

Rock Ridge Elementary School

Language Policy

(The most recent date for reflection and review of this document was on Monday, November 1, 2021 during our Professional Learning Community time.)

Language is fundamental to thinking, communicating, learning, accessing information, and teaching. It is the one content area that permeates all others, the major connection between different aspects of our curriculum. Because language is fundamental, it is important that students learn to read, write, speak and listen in more than one language.

Our Practice

English will be the language of instruction at Rock Ridge Elementary School. Because language instruction in our school involves learning language, learning about language and learning through language, the amount of time-spent daily on language in any one classroom will equal a large percentage of the time students are in school. Nevertheless, Rock Ridge educators have allocated specific instructional time for reading, writing, listening and speaking. These blocks of time range from 120 minutes in the intermediate grades to 180 minutes in primary grades. Kindergarten, because of their half-day schedule, will have a 60-minute literacy block daily.

As mentioned earlier, language instruction will be integrated throughout the day as an integral part of every unit in the Program of Inquiry of Rock Ridge. This allows students to learn language in the context of purposeful inquiry. Within the units of inquiry, language will be integrated in the following ways:

- Reading:
 - Biographies
 - Fiction
 - Factual accounts, expository texts
 - Read Alouds
 - Comics and graphic novels
 - Newspaper and magazine articles
 - Stories in Spanish
 - Primary resources
 - Digital media
- Writing:
 - Reports
 - Essays
 - Narratives
 - Journal entries

- Letters
- Poetry and lyrics
- Email and instant messages
- Interactive Writing and Editing
- Spanish writing instruction
- Speaking and Listening:
 - Cooperative learning
 - Vocabulary front loading
 - Presenting, speaking, demonstrating learning
 - Voice threads
 - Video presentations
 - Read alouds to younger students
 - Digital storytelling
 - Music and Lyrics
 - Discussions and debates
 - Peer planning and editing of writing
 - Spanish language instruction

Best Practices in Language Instruction

At Rock Ridge, all teachers are trained in a Balanced Literacy approach to literacy instruction known as the Jan Richardson Framework. The JR framework is a selection of instructional strategies that allow for the gradual release of reading and writing responsibility from the teacher to the student. In all cases, lessons begin with the teacher demonstrating a skill (I do, You watch). Then, students are invited to participate with scaffolding provided by the teacher (We do it together). Finally, students are released to practice the skills independently (You do, I watch).

- In reading, the instructional strategies suggested by Jan Richardson are as follows:
 - Read aloud with a purpose
 - Shared Reading
 - Guided Reading Groups and Book Clubs
 - Independent Reading with conferences
- In writing, the instructional strategies suggested by Jan Richardson are as follows:
 - Modeled Writing
 - Interactive Writing and Editing
 - Guided Writing
 - Independent Writing with conferences

Because our girls perform better in literacy than our boys, Rock Ridge Elementary has instituted a plan to address the specific needs of male readers and writers. This plan, based on current theories about how to mitigate the gender gap in literacy, includes

gender sensitive language instruction:

- Prompt and topic choice
- Movement opportunities – Brain Breaks, recess and exercise in the classroom
- Boy-friendly instructional materials
- Use of talk in prewriting, revision, editing and presentation of writing
- Integration of technology in reading and writing instruction
- Interest-based literacy instruction

How will we identify student needs?

Rock Ridge teachers believe that instruction is driven by assessment. As a result, frequent assessment is mandatory to determine individual student needs and next steps for instruction. This assessment can be formal or informal and may involve pre-assessment, formative assessment and summative assessment. For more about the Rock Ridge Assessment beliefs, please review our Assessment Policy.

- Informal Literacy Assessment:
 - Interest Surveys
 - Reading and writing conversations
 - Student Surveys
 - Parent Surveys
 - Anecdotal notes
 - Talk to other staff members (previous teacher, specials, special education)
 - Work Samples
 - Observations of conversations with peers
 - Watch for avoidance behaviors
 - i-Ready Online Lessons
 - i-Ready Standards Mastery

- Formal Literacy Assessment:

- Summative Assessment:

The Douglas County School District mandates that all K-3 students and 4-6 students with reading goals be formally assessed in reading 3 times a year using the i-Ready diagnostic assessment tool. All students must be screened after 13 weeks of instruction and have an end of the year Summative Assessment.

- AIMSweb benchmark assessment in reading (fluency and comprehension) three times a year with special education students.

- In writing, students are given an extended writing assessment three times a year. In that assessment, students are given a prompt and spend one period planning and drafting their

response. On the second day, students revise, edit and create a final draft of their piece. These are scored using the 6-Traits rubric.

· Formative Assessments:

In reading, teachers use reading conferences, unit tests and Running Records to make formative assessments that drive instruction.

Progress monitoring using AIMSweb reading assessment or i-Ready Standards Mastery for struggling readers monthly.

In writing, teachers assess monthly. In months where a summative assessment is not required, teachers use teacher created assessment. In this assessment, students are given a variety of topics from which to choose. These pieces are scored using the Every Child a Writer rubric. In addition, teachers hold writing conferences to determine and teach individual next steps in writing.

How will we support struggling learners?

