



Teaching in the languages of our community: English, español, Portugués

International Charter School Language Policy IB-PYP Candidate School 2016-2017

Our Mission

The mission of the International Charter School is to integrate the diverse languages and cultures of the communities it serves by teaching all students in two languages - in Spanish and English or in Portuguese and English - and helping children develop an appreciation of other cultures. Children learn to work collaboratively from their multiple experiences and backgrounds, striving towards high standards of academic achievement. Everyone is part of a community of learners, engaging in inquiry about the world, themselves, and others.

The International Baccalaureate Mission

The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.

To this end, the organization works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment.

These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.

School Context

The International Charter School (ICS) is an academically high performing dual language charter school with a solid reputation in the education community for meeting the needs of diverse learners, including subgroups of students whose needs are not commonly met: English language learners (ELLs), Latinos, and students living in poverty. ICS is the only school in Rhode Island exclusively dedicated to dual language education and is the only school in the state with a Portuguese-English program at the elementary school level. ICS is uniquely meeting the needs of RI families from English, Spanish and Portuguese backgrounds, as well as families from any other language background who value bilingual and multicultural education. In addition to supporting the academic and socio-emotional success of students, ICS develops linguistic and cultural competencies to help students thrive in a global world. ICS's dual language model and proposed International Baccalaureate (IB) programming will build on the languages and cultures of the RI community and uniquely empower RI students to become global citizens at a time when such skills are essential.

Historical Background

ICS was founded in 2001 as a bold experiment in dual-language education. The experiment asked: what if a school could bring together students from three distinct linguistic and cultural backgrounds and create an environment in which the students could excel academically, develop multilingual competencies, and share their understanding of their varied heritages? What if students could learn about the broader world from each other, the communities they come from, and their school? Drawn in equal proportions from households where the primary languages are English, Spanish, and Portuguese, ICS students form a community in which each student's cultural background and identity is shared and celebrated.

Dual Language Program Structure (grades K-5)

The ICS K-5 dual language program enrolls students in one of two dual language program strands: Spanish-English or Portuguese-English. Academic instruction occurs in two languages utilizing a 50/50 dual language model with a daily language rotation. This allows each student access to curriculum in their native language. In this 50/50 model, 50% of students' academic instruction is in English and 50% is in either Spanish or Portuguese. Research shows that integrating the second language instruction with academic or other content matter is more effective than teaching second language in isolation. Through this approach, students develop content area knowledge along with proficiency in both languages.

Language Philosophy

We believe in the equal importance of all languages because language is empowering and enabling and essential to intercultural communication and preservation of identity and traditional culture.

At ICS success in language is not only measured by a student's ability to read, write or speak a language but also by cultural competence such that the student has the ability to understand other cultures and to foster a deeper sense of identity and a broader understanding of diversity. Through their learning experiences students should develop not only an awareness of other cultures but a comprehensive understanding of cross-cultural communication that will prepare them for the current reality of globalized economies and the unpredictable and increasingly international future of the twenty-first century. Language acquisition is associated with developing cognitive capacities that enable more diverse thinking and facilitate future language acquisition throughout learners' lives.

Language and the Program of Inquiry

Language instruction is integrated throughout the Program of Inquiry. Higher level thinking, key concept questions, and extended research all lend themselves to having a strong vocabulary and language presence within the planners. Oral, visual, and written language are all present within planner activities. Literature selections both in read-alouds and guided reading are chosen to build an understanding of the concepts within the planners.

Philosophy of Teaching, Learning and Administration

Through our dual language and proposed International Baccalaureate (IB) education models, ICS will develop in students the skills needed to be successful in an increasingly diverse state and nation, and in an increasingly globally connected world. In order to attain the goals of the dual language and IB programs, it is essential that teachers at the International Charter School also value bilingualism and multiculturalism. ICS teachers strive to foster a lifelong love of learning in students. They demonstrate high levels of knowledge, skills, abilities, and commitment to teach their students to become effective communicators who will use verbal, written, artistic, and technological forms of communication to give, send, receive, and interpret information in two languages. They participate as members of a community of learners and are highly qualified. In addition, teachers contribute as members of a collaborative work environment and work to foster a collective environment free of bias, prejudice and bullying.

By providing the responsive infrastructure for positive, active, ongoing relationships amongst faculty, staff, students, parents and the community served in conjunction with an unwavering focus on academic achievement, administration at ICS is able to foster a shared sense of commitment to developing students as responsible successful participants in our global society. Furthermore, creating a caring community that ICS seeks to provide and supporting students' social and emotional needs is everyone's responsibility at all times. The pedagogical leadership team at ICS clearly articulates and models school-wide expectations, and ensures that staff and faculty are provided with necessary professional development, appropriate systems, and supports.

Family Involvement

We view family involvement as one of the pillars of the school and encourage families to partner with us in providing their children with the highest quality opportunities for development.

