



# Language Policy

## Signal Mountain Middle/High School



### **Philosophy**

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.

### **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. "The primary aim of language B in the MYP is to encourage students to gain competence in a modern language other than their mother tongue, with the long-term goal of balanced bilingualism." (excerpted from the IB MYP Language Acquisition guide). Competency in a second language can only be achieved by sustained, continuous instruction in the same Language B for the length of the program. The aims for Language B in the Diploma Program 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.

Intentional and purposeful interdisciplinary units designed by teams of teachers will facilitate and foster intercultural understanding and respect.

### **Language of Instruction**

Signal Mountain Middle/High School is a public school in Tennessee with a fairly homogeneous population of English speakers. Our language of instruction is English. Less than three percent of our students are non-native speakers. Less than three percent of our students are the children of non-native speakers. Students are required to take Language Arts and/or English in every 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 A teachers to be used to guide all research papers and projects.

### **Second Language choices and paths**

Starting at 6<sup>th</sup> grade, SMMHS's students have three language acquisition choices: French, German, and Spanish. German was introduced as an MYP Language Acquisition choice to 6<sup>th</sup> grade students in 2010-2011. Students are required to take the **same** Language B for all five 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 phase 1 criteria will be used for assessments for students who enter in the 6<sup>th</sup> 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.

Currently, SMMHS offers the following:

- 6<sup>th</sup> grade Language Carousel of French, German, and Spanish
- 7<sup>th</sup> grade French 1a, German 1a, or Spanish 1a (1<sup>st</sup> half of the high school curriculum is covered)
- 8<sup>th</sup> grade French 1b, German 1b or Spanish 1b (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the high school curriculum is covered, 1<sup>st</sup> high school language credit is given)
- 9<sup>th</sup> grade French, German, or Spanish 1 or 2
- 10<sup>th</sup> grade French, German, or Spanish 2 or 3
- 11<sup>th</sup> grade DP French, DP German, or DP Spanish SL or HL (1<sup>st</sup> year)
- 12<sup>th</sup> grade DP French, DP German, or DP Spanish SL or HL (2<sup>nd</sup> year)
- Students who enter the program in High School will be placed in the appropriate level and will take the Ab Initio exam.

11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> 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 from 6<sup>th</sup> through 10<sup>th</sup> grade are required to continue the same language throughout their MYP. As stated, optimum language acquisition can only take place with a significant time commitment to language study. Transfer students in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade who have not had the prerequisite second language credit in 8<sup>th</sup> grade will be accepted into the Diploma Program on a case-by-case basis. Students and parents will be informed that a lack of prerequisite courses could impact performance in DP Language Acquisition courses.

SMMHS offers both a whole-school Middle Years Program and the Diploma Program for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students who elect it.

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, and we do not have staff capacity as yet to provide mixed grade classes; consequently, if a student does not pass the 8<sup>th</sup> grade course, he or she must take high school French 1, German 1 or Spanish 1 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. Students earning a 74 or below in levels 1 or 2 may elect to retake the class in order to improve the final grade. Students earning a grade above 74 must complete the next credit in the course sequence. Entry into the Diploma Program is elective; however, successful completion of language acquisition courses at the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade levels 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 SEN 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.

## **Support for Languages**

### **English A**

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 through the Areas of Interaction. Assessments in all 8 subject areas include communication skills in writing and presentation (oral communication).

SMMHS has a working Literacy Plan which includes an emphasis on reading and writing across the curriculum as well as regular professional development to support all subject area teachers in literacy strategies.

Students in grades 6-8 are required by Hamilton County Department of Education policy to take and pass each year of Language Arts (Language A). Students in those grades not passing must attend virtual summer school in order to advance to the next grade. SMMHS provides several levels of support to assist students who are struggling including after school assistance. Students in grades 9-12 are

required to take and pass English A in all four years of their high school program. Students who fail English at any grade level must either repeat it or retake it in summer school and pass in order to graduate from high school. Credit recovery through the Language A teacher is available when circumstances warrant it. Entry into the Diploma Program will be contingent upon successful completion of honors level language A English in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades.

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: Afrikaner, French, German, Hungarian, Russian and Spanish, for example. At least 96% of our students have families who are native English speaking. As a result, SMMHS does not have an ELL or ESL program on site. Hamilton County Department of Education identifies ESL students either through a central office application process or surveys completed by parents at the beginning of a school year. Student without sufficient proficiency in English are transported to an area school with an ESL program where they attend until they gain the English language skills needed to attend their zone school. Support for such students is available upon formal request at SMMHS, but is very limited in scope. As our non-native speaking population increases, our policy and procedures will need to be adjusted to accommodate these students.

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.

### **Language Acquisition**

In order to optimize second language acquisition, students are required to study the chosen language for the five years of the MYP and to continue that study into the Diploma Program.

At present, struggling Language Acquisition learners are given opportunities for additional support from the Language Acquisition teachers and through the web-based support from the textbook company. Language Acquisition teachers also provide after-school help sessions.

Students entering later in the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade are supported by the Language Acquisition teachers through the web-based tutorial. SMMHS is exploring the future purchase of a language lab to support students. Students entering the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade at SMMHS without a language acquisition foundation will take French 1 or Spanish 1 (combining MYP Level 2 and 3) for high school credit. Students entering SMMHS from another Hamilton County School, who are native speakers, or who have parents that are native speakers will need to be tested in order to determine placement.

### **Other mother-tongues**

In order to support mother-tongue learning of SMMHS' German population of students, SMMHS has sought and received approval from the state of Tennessee to offer Heritage German at two levels. Students in Years 1-3 of the MYP are enrolled in Heritage German I and students in Years 4 and 5 are enrolled in Heritage German II. These classes give our German students the opportunity to study and practice their mother tongue with other native speakers during classes three times per week.

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.

### **Media Center**

All subject areas are fully supported by the resources and media specialists in the media center. Research data bases and other resources are available to students and staff. Internet access is provided for all. Media center specialists hold regular sessions to teach the effective use of all resources including citation conventions and issues of academic honesty.

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

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

The media specialists collaborate regularly with subject area teachers on units and lessons and schedule classes in the media center for research purposes as well as general media center use.