Rock Ridge Elementary uses a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) model of instruction. This model breaks instruction into three tiers, the first tier contains interventions that all students have access to. The second tier contains interventions that are specific to learners who continue to struggle. The top tier of interventions are reserved for the most impacted learners, those for whom all other interventions have not been successful.

All students are screened for literacy proficiency within the first three weeks of school. These initial screenings, along with informal assessments, are used to group students by need. Guided reading groups, book clubs and writing groups allow teachers to meet individual student needs through:

- Direct, assessment-driven instruction
- Differentiation for individual learning styles
- Implementation of interventions to meet the specific needs of small groups of students
- Differentiation of teaching strategies

When these small group interventions are not enough to meet a struggling learner's needs, an Individualized Literacy Plan is created (ILP) in collaboration with other teachers and specialists. This plan outlines the specific interventions designed to meet individual needs in such areas as:

- Vocabulary
- Fluency
- Comprehension
- Phonics
- Phonemic Awareness

When a struggling learner, despite concentrated effort to meet the needs outlined in an ILP, continues to lag behind his or her peers, the level of support increases. If necessary, learning

specialists are consulted and the student may be tested to see if they qualify for support through our Learning Services Department.

How will we meet the needs of advanced learners?

The RTI model of instruction is also used to meet the needs of advanced learners. As with struggling learners, the first tier contains interventions that all students have access to. The second tier contains interventions that are specific to advanced learners. The top tier of interventions are reserved for the most gifted of all our students, those for whom all other interventions have not been successful.

All students are screened for literacy proficiency within the first three weeks of school. These initial screenings, along with informal assessments, are used to group students by need. Guided Reading groups, book clubs and writing groups allow teachers to meet individual student needs through:

- Direct, assessment-driven instruction
- Differentiation for individual learning styles
- Implementation of interventions to meet the specific needs of small groups of students
- Differentiation of teaching strategies
- Peer tutoring and buddies

When these group interventions are not enough to challenge an advanced learner, an Advanced Learning Plan (ALP) is created to meet the needs of the learner through:

- Placement in the appropriate grade level for literacy instruction
- Use of alternative resources
- Extension of the learning through independent study and inquiry
- Peer teaching
- Differentiating the product, process and content based on ability

How can we involve parents in language acquisition?

Parents are key partners in meeting the needs of all learners. To ensure that all parents have the information and tools they need, teachers at Rock Ridge communicate with parents regularly. Parent meetings are scheduled before school begins (goal setting) and at the end of the first and second trimesters. If a child is struggling or excelling and needs a plan to meet his or her needs, a parent meeting is mandatory.

In addition to parent conferences, teachers work to get parents involved in language acquisition in many of the following ways:

- Literacy night
- Parent University – classes offered by the district on a variety of topics
- Literacy homework that includes reading to, with and by parents and/or family members
- Culture night
- Parent/family projects

- Parent education including the importance of eating dinner together, limiting television and video games, conversation starters, ideas for language games and activities to do at home.
- Encourage parent volunteers in the classroom
- Distribute information about community opportunities including library programs.
- Information about current Units of Inquiry including lines of inquiry
- Parent newsletters
- School newsletters
- Email
- Phone calls

World Language

Currently, Spanish is taught to all students in grades First through 6th. The World Language team consists of a licensed teacher who is fluent in Spanish and a trained educational assistant who speaks Spanish. A language lab with 30 computers is used by students to access the Rosetta Stone software twice a week. Once a week, the World Language team meets with students for oral and written language instruction. Classroom teachers also have access to the Rosetta Stone software in order to learn the language and reinforce new learning in class.

The following strategies are used to teach Spanish:

- Immersion into daily routines such as calendar, directions, planners, labels in classroom and the school at large
- Rosetta Stone software allows student to move at their own pace
- Software uses immersion integrating photos, listening, speaking and reading
- Read alouds in both languages
- World language posters, labels
- Spanish translations of the Learner Profile, Attitudes, Skills and Concepts
- Books on tape in second language
- Repetitive teaching
- Integrate common phrases
- Spanish/English dictionaries in class
- Spanish picture books
- Songs in Spanish
- Classroom and school library kept up to date with books in Spanish

Mother Tongue support

The Douglas County School District has an ESL program that is offered at selected schools in the area, Rock Ridge is not one of these sites. All students who identify a language other than English spoken at home are tested for English proficiency. Those students who need English acquisition support are enrolled at one of the neighborhood schools with an ESL program. Parents can choose to “opt out” of the program and we do have a few students who have elected to stay at Rock Ridge even though they need more support. While acquisition of English is paramount, we are devoted to the idea that students who come to school speaking

another language must not only be supported in English acquisition, but also in the maintenance of their first language. Mother Tongue Support can be provided in the following ways:

- Materials available in the classroom and the media center in the Mother Tongue
- Picture books/Books on Tape in the Mother Tongue
- Visual Aides in the Classroom
- Sharing of language and culture in classroom
- English/mother tongue dictionary in room
- Parent communication (translated if necessary) stressing the importance of the Mother Tongue
- Clustering of students who share a common language into one classroom to allow for classroom/playground/dining room interactions in the mother tongue
- Sign Language and augmented communication when necessary