

Commack Middle School

Language Guidelines

Philosophy

We, the members of a nationally recognized Blue Ribbon School and International Baccalaureate World School, believe that effective communication is fundamental to learning and the key to success in our ever-changing world.

We engage our students in all four strands of communication (reading, writing, listening and speaking) in every area of endeavor to best prepare them to be productive members of society who will contribute to the greater good. Our teachers guide our students to become effective communicators who can comprehend information from a variety of sources, who can express themselves effectively to a variety of audiences, and who will acknowledge and respect differing points of view, however they are expressed – recognizing that other people, with their differences, can also be right.

We believe that language itself may also be considered its own entity in our educational program, and our teachers guide our students to master the lexicon of each discipline, which includes the rapidly developing vocabulary of technology as well as the linguistics, philology, and vocabulary of Language and Literature (English) and Language Acquisition (French, Italian, or Spanish).

Our vision of language incorporates the World Readiness Standards for Learning Languages as comprehensive plans to develop balanced literacy. Our primary goal is to teach our students to be effective communicators in our rapidly advancing society, to be open-minded and reflective as they read and listen, and to convey that they are knowledgeable, principled, and caring as they write and speak.

Overview of Language Program

Our language program is informed by the fundamental principles of the Middle Years Program and our instructional practices offer challenge and support for students. We agree with the IBO that learning additional languages greatly contributes to the holistic development of our students. We encourage all of our students to gain proficiency in a second language and we recognize that this is a natural pathway to intercultural awareness, international mindedness and effective communication.

We engage English Language Learners (ELL) in all four strands of communication (reading, writing, listening and speaking) to help them meet educational objectives while supporting them in their development as independent, global-minded citizens.

- English is the main language of instruction.
 - ELL learners are supported through either stand-alone or integrated instruction in a content area depending on the student's level of proficiency, for 200-400 minutes per week –as per our state guidelines.
 - ELL students may use native language resources (e.g. bilingual dictionaries) to supplement their English instruction.
 - We currently have 29 students who qualify for ELL services which is less than 2.2% of our student population.
- English as a subject is taught through:
 - English/Language Arts in year 1
 - English 7 in year 2
 - English 8 in year 3
- French, Italian, and Spanish are taught in the following sequence:
 - Language 6 (French, Italian, or Spanish) in year 1 on alternate days for the full year.
 - Language 7 (French, Italian, or Spanish) in year 2 daily for the full year.
 - Level I (French, Italian, or Spanish) in year 3 daily for the full year.
- Additional language and culture experiences are provided to our students through:
 - a study of a variety of enrichment courses including, but not limited to, Theater, Building and Beyond, Leaders of Tomorrow, Science/History through Popular Cinema, Writers Studio, Gaming and Coding, Robotics, STEM, Forensics, etc. Students interpret communication and develop the capacity to communicate with a range of audiences.

The development and maintenance of the mother tongue is supported in our school by:

- o teachers and administrators modeling standard English-language practices in their communication with students, parents and colleagues.
- o providing students in year 1 with two periods of instruction in Language and Literature every day.
- o providing students in year 2 with a second period of instruction in their Language and Literature classes every other day.
- o administering the rigorous New York State (NYS) English Language Arts Assessment to our students yearly, to provide a benchmark for each student's progress in language proficiency.
- o administering the AimswebPlus to screen and monitor the reading skills of students. With its robust set of standards-aligned measures, aimswebPlus is proven to uncover learning gaps quickly, identify at-risk students and assess individual and classroom growth.
- o affording students the opportunity to have independent reading choices throughout their language and literature courses.
- o assisting those students who require greater support related to language acquisition/proficiency by scheduling them to receive academic intervention services, which is a skills-based program designed to improve students' use of the English language.
- o providing students "extended learning opportunities" to have access to independent reading time for both enjoyment and application and transfer of taught literacy skills.

