Language Policy

St. Thomas High School

Definition of Language

Language is defined (QEP, 2004) as the representational systems of spoken, written, and media discourse. Language includes words, images, signs, symbols, sounds, gestures, and body language. Discourse is language in use. It arises out of the social context in which it is produced.

Philosophy of Language Learning

The language curriculum at St. Thomas is grounded in the belief that language serves social purposes. Language allows people to communicate feelings, ideas, values, beliefs, and knowledge. It is also a medium for involving individuals in the life of the pluralistic communities of the modern world. Language provides a way to make sense of experience and to break down barriers that separate individuals. (QEP, 2004) Language, in essence, is a tool for making meaning of the world around us and a medium for communication and for learning. A language reflects the culture, values, history, and thinking of those who speak it. Learning another language allows one to understand others; it is a statement of respect.

Language learning is seen as the development of a repertoire of essential strategies, processes, skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will make it possible for all students to become life-long learners and to flourish in a world of rapid social, cultural, and technological change. (QEP, 2004)

Language study promotes international understanding, reinforces cultural identity, contributes to personal growth, and allows for effective communication. It is important that students learn languages, learn through languages, and learn about languages.

Language Profile of St. Thomas High School

St Thomas is a public high school of over 1300 students in the province of Quebec in Canada. The province offers linguistically-based school boards in either French or English. St. Thomas operates within the English system.

To attend an English school in Quebec students must have a Certificate of Eligibility. The criteria for obtaining such a certificate are outlined in the Charter of the French Language (sections 73, 76, and 86.1)

While a handful of International students study at St. Thomas, the vast majority of our population consists of students who have been in the English school system in Quebec from
kindergarten. The strong majority have been in French Immersion programmes within English schools for their elementary schooling. Studying French as a second language is not new for them, and in most cases, students have taken content-courses in French prior to arriving at St. Thomas High School.

Spanish will be a new language for all but a handful of our students. Those who do know some Spanish will generally have learned it as a second language within the home. Some elementary schools in our school board offer language development in Spanish as an after school activity.

Language in the Programmes Offered at St Thomas High School

St Thomas currently offers three programmes: English, French Immersion, and the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme. The same language philosophy underlies the three programmes, but the amount of instruction time in each language varies by programme.

- **English Programme**

  Approximately 5.5 % of our student population follows the English Programme.

  - All courses are offered in English, except for second-language instruction in French and for Music or Visual Arts.
  - Second – language instruction in French is offered for a 50 minutes period on each day of the 6 day cycle.

- **French Immersion Programme**

  Approximately 34.5 % of our student population follows the French Immersion Programme.

  - While most courses are offered in English, second-language instruction and some of the content-courses are offered in French.
  - Second – language instruction in French is offered for a 50 minutes period on each day of the 6 day cycle.
  - The list of content -courses offered in French varies by grade level .
    - In Sec I (grade 7), in addition to the French as a second language course, the student will receive the following content- courses in French: Science and Technology, History and Citizenship/ Geography, Art or Music. Over 50% of the curriculum is offered in French.
    - In Sec II (grade 8), in addition to French as a second language, the student will receive the following content- courses in French: History and Citizenship/ Geography, Art or Music.
In Sec III (grade 9), in addition to French as a second language, the student will receive the following content-course in French: History and Citizenship.

In Sec IV (grade 10), in addition to French as a second language, the student may opt for History and Citizenship in French.

In Sec V (grade 11), in addition to French as a second language, the Ethics curriculum will be presented in French.

- **International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme**

Approximately 60% of our student population follows the IBMYP.

- While most courses are offered in English, second-language instruction and some of the content-courses are offered in French.
- Second-language instruction in French is offered for a 50 minutes period on each day of the 6 day cycle.
- The list of content-courses offered in French varies by grade level.
  - In Sec I (grade 7), in addition to French as a second language, the student will receive the following content-courses in French: Science and Technology, History and Citizenship/Geography, Art or Music. Over 50% of the curriculum is offered in French.
  - In Sec II (grade 8), in addition to French as a second language, the student will receive the following content-courses in French: History and Citizenship/Geography, Art or Music.
  - In Sec III (grade 9), in addition to French as a second language, the student will receive the following content-course in French: History and Citizenship.
  - In Sec IV (grade 10), in addition to French as a second language, the student may opt for History and citizenship in French.
  - In Sec V (grade 11), in addition to French as a second language, the Ethics curriculum will be presented in French.
- Second-language instruction in Spanish is given for a 50 minutes period on two days of the 6 day cycle at the Sec I and II level.
- Second-language instruction in Spanish is an option for a 50 minutes period on two days of the 6 day cycle at the Sec III and IV level.
Guiding Principles of Language Learning at St. Thomas High School

- Language is central to learning. All teachers are language teachers with a responsibility to support growth in effective communication (oral, written or in other media).
- It is important to provide clear expectations about style, purpose, audience and form for each assignment or project in any course, as language changes in response to these factors.
- Language develops through constructive feedback by peers, teachers, and parents.
- Written reflection is an important tool for learning.
- Students need a non-threatening environment of respect and open-mindedness to grow as language-learners and to use language to grow as people.
- Literacy skills should be taught in context
- Students learn language best when they are exposed to good modeling in a rich language environment
- Students should explore language through the Arts.
- Students need an opportunity to interpret and use mathematical, scientific, and technological information with their specialized vocabulary and symbol systems.

Support for Language Learning

Successful language learning can be enhanced through a support system within the school. Currently four forms of support are offered at St. Thomas:

- Tutorials offered by classroom teachers at lunch hour or after school in any course.
- Francization sessions
  - The Quebec government provides a subsidy for the school to be able to offer additional language instruction for recent immigrants (from other countries or other provinces) who do not speak French or whose command of French is weak. This extra instruction is offered outside the regular classroom timetable.
- Literacy Programme (annex)
  - Additional basic literacy skills are offered in English to Cycle I students (grades 7 and 8) in small group settings within the student’s regular timetable. This support is offered to students who are experiencing academic difficulty, and is in addition to the regular English Language Arts curriculum.
- The Learning Center
  - This center offers academic support in small group settings to students who are experiencing difficulties. The focus is on
organizational skills and study skills. The service is scheduled within the student’s timetable.

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