish 1 or 2
- 10th grade French, German, or Spanish 2 or 3
- 11th grade DP French, DP German, or DP Spanish SL or HL (1st year)
- 12th grade DP French, DP German, or DP Spanish SL or HL (2nd year)

SMMHS offers both a whole-school Middle Years Program and the Diploma Program for 11th and 12th grade students who elect it. 11th and 12th grade DP Language Acquisition classes represent World Language credits 4 and 5 for county and state purposes. Students who have followed the MYP curriculum path in grades 6-10 are required to continue the same language from years 2 through 5 of the MYP. As stated, optimum language acquisition can only take place with a significant time commitment to language study. Transfer students in the 9th grade who have not had the prerequisite second language credit in 8th grade will be counseled on choices for the DP Language Acquisition courses. Language ab initio is offered in some cases. Those students often sit in class with the DP Language B HL/SL, and a few have chosen to test at the SL level by the end of the two years.

The Hamilton County Board of Education does not require a student in middle school to pass the foreign language in order to advance to the next grade; if a student does not pass the 8th grade course, he or she must repeat the course to earn the required credit. This could have an impact on the IB MYP assessments at the end of the five years of the program for those students. By state and county requirements, students are required to have two foreign language credits in high school in order to graduate. At SMMHS, we require all students to take language acquisition classes in grades 6-10. Students must complete 2 consecutive years of world language at the high school level. We recommend that students who receive a D or below on a high school credit course repeat that course. Beyond that, students repeating will be considered on a case by case basis by a committee. Entry into the Diploma Program is elective and open access; however, students must have the required credits to keep them on track for graduation. Therefore, successful completion of language acquisition courses in grades 9-10 is required for entry into the program. DP students complete Language Acquisition courses at the Standard Level (SL) or Higher Level (HL) over two years.

As SMMHS offers a whole-school MYP in grades 6-10, all students have access to one of these languages with the rare exception of students who have Individual Education Plans that exempt them from the Language Acquisition requirement. These students are given the opportunity to participate with modifications and accommodations, but the final decision to participate in Language Acquisition courses rests with the IEP team's decision.

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Culture 4.3: The school identifies in its language policy a variety of physical and virtual resources used to facilitate language development. (0301-04-0300)

Language and Literature (Language Arts and English)

Students in grades 6-8 are required by Hamilton County Department of Education policy to take and pass each year of English Language Arts (Language and Literature). Students in those grades not passing must attend virtual summer school in order to advance to the next grade. Students in grades 9-12 are required to take and pass Language and Literature in all four years of their high school program. Students who fail English at any grade level must either repeat the class or retake it in summer school and pass in order to graduate from high school. Credit recovery through the Language and Literature teacher is available when circumstances warrant it. Entry into the Diploma Program will be contingent upon successful completion of Language and Literature in the 9th and 10th grades.

For all grades 6-10, our district implements various diagnostic and benchmarks assessments to identify students who are struggling, and SMMHS provides several levels of support to assist those students, including after school assistance, response to intervention (RTI) periods, and on-site support through our Learning Center which is staffed by both paraprofessionals and student peer tutors.

Traditionally Signal Mountain Middle/High School has had a very homogeneous population – less than three percent of our students are native speakers of another language. Our current language profile for students who speak a mother tongue other than English in the home is as follows:

- 2 Arabic
- 1 Bengali
- 7 Burmese
- 1 Cebuano
- 4 Chinese
- 4 French
- 11 German
- 1 Korean
- 1 Polish
- 1 Portuguese
- 1 Russian
- 14 Spanish
- 1 Thai

At least 97% of our students have families who are native English speaking. In the 2023-2024 school year, however, SMMHS was assigned an English as a New Language (ENL) teacher who is at the school half day Mon-Fri. She teaches two ENL classes called *English Language Development* for those students in need of English learning support. One class is for high school students (grades 9-12) and the other is for middle school (grade 6-8). This course can be taken in lieu of English Language Arts for those students identified. Hamilton County Department of Education identifies ENL students through a central office application process and a survey completed by parents at the beginning of a school year. The ENL teacher then conducts a language screening test to see if the student qualifies for English language

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support. Students without sufficient proficiency in English are now offered the ENL course, but families can “opt out” of this course. However, even if students opt out of the course, they are still identified on her case load for support services.

