



Birchwood Elementary School Language Policy

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Note: The term "home" language is used for students' first, (or primary) language instead of the term, "mother tongue." The "target" language referred to in this language policy is English.

1. Birchwood's Mission Statement:

At Birchwood Elementary School we strive to develop knowledgeable, skilled, compassionate, principled, and action-oriented young people. We want Birchwood students to become internationally-minded individuals who help create a better world.

To that end, we commit ourselves to:

- Honor diversity and individuality in a safe learning environment.
- Build a community where students, families and staff collaborate with each other to help students realize their academic, creative, social and physical potential.
- Act with integrity and honesty.
- Take on new challenges, learn to be resourceful and resilient, and use these skills to become lifelong learners.
- Become caring, compassionate and respectful people who have a global understanding of the world.
- Make balanced and healthy choices in our lives to achieve well-being for ourselves and others.
- Develop teamwork skills and share our learning with others.



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2. School Language Philosophy

All educators at Birchwood Elementary use the Sheltered Instruction (SI) approach to teaching English by integrating language and content while infusing socio-cultural awareness into daily lesson and unit planning. The ultimate goal of SI is to provide accessibility for all students to

meet and exceed grade-level content standards while developing conceptual content understandings and English language proficiency simultaneously.

Teachers strive to present information in a comprehensible format using a variety of language support strategies which serve to scaffold increasingly complex and sophisticated language across the curriculum. Optimum language development occurs in environments rich in visual and printed supports, with a combination of direct teacher modeling/demonstrations and ample time for students to participate in guided/shared and independent practice. Teachers provide continuous, systematic, and supportive feedback tailored to students' language needs.

3. Core Beliefs About Language Acquisition

At Birchwood Elementary, we believe:

- Language acquisition is a foundational part of learning; therefore all teachers, regardless of the content they teach, are language teachers.
- Home languages must be valued to create a safe, equitable, and positive learning environments and to increase students' capacity to learn. A strong linguistic foundation in one's home language directly supports success in learning additional languages.
- Language is acquired through the exchange of authentic, meaningful messages and multiple opportunities to practice the target language.
- Linguistic and cultural assets are viewed as valuable resources to learning.

4. Language Instructional Program

Teachers find effective ways to integrate all five literacy domains: Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking, and Visual. The interdependence of these domains are highlighted in each unit of inquiry and related directly to Common Core Standards (CCSS) and English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPs).

A. Language of Instruction

English is the primary language of instruction at Birchwood Elementary. All academic subjects and core curricula, units of inquiry, and the Program of Inquiry are written and presented in English. This supports the development of English as the primary language of instruction. Spanish is taught as a second language for grades 2-5. Kindergarten and first grade teachers integrate Spanish as much as possible into daily classroom activities. Spanish is the home language for many of our students, so receiving formal instruction in Spanish at school serves to strengthen their home literacy skills while exposing non-native Spanish speakers to a new language and culture.



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B. Reading/Writing Instruction

At Birchwood, we believe reading provides students with rich language models and opportunities to explore a variety of genres and construct meaning through a variety of texts. Ongoing read alouds and interactive discussions help students retain, analyze, and recall language.

At Birchwood, we believe that writing instruction should provide students with opportunities to undertake a recursive writing process (brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) on a regular basis to share their thoughts for a variety of engaging topics, authentic audiences, and meaningful purposes.

We use the Units of Study for Teaching Reading and the Units of Study for Teaching Writing by Lucy Calkins as a resource guide for teaching reading/writing in a Workshop-style approach. Integral to this model is the "Gradual Release of Responsibility" where teachers first explicitly demonstrate a reading strategy or skill in a 10-15 minute mini-lesson, including time for guided practice, followed by 30-45 minutes of structured independent reading time for students to practice the strategies/skills taught while teachers meet in small groups/1:1 conferences to coach and monitor student progress toward the learning targets.

We are classified as a Title I school. Title I is a federal program that provides financial assistance to schools with high percentages of children living in poverty to help ensure that all children meet rigorous, academic standards. Our skilled team of Literacy Specialists give support for teachers and students in grades K-5 by delivering 1:1, small group, and whole group reading instruction and academic supports. Collaborative plans are made every six weeks to analyze student literacy progress and determine additional support plans for students performing below grade level so they can make accelerated reading growth.

C. Listening and Speaking

At Birchwood, we believe students must have a variety of opportunities to use language in authentic and meaningful contexts. Some examples of how we support this ongoing development of students' listening and speaking skills include:

- Presentations at weekly school assemblies where students take the lead in creating, rehearsing, and presenting information, skits, and performances in front of their peers.
- Weekly newscast of the 5th graders' Birchwood News, which is shared via an online link with the entire school community to watch each Monday morning in classrooms and is also available for families to view at home.
- Through collaboration, the ELL Specialist visits all K-5 classrooms regularly to give demonstrations about having a "great conversation," introducing various talk moves (question starters and sentence frames) with time for students to practice using great conversation skills in peer-peer and small group interactions and whole class lessons.