Overview of the promotion of language throughout the middle school community

Our middle school community is committed to the promotion of language in accordance with the philosophy and practices of the Middle Years Program, as we guide our students to become effective communicators. We strive to nurture and support the development of language as a means to promote holistic learning, effective communication and intercultural awareness, in each subject area, across the curricula, within and beyond the academic school day. We agree with the assertion that the development of literacy skills is the responsibility of all disciplines. Examples of our efforts to foster student literacy include:

- Literacy in our Language and Literature program
 - o Our teachers emphasize language skills in all four strands (reading, writing, listening, speaking) of communication, and they facilitate our students' development and transfer of those skills through the study of literature from many cultures.
- Literacy in our Individuals and Societies program
 - o Our teachers work with students in ways to consider and categorize information around common themes and points of view and teach them to use appropriate language in analyzing a variety of historical sources.
- Literacy in our Mathematics program
 - o Our teachers challenge students to effectively interpret the language of mathematics and to use that language as they reply to extended-response questions in the mother tongue. Students in our math academic intervention services (AIS) classes work to develop their understanding of the language of mathematics through the development of compensatory literacy strategies.
- Literacy in our Sciences program
 - o Our teachers help students develop scientific literacy in a variety of ways. Science vocabulary acquisition and proper use is a considerable focus. Our teachers guide students in using their language skills to ask scientifically appropriate questions, plan and carry out investigations, analyze and interpret qualitative and quantitative data, construct explanations and engage in both verbal and written argumentation to communicate information using multiple platforms.
- Literacy in our Design program
 - o Our teachers focus on the principles of design and encourage their students to develop fluency in technical language that focuses on measurements, processes, sequences, and cause-effect relationships. Students in technology classes follow the design cycle and reflect, in writing, on their experiences.
- Literacy in our Language Acquisition program
 - o Our teachers nurture students' capacity to communicate effectively in world languages by engaging them in the four strands of communication (reading, writing, listening, speaking). Students explore the culture of the target language through the use of multimedia and multi-modal instruction.

- Literacy in our Physical Education program
 - Our teachers emphasize wellness and lifetime fitness as well as sportsmanship. In physical education classes, our students learn the lexicon of a variety of sports, nutrition and athletic movement. Students learn to communicate effectively through interaction.
- Literacy in our Arts program
 - Our teachers, through fine and applied arts and music, enable students to become proficient in the vocabulary of those disciplines and to express themselves effectively and aesthetically in using multiple modalities. Our students have opportunities to reflect on and to critique their own and others' works or performances, both orally and in writing via a process journal.
- Literacy in our Library Media Center
 - Our library-media specialists assist students, individually and in whole-class sessions, in acquiring language skills for research, evaluating, synthesizing and ethically using information from a variety of sources and media.
 - Our library-media specialists help students to utilize critical literacy skills to analyze and interpret print sources.
- Language in school activities and events
 - International Culture and Cuisine Night/ National Foreign Language Week. These events celebrate multicultural awareness and global mindedness.
 - We Help Two school-wide interdisciplinary service learning project: We Help Two is an organization dedicated to providing access to clean water and educational programming in underdeveloped regions of the world. We Help Two funds water, sanitation and hygiene education (WASH) projects in partner schools to ensure improved educational and social conditions for children and communities. This partnership encourages students to become increasingly globally minded, particularly as it relates to scarcity and the global water crisis.
 - Pulsera Project - CMS has partnered with The Pulsera Project for several years. The Project buys hand-woven pulseras from Central American artists and then partners with student groups to sell them through U.S. schools. They provide sustainable fair trade employment and have dramatically expanded economic opportunities for hundreds of artists in Nicaragua and Guatemala since 2009. With the money raised from pulsera sales they fund many programs that empower people through secondary education, university scholarships, housing programs, healthcare, workers' rights advocacy, gender equality, funding for environmental initiatives, and more.
 - The annual publication and distribution of our art-and-literary magazine *Reflections*, featuring student writing and artwork.
 - The New York State Schools Music Association (NYSSMA) music festival.
 - Suffolk County Music Educators' Association (SCMEA) music festival.
 - The school district's annual Art Walk and Music Festival.
 - The school district's annual Festival of the Arts.
- Language as supported by our middle school professional community
 - Our school and school district employ a number of practices that evidence our commitment to language acquisition and effective use. These practices include:
 - collaboration, scheduled as a "professional period" daily, during which time teachers have the opportunity to meet for discussion of best practices as supported by the MYP.
 - internal professional structures, which include meetings with the building leadership team, the faculty as a whole, individual departments, teachers on interdisciplinary teams and teachers participating in professional learning circles. These focus on language being fundamental to learning and on effective communication.
 - professional conferences whereby teachers are required to engage in multiple hours of professional development annually.
 - written communications with parents and with the community.
 - hiring practices that require candidates to be screened, both by interview and by writing samples, for effective communication skills.
 - teacher evaluation practices, which stipulate that teachers be effective communicators and employ language appropriately and professionally.
 - ELL Supports:
 - ELL teachers regularly provide in-classroom "push-in" support to students.
 - Annually, ELL teachers meet with general education teachers to provide information related to student needs/abilities and 'best practices,' for working with ELL students.
 - Annually, ELL teachers support students as they transition into Commack Middle School or to Commack High School.

