



Language Policy

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School – Halton Catholic District School Board (applicable to IB programme)

At St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School, we believe that the foundation for all learning is language. We also believe that language is instrumental in developing a learning community of international-mindedness and intercultural understanding. Language and culture are intertwined, and thus, language is a crucial part of an international education as it is the primary means of communication, and language skills are fundamental to lifelong learning. For students to be successful learners, they must be able to use language appropriately, accurately, and confidently both orally and in writing in a variety of contexts for a variety of purposes. Language proficiency enables students to develop the inquiry skills needed to acquire knowledge related to all areas of the IB Diploma Programme.

All Teachers are Language Teachers

Language acquisition is a life-long process; therefore, all professionals (teachers, counselors, administrators, and librarians) are considered language teachers. As noted in the document *Learning in a language other than mother tongue*, “language development is a process of [...] learning language, learning through language and learning about language.” Thus, in addition to studying English A: Language and Literature HL, there is a school-wide commitment by teachers of all subjects to help students develop their language skills.

Language of Instruction

All students in the province of Ontario must show proficiency in English in order to graduate. To that end, English is taught as a subject in each grade. Moreover, English is the language of instruction throughout the school (with the notable exception of the Extended French Program). The provincial curriculum is very broad and focuses on all four facets of language, although provincial literacy tests evaluate reading and writing. Within the IB Programme, English is taught as a Language A by qualified, experienced and IB trained instructors. Language A courses at St. Thomas Aquinas focus text choices on the diverse backgrounds of our students, as well as offering an understanding of Indigenous perspectives.



Additional Language to Mother Tongue

The primary aim of the Language Acquisition course is to encourage students to gain competence in a second language with the long-term goal of balanced bilingualism. This is in recognition of the role that a second language has an appreciation of cultural diversity and global mindedness.

Students at St. Thomas Aquinas speak a wide range of mother tongues. On a recent school survey, 61% of our students speak English at home. 14% of students in our school speak other languages at home. 1% of students at our school speak French at home. 24% of students at our school speak English and another language at home. 1% of students at our school speak English and French at home. There are a variety of languages spoken within our school community including Spanish, Arabic, Russian, Korean, Tagalog, and Mandarin. The primary language of instruction at St. Thomas Aquinas is English. French is the most commonly taught second language. Italian is also another language taught at our school. While there is no second language requirement to graduate in the province of Ontario, students begin their second language instruction in French in grade 4 and are expected to study French until grade 9. Most IB students will study French B SL, with both core and extended French options, or choose to take Italian ab initio SL.

Mother Tongue Support

We recognize that our school is part of a culturally diverse community which has complex language and learning-related needs. To support language diversity and mother tongue development, students are encouraged to continue honing their language skills at home and in their community.

The Halton Catholic District School Board runs an International Languages program in support of mother tongue language development. The program deepens students' cultural awareness, fosters pride in their heritage, and strengthens their self-esteem and self-image. Additionally, international language instruction helps students communicate more effectively with people of diverse backgrounds. Students build language skills that they will be able to use locally, nationally, and globally, giving them more opportunities to represent Canada in the global village.

Language Equity and Inclusion (Support for students who are not proficient in the language of instruction)

Halton Catholic District School Board *Equity and Inclusive Education* policy (2021) states that “Both in its content and methodology, inclusive curriculum seeks to recognize our commitment to Catholic values and to affirm the life experiences of all students, regardless of [...] linguistic background.” Therefore, “effective evaluation includes researched best practices that truly reflect the current level of achievement of the student. Multiple opportunities for assessment allow for student learning and accuracy of assessment and instruction. Students must be represented in the curriculum and heard in



the assessment and evaluation. Students' voice is fundamental in the planning for instruction and the accuracy of assessment."

IB students must demonstrate a high level of language proficiency in reading and writing in English in order to be successful in the program. English Language Learners (ELL) will receive language support from individual classroom teachers and ESL school staff. To support parents who are ELLs, the school provides many publications in different languages and provides translators for parent-teacher interviews. HCDSB employs settlement workers to support students and families with after-school programs.

Promotion of English

English is the language of instruction and the language spoken for extra-curricular activity at our school. Due to the rigour of the IB program students must demonstrate proficiency in reading and writing English. English instruction is mandated as cross-curricular by the Ontario Ministry of Education and, therefore, is a key component of the curricula of all DP subject groups. Language A is offered in English and is taken at HL.

Professional Development

We recognize that administrators, teachers, librarians and other school staff require professional development in the fields of language learning and teaching. This is achieved through official IB training, and through PD provided by the board, school or department level. For example, teachers receive opportunities for learning about language development, strategies for supporting English Language Learners, and fostering language diversity and intercultural awareness.

This document was developed by a committee of teachers and the IB coordinator and reviewed by administrators and department heads. The IB language policy is posted on our school website and is available in print format for anyone who requests it. This policy will be reviewed every year by a committee consisting of the Diploma Coordinator, teaching staff members, and an administrator.

Documents consulted during the preparation of this policy:

- Halton Catholic District School Board Policy II-45: *Equity and Inclusive Education* (2021);
- *Guidelines for developing a school language policy* (2008), published by the International Baccalaureate Organization.
- *Programme standards and practices* (2020), published by the International Baccalaureate Organization.