All children have rich and varied experiences and bring rich funds of knowledge to schools. At ICS we believe in acknowledging and providing native language instruction and culturally responsive pedagogy. Families are our partners in this process. Research shows that family involvement increases student achievement and, consequently, that schools should take advantage of them as a resource. In order for schools to value familial contributions, they cannot assume that they have the knowledge and parents have the needs. Research confirms that there are many ways to engage parents as leaders, all of which have the following characteristics:

- A wide range of activities both formal and informal, which are linguistically and culturally accessible to parents and responsive to the community
- Regular communication between parents and schools in language the parents can understand
- Treatment of diverse families and communities as rich sources of instructional resources

Guiding Principles

At ICS we recognize that language is a driving force and a vehicle for integrated, transdisciplinary and inquiry-based learning. We share the following common beliefs about language:

- Language is the major connecting element across the curriculum.
- Language is used to construct meaning and deepen our understanding of the world.
- Language is best learned in an authentic context using meaningful and engaging language tasks.
- Language forms the foundation for all learning and education.
- Language helps forge social relationships and cope with the practical expectations of life.
- The development of language incorporates the three components of language learning, learning through language and learning about language.
- All teachers are teachers of language and, as such, need to teach their students explicitly how to engage with the language conventions and content specific vocabulary.
- Students learn best when they are actively involved in listening, speaking, viewing, presenting, reading and writing.
- All children are entitled to a culturally and linguistically responsive education.
- A person's mother tongue is a direct link to that person's culture, heritage and identity.
- Maintaining a student's mother tongue promotes successful academic and cognitive development.
- The use of technology plays a role in language learning and communication.

Support for Language Learners

ICS teachers collaborate to create a caring language community to enhance the language learning of all students. Since all mainstream classrooms contain language learners (English learners, Spanish learners and Portuguese learners), and all teachers are teachers of language, ICS teachers are required to be certified in elementary school education as well as in ESL, Bilingual or Dual Language education. Through sheltered instruction teachers employ a wide range of scaffolding strategies to communicate meaningful input in the content area to students.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Responsive Classroom is a very important part of the everyday life of ICS. This is an approach that is intended to help our entire school community establish and live in a manner that supports respectful behavior. It gives equal value to how children learn and what they learn, which in turn promotes positive social and academic growth and development for all.

In the Responsive Classroom approach, how teachers talk to children is a critical tool for classroom management. Teacher language is a proactive intervention. Teachers can use language to help children develop self-controls and construct positive relationships. How we talk can build up or knock down; encourage or demoralize. At ICS our goal is to use our language to encourage and empower children.

IB Learner Profile/Attitudes

ICS promotes the attributes of the IB Learner Profile that lead to “international mindedness.” Through all aspects of the program, all members of the community work to become inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced, and reflective. ICS students also learn and practice IB-PYP attitudes, which they strive to demonstrate throughout the day. The attitudes are appreciation, commitment, confidence, cooperation, creativity, curiosity, empathy, enthusiasm, independence, integrity, respect, and tolerance.

Mother Tongue Support

According to the PYP, language provides the means for thinking and communicating and is fundamental for learning. Learning a language is not enough; through a language we appreciate the complexity and richness of culture. Mother tongue development is necessary for cultural identity. Therefore PYP schools must recognize and support the mother tongue of each student.

At ICS we do not offer additional mother tongue support for languages not being taught in our dual language program strands. However, we do provide information to parents on other language programs offered throughout the state of Rhode Island so the students can keep up with their mother tongue.

Library

The ICS library helps to enrich students literacy and language learning skills. The students weekly trips to the media center follow an inquiry approach, where students are given time to browse and select materials that interest them. Our collection includes a wide variety of fiction and nonfiction books as well as encyclopedias, poetry, magazines, reference books and electronic sources. The library collection includes books in English, Spanish and Portuguese. This helps to promote reading in students’ mother tongue as well as their second language. The school community has access to the library database where teachers and staff can browse books organized by transdisciplinary units, learner profile attributes and attitudes as well as search for a topic of their choosing. The media specialist supports classroom teachers by locating materials which connect with the school’s programme of inquiry.

After School/ICS+

ICS’s after school program, ICS+, is designed to provide families with an after school care and learning opportunity for their children from the end of the school day until 6:00 pm. The goals of this program are to provide a safe and stimulating environment for the children of ICS parents/caregivers who need care for their children during after school hours. The program is aligned with the ICS mission, including developing students’ social and emotional skills, focusing on multilingual and multicultural experiences, and providing opportunities for students to develop academically.

Admissions Requirements

ICS seeks students from diverse socioeconomic, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Families interested in enrolling at ICS must complete an application (due in February), choose the Spanish-English or Portuguese-English language strand, and enter the annual lottery, which is held in early March. Students that are not admitted are placed on a waiting list. Vacancies are filled from the waiting list. Students entering kindergarten must be 5 years old by September 1st and students entering 1st grade must be 6 years old by September 1st.

Communication of Language Policy to the ICS Community

The language policy will be introduced to the ICS community through a variety of pathways including staff meetings, PTO meetings, home visits, academic nights and board of trustees meetings. The language policy will also be available on the ICS website. New staff will be familiarized with the document during staff orientation.

Review Process

The language policy will be reviewed regularly as part of the Board's cycle of policy reviews, curriculum review cycle and as part of the whole school improvement plan and will be updated as needed.

The Pedagogical Leadership Team will review the implementation of the policy in classrooms and throughout the school on a regular basis as part of the appraisal process.