- Language to aid in the development and maintenance of effective home-school communications is supported through:
 - The student agenda planner: Students must record their assignments daily in the agenda planner. Parents are encouraged to review their children's planners and correspond with teachers via phone call, email or other modes of communication
 - Teachers' Google Classroom(s): Our teachers have created individual and team Google Classrooms, where they post valuable information (e.g., topics of study, calendars, homework assignments, rubrics for assessments, due dates for projects).
 - Teachers are encouraged to establish positive relationships with parents through frequent and effective communications.
 - Parents are invited to meet their children's teachers at grade level Open House events at the beginning of each school year.
 - Our school hosts two formal opportunities (one during the day, one in the evening) for parents to meet with their children's teachers every year.
 - Counselors and teachers on interdisciplinary teams identify students in need of support and arrange team meetings to address concerns.
 - Parents are actively encouraged to initiate team meetings.
 - Parents are actively encouraged to communicate with teachers by phone or email.
 - Staff members' phone extensions and email addresses are listed on the Commack Middle School website for immediate access.
 - Report cards are issued quarterly, via an electronic parent portal. A feature of the report card enables teachers to comment on student progress to parents.
 - Our School Messenger school-to-home telephone messaging system enables communications regarding school events, emergencies and important issues affecting students.
 - Our school-based management team, which is a committee composed of the principal, the chief building representative of the teachers' union, teachers representing all departments, administrators, support staff and parents. The SBMT meets monthly to collaborate on ways to improve the educational experiences of our students. The design of the committee is language-based, to facilitate communication among the different representatives of our school community.
 - Staff members serve as PTA and SEPTA liaisons in order to communicate information effectively and promote a strong home-school partnership.
 - Newsletters composed by individual teachers keep parents updated on current topics of study and upcoming events, assessments and activities.
 - The District employs the use of a variety of social media platforms including, but not limited to, Twitter, Instagram and others.

Essential Agreements for the Teaching of Language at Commack Middle School

We believe:

- that effective communication is fundamental to learning and the key to success in our ever-changing world.
- that individuals communicate effectively when they are open-minded and reflective as they read and listen and when they convey that they are knowledgeable, principled and caring as they write and speak.
- that teaching and learning incorporates the vocabulary of the MYP framework across all curricula.
- in promoting a positive school climate with consistent behavioral expectations around a common language for students to foster respect, demonstrate responsibility and build positive relationships.
- that it is our responsibility to graduate individuals who can successfully apply learned language skills.

All students at Commack Middle School:

- are taught to celebrate their native language and to respectfully acknowledge the languages of others.
- understand the important role that language plays in their education and in their lives.
- receive instruction in language in each of their courses daily.
- apply their language skills to finding resources and doing research.
- continue to build upon content specific vocabulary unique to each subject area.
- have access to, and utilize, a wide variety of technological resources for language learning and application.
- are encouraged to build their language skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening.
- are encouraged to express themselves with confidence orally and in writing.
- are required to read every day.
- receive support services as needed to develop language skills and to become effective communicators.

- begin to study a second language in year 1.
- are guided to gain proficiency in language acquisition.
- are encouraged to explore cultural traditions through Language and Literature and Language Acquisition, that represent diverse cultures.
- explore the languages of art and music in years 1, 2, and 3.
- are exposed to the modeling of effective communication on a daily basis.
- are motivated to participate in rich discussions across the curriculum.
- have myriad opportunities outside the classroom for practicing their communication skills, through their participation in clubs and athletics.
- learn to use language to foster social-emotional competencies in order to resolve disputes and to show respect and empathy toward others.

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