Language Acquisition

The Language Acquisition Carousel, offered in the first year of the MYP, is designed so that students will be presented with the same material in the three languages and will be assessed using the same types of assessments. Students and parents will be able to best determine the students’ interests and strengths in each of the languages and cultures and make an informed decision in choosing a language for the 4 remaining years of the program. In order to optimize second language acquisition, students are required to study the chosen language for the four years of the MYP and to continue that study into the Diploma Program.

At present, students who have difficulty acquiring a second language are given opportunities for additional support from the Language Acquisition teachers and through the web-based support from the textbook company as well as other language acquisition platforms. Language Acquisition teachers also provide after-school help sessions.

Students who enter late in the year of the 6th grade may complete only part of the language carousel and will begin study of the language of their choice in the 7th grade with Language Acquisition course 1a. The Language Acquisition teachers, through the web-based tutorial, support students entering later in the 7th or 8th grade. Students entering the 8th or 9th grade at SMMHS without a language acquisition foundation will take Spanish 1 (combining MYP Level 2 and 3) for high school credit; we are looking at adding a French 1 and German 1 for these students in the future. Students entering SMMHS from another Hamilton County School, who are native speakers, or who have parents that are native speakers will need to be placed into an appropriate language class based on transcripts and other evaluations. Our Subject Area Leader for Language Acquisition will be the first point of contact when these students present themselves at the Guidance office.

Other mother-tongues

Because of the large number of students for whom German is the mother tongue in our area, a Language and Literature class called *Heritage German* to students whose first language is German in grades 6-10. In addition to Language and Literature classes in German, students are required to take the Language and Literature courses offered in English as well as choose a Language Acquisition course, in this case either French or Spanish. Those students who are native German speakers also have the option to take DP German A Language and Literature as their group 6 choice. As a result, we have historically seen these students earn the IB Bilingual Diploma.

With so few non-English speaking students, SMMHS does not have the resources to continue mother- tongue learning of those students (other than German). Support of mother tongue, therefore, rests primarily with individual families, but can be supported by the school community through formal and informal messages that the language of each student’s culture is something to be valued and retained while acquiring necessary English skills.

However, in the 2023-2024 school year, SMMHS launched a Heritage Spanish course in year 2 of the MYP. This course has been developed to support a local private elementary school who recently promoted their first cohort of 6th grade students who have been in a Spanish Immersion program since kindergarten. The hope is that this partnership and course development may later grow into an option for our native Spanish-speaking students as well.

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Media Center

All subject areas are fully supported by the resources and media specialist in the media center. Research databases and other resources are available to students and staff. Resources include access to databases at the Chattanooga Public Library and Tennessee Electronic Library. Internet access is provided for all; we are a 1:1 school. Our media center specialist holds regular sessions to teach the effective use of all resources including citation conventions and issues of academic integrity, as well as offering technology support.

Print material to support Language and Literature is comprehensive with the collection being added to daily. Numerous databases and internet resources fully support communications skills.

The media center continues to build its collection of Language Acquisition print and resource materials including fiction and non-fiction titles in the offered languages as well as bi-lingual works. Online databases including world newspapers are available in the media center and can be accessed from home computers.

The media specialist collaborates regularly with subject area teachers on units and lessons and schedules classes in the media center for research purposes as well as general media center use. She also collaborates with colleagues at the UTC library to search for gaps in research skills of college freshmen to better inform her work with high school seniors.

Culture 4.4: The school clearly describes in its language policy the rights and responsibilities of all members of the school community and what constitutes good practice within the school context. (0301-04-0400)

Through the curricular framework provided by the IB Middle Years program, we emphasize holistic learning, intercultural awareness, and communication. The program encourages students to make connections within and across subjects. Assessments in all 8 subject areas include communication skills in writing and presentation (oral communication). ALL SMMHS teachers in ALL subjects/disciplines are literacy instructors, and teachers are expected to model exemplary communication skills to the students and community. Class activities, class meetings and assemblies should be designed to give students the opportunity to practice communication skills in meaningful situations.

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Additional Authority All policies written for Signal Mountain Middle/High School will comply with policies established by the local Hamilton County Schools district and the Tennessee State Department of Education including all federal, state, and local laws.