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D. Language and Technology Integration

We believe that students as 21st Century learners must have access to appropriate digital tools to further their language growth and ability to communicate in meaningful learning activities, both individually and collectively. Some examples include using:

- Various media platforms, such as web-based tools and other applications to create videos, presentations, and productions to share with wider audiences for a specific purpose
- Internet resources to enhance learning through research, inquiry, and problem-solving
- Computers to aid in the writing process and publication of final projects
- Online libraries and other tools to support and assess their growth as readers, writers and communicators

5. English Language Learning

Birchwood Elementary is home to a significant number of students and families who are English language learners (ELLs), or individuals who are learning English as a new language. A total of nine different home languages are represented school-wide. Roughly 30% of Birchwood's total population in grades K-5 qualify to receive direct program services provided by a trained ELL Specialist.

At Birchwood, we believe ELLs acquire academic English effectively when it is taught and learned along academic content in the classroom. Our teachers strive to integrate content and language instruction and collaborate regularly with the school's ELL Specialist to design inclusive learning activities for all students. Students new to the United States/students in need of more intensive support meet with the ELL Specialist for periods of small group direct instruction outside the classroom, while students with more advanced English language proficiency receive ELL services in their classrooms alongside peers through the Sheltered Instruction (SI) approach to delivering core curriculum.

The ELL Specialist's role includes providing both direct program services to students and mentoring/coaching general education classroom teachers so all staff is trained in using research-based instructional strategies, such as Sheltered Instruction (SI), Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD), and Thinking Maps (collection of graphic organizers).

6. Resources to Support Home Language

Home-school communications, such as report cards, medical forms and other legal documents are formally translated and available in thirty-seven different languages. Interpreters are available for parent-teacher conferences and other events. School support staff, including a bilingual secretary and an ELL specialist, facilitate communication with families to encourage involvement in and understanding of school programs.



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A. Family Engagement

We believe strongly in the importance of developing community at Birchwood. Throughout the year, we hold a number of events designed to engage our families and help them connect with our school. We strive to reach all families, including those that do not speak English as their first language. We plan to continue hosting events that bring our community together and strengthen our family engagement.

Some past events have included

- Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings/dinners in Spanish/English
- Family Language Exchange (FLEX) events
- Eliza Court Community BBQ hosted by teachers and district staff
- Summer Literacy and Lunch program at Eliza Court
- Zumba classes offered by our ELL Specialists for parents
- Themed Literacy Nights
- Birchwood Bash community end-of-year celebration

B. World Language Program-Spanish Language Instruction

Currently, students in grades 2-5 receive one 30 minute session of Spanish instruction per week with our Spanish teacher. The main program used for classroom instruction is Risas y Sonrisas Spanish Program for grades 2-5. Classroom lessons integrate visual materials and photos with oral/aural instruction. Supplemental resources include the Risas y Sonrisas Online Program, the AIMS Spanish Program and Online Portal, Teach Them Spanish, and the Benchmark Reader's Theatre in Spanish. Club de Lectura is offered for one hour per week as an after-school Spanish literacy program for students with Spanish as their primary language. This program promotes literacy development by building on the students' primary language to assist in the transfer of skills and strategies when learning to read English in their classrooms.

C. Library-Media Program:

The library media program supports teachers and students in using technology and literary resources to enhance instruction and student learning. Students in grades K-5 receive computer lab time and/or time with laptops to engage in research, support writing skills, and use various instructional programs/tools. Our Library Media Specialist supports the I.B. units of inquiry across the grade levels by gathering resources that link to the units and/or the Learner Profile attributes.



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7. Professional Development

Professional development is a critical component of the language program at Birchwood. Staff partakes in a variety of professional development in the following areas: inquiry, literacy, technology integration, instructional pedagogy, and language acquisition/development. Resources and time are allocated at the district and building level to support ongoing staff development. The Bellingham School District provides time for staff to collaborate by offering early release dates, building-based in-service days, and individual staff development choice options. At Birchwood, the ELL specialist presents monthly language strategy demonstrations at staff meetings and leads collaborative workshops with the IB coordinator, including how to implement Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD) strategies and Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) features into long-range unit and daily lesson planning.

8. Language Policy Review Process

This Language Policy is a working, living document and will require the commitment of an ongoing review process to revise and reflect changes as we embark further in the implementation of the PYP program at Birchwood Elementary. The following outlines steps for undertaking this review process:

- A Policy Review Committee will collaboratively review and revise (if necessary) the Language Policy once a year in June
- The Policy Review Committee will share revisions and ask for input from various stakeholders, including grade level teachers, support staff, families/community, IB Coordinator, and administration).
- The Policy Review Committee will reach a consensus and revise the Language Policy as appropriate/ necessary.