



Barack Obama Academy of International Studies Language Policy



Obama Academy Mission Statement

The Barack Obama Academy of International Studies is an International Baccalaureate World School that prepares students to become well-rounded, globally competitive, compassionate, and confident, in a safe and supportive environment.

The IB Mission Statement

The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.

To this end the organization works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment.

These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.

Language Philosophy

The development of our students' language proficiency plays a central role in the culture and life of the Obama Academy. The Mission Statements of the IB Organization and the Obama Academy cannot be realized by students unless they develop strong proficiency in multiple languages. Facility in one's native language is necessary if students are to develop into inquiring, confident, compassionate and caring people who have a lifelong desire for learning. For students to be globally competitive, well-rounded and respectful of other people and cultures, they need to be able to communicate with people in a second language.

The Obama Academy believes that the key to academic success is clear, concise communication across all subject areas. Since effective communication is paramount to academic achievement, each instructor has a role to play as a teacher of language.

School Language Profile

English is the language of instruction and academic governance at the Obama Academy, and the Pittsburgh Public Schools. 99% of Obama Academy students use English as the primary language in their homes. Thus, daily instruction across the subjects supports the development of the majority of

students' home culture and language. Students who come to the Obama Academy from other language traditions are encouraged to maintain the development of their home language in addition to their English language studies.

The number of families throughout Pittsburgh speaking a language other than English at home is relatively small, but the presence of so many internationally recognized colleges and universities within the city limits means that access to native and near native proficient language speakers is quite high. We are committed to including these vital communities into the instruction and culture of our school not only for students who speak those languages at home, but also for those students who desire to improve their facility in second, or third, languages.

Support for Mother Tongue Development

While most students who come to the Obama Academy receive instruction in their mother tongue, English, we are committed to students maintaining other languages that our families may speak at home. To this end, we utilize the language resources of the various university and cultural groups in Pittsburgh, for both in school activities, and to support families. Additionally, we always strive to demonstrate that as global citizens, it is necessary for our students and families to achieve proficiency in more than one language.

Overview of Support for Second Language Development

As a city-wide magnet program, serving students from 6th through 12th grades, we work with students who come from a huge spectrum of second language abilities. We are committed to helping improve students' proficiency in not only their native language, but also additional languages. These efforts are not limited to the classroom, but cover after-school and community based learning experiences. All students, at the minimum, strive to improve their proficiency in English and one of the four other languages taught in the school; German, Japanese, French and Spanish. Students have a full period of language study in one of these languages every day (40 minutes for high school and 46 minutes for middle school) to ensure that they have the consistency and continuity necessary for second language acquisition. In further pursuit of language proficiency, students study the same second language throughout their academic career until graduation.

There are several points of entry into the Obama Academy for learners of varying degrees of second language proficiency.

6th Grade Entry

Magnet Feeder Schools- There are 4 elementary language feeder schools that include language instruction in German, French or Spanish. In their 5th Grade year, students from these schools who elect to come to the Obama Academy have automatic acceptance, on the condition that they continue the study of the language they have been learning in elementary school. These students are enrolled in classes designed to take advantage of their previous language experiences.

General Population- Students who have not attended one of the language feeder schools must apply to enter through a lottery. There are no requirements for the lottery beyond living within the Pittsburgh city limits. These students are automatically enrolled in introductory level language courses.

Students who have studied German, Spanish or French can take a proficiency exam to pass into the more advanced 6th grade classes.

9th Grade Entry

Per district policy, all students wishing to enter the Obama Academy in the 9th grade must apply and prove they meet a predetermined set of criteria.

Continuing Obama Academy Students- 8th grade students who meet the entrance criteria to Obama Academy have automatic acceptance, if they apply. Their acceptance is conditional their continuing to study language they were learning in 6th-8th Grade.

General Population- Students who did not attend the Obama academy for middle school must apply to enter a lottery. Students who are selected are automatically enrolled in introductory level language courses. Students who have studied German, Spanish Japanese or French can take a proficiency exam to pass into the more advanced 9th grade class.

7th, 8th, 10th, 11th, 12th Grade Entry

Because of scheduling and staff limitations, we are not able to provide students introductory language courses in 7th, 8th, 10th, 11th or 12th grades. Students who apply to come to the Obama Academy in one of these grades must pass a proficiency exam to demonstrate their ability to keep up with the language class in that particular grade level.

ESL Support

All students entering the Pittsburgh Public Schools must complete a Home Language Survey. On the basis of this survey, some students are administered an English language screening test. Students whose scores on this test indicates a need for ESL support will have a traveling teacher, assigned by the school district, come to the Obama Academy to support their language development and academic progress as they gain proficiency in the language of instruction.

Interdisciplinary Support of Second Language Development

Because of the commitment to second language learning, teachers from other subjects incorporate the language and culture of the four languages studied in the school, German, Japanese, French and Spanish whenever possible.

Language Acquisition Diploma Programme Testing

Students may opt to test at the Standard Level or the Higher Level Language Acquisition Exam.