



Academia de Lenguaje y Bellas Artes: Language Policy

OUR MISSION

The mission of ALBA School is founded on the conviction that bilingual students can reach their full potential academically, in English and Spanish, when challenged through a rigorous curriculum that develops critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity through the integration of the fine arts. Our students will develop self-confidence and self-worth as their Hispanic cultural identity is both recognized and valued through the curriculum as they prepare to be internationally minded life-long learners. Parents are vital partners in this mission.

OUR LANGUAGE PHILOSOPHY

ALBA School believes that students find their cross-cultural identity through instruction in the native language-Spanish and acquisition of English language proficiency with an arts focus that draws on traditional art forms. The ALBA School learning environment helps to foster Hispanic cultural identity and appreciation through strong parental support and community involvement, while preparing students to be bilingual and bicultural learners in a global society. (Cummins 2000)

At ALBA School we value providing students with the opportunities and skills to further their education in schools where traditionally bilingual students do not attend in great numbers. ALBA School students learn in a respectful, nurturing, and encouraging environment where parents, teachers and community members work in close harmony towards clearly stated goals and objectives.

At ALBA, all teachers are language teachers, and all of our students are language learners. We believe that each student is different, and that there is no one approach that fits all students. Individual students will also