

Language Policy

International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme

Utica Academy for International Studies

Utica Community Schools

Sterling Heights, MI, USA



*This policy was created in 2015 by the Utica Academy for International Studies
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UAIS Language Policy

The purpose of this document is to describe the procedures and philosophy for second-language teaching and mother-tongue language support that meets the needs of students and reflects the ideals of the program. At the Utica Academy for International Studies (UAIS), the IB Diploma Program Language Policy delineates the policies of language teaching and learning. For the purposes of this document, “Language of Instruction” will be understood to mean English and “Mother Tongue” will be understood to mean languages other than English that are spoken by students at home.

Philosophy

The teachers of the UAIS agree that, fundamentally, language allows students to communicate their ideas and beliefs with others in the learning environment. Additionally, we acknowledge that language is an expression of culture and identity and recognition of this facilitates the development of our students into internationally minded global citizens. We also believe that acquisition of language competence is not limited to the study of world languages, but each discipline has its own specialized lexicon and syntax. Consequently, we acknowledge that everyone in our program—teachers and students included—is a language teacher and learner.

An understanding of language and its implications is one of the tools that facilitates the demonstration of the IB Learner Profile traits. Beyond the apparent relationship to the communicator trait, the cultural and curricular implications of language knowledge cause students to be more open-minded. The special problems of language, such as issues of translation, ambiguity, and emotionally loaded diction, require students to think about the benefits and limitations of language as a way of knowing and to inquire about how this understanding of language has real-world applications. This recognizes only a few of the myriad ways that the acquisition of language knowledge develops the LP traits.

We aim to create an academic and affective setting that allows students to smoothly navigate this multilingual, multi-disciplinary environment.

Language Profile

English is the language of instruction at UAIS. All subject areas except Group 2 World Languages are instructed in English.

100% of students at UAIS identified English as their first language and working academic language.

Languages other than English spoken at home by Utica Academy for International Studies students (2015/2016)	Percentage of student population
Arabic	12
Malayalam	4
Albanian	4
Polish	2
Vietnamese	2

Spanish	2
Gujarati	2
Chinese, Korean, Romanian, Urdu, Hindi, Tamil, Portuguese, Oriya	<1

Studies in World Language

The UAIS requires students to complete a four-year course in one of three world languages. The offerings are French, Japanese, and Spanish. Language B courses are taught at the Standard and Higher Levels. In addition, UAIS offers *Ab Initio* Standard Level examinations on an as-needed basis.

Classroom instruction is supported by co-curricular and extra-curricular clubs and honor societies associated with each language. Annual international travel opportunities serve as an extension of the classroom, enhancing the students' understanding of language and culture. Members of the language honor societies also provide academic assistance to peers.

Studies in the Language of Instruction

The UAIS requires students to complete four years of coursework in English Language Arts, including two years of IB Language A during their years in the Diploma Program. During these years, instruction focuses on developing the students' abilities to engage with and interpret the language of a variety of genres and text styles, including poetry, prose fiction and nonfiction, and drama. Students' skills are strengthened through direct and inquiry-based instruction, involving Reading Apprenticeship—literacy-based strategies for engaging text in order to extract meaning—and a variety of other strategies, including the examination of literary devices and techniques, diction, syntax, and the overall effect produced by the interaction of writers' language choices. Exposure to a variety of texts enhances the students' understanding with the communicative possibilities that develop as a result of skillful language employment.

Instruction is also designed to develop students' written and spoken communication skills, with direct and inquiry-based instruction involving the development of rhetorical strategies for argumentation, including but not limited to organization and appropriateness of language choices. Students learn how to shape their own language choices to serve a variety of purposes, including analysis, information, and persuasion. This is accomplished through discussions and presentations with and to peers and instructors, and with a variety of formal and informal writing assignments, devised in connection with the expectations presented in the rubrics of the IB exams and other standardized assessments, including the SAT.

Though attention to its academic value is central to the instruction, no less important is that students learn that language is a tool for communication and change.

Language Learning Outcomes

All courses across the curriculum, even those not explicitly designated as language courses, are designed so that our students will acquire knowledge and understanding of

- Effective writing processes
- Effective reading processes
- Effective use of language as a valuable life skill
- Complexity and structures of languages
- The fact that communicative competence comes before emphasis on accuracy

Additionally, our students will be aware that

- Language is our major means of reflection
- Effective communication requires changes (register, style) based upon circumstances (audience, purpose)
- Language development is impacted by a variety of factors (e.g., historical, cultural, societal, geographical)
- Literature is a means of understanding one’s self and others
- Language has both benefits and limitations as a way of knowing

Mother Tongue Support

We recognize that students communicate in languages other than the language of instruction. We believe that these additional languages are a resource to our program, not just as an enhancement to cultural understanding but also to curricular instruction. For instance, lessons on issues inherent to translation and idioms rely heavily on the presence and contribution of students for whom these issues are not merely theoretical. Extra-curricular clubs such as the Cultural Diversity club, Amnesty International, the Muslim Student Association, and others are supported as part of our policy of embracing language diversity. Many of our students also teach their Mother Tongues to peers as CAS projects.

The students will complete a Home Language Survey through ManageBac, in which they report their preferred academic language and Mother Tongue, if applicable.

The Utica Community Schools district also supports Mother Tongue communication by providing translators for parents who require it. The district website can be instantly translated into nearly 100 languages. The website also includes, with each translation, an invitation to site visitors to contribute a better translation if they are able to provide one.

Additionally, the district subscribes to LanguageLine Solutions, a service that provides over-the-phone, video remote, and onsite interpreting and bilingual communication that facilitates staff communication with parents whose Mother Tongue differs from the language of instruction.

Also, as part of state mandates requiring language access, Utica Community Schools offers ELL services to students who will benefit from them.

Teacher Development with Regard to Language

Teachers are provided with periodic Professional Development relating to language instruction. For instance, staff meetings focus on developing teacher understanding of the terminology of Theory of Knowledge, with the intent to integrate it across all subject areas. Instruction in Reading Apprenticeship strategies has also been a focus of teacher PD.

Teachers also frequently are given common time during professional development sessions and even during the school day to collaborate and develop cross-curricular lessons and understanding. All of this manifests in improved instruction of students, as teachers familiar with language of the various disciplines are more able to avoid isolation of their subject matter and discuss relevant connections among the different courses.

Assessments

With the exception of the World Languages, all student assessments are conducted in the Language of Instruction. In all disciplines, students are instructed in the relevant technical language required to complete the assessments proficiently.

Review Process

This policy document is to be reviewed prior to each IBO mandated five-year self-study or as needed by the Language Committee in consultation with the administrative team and staff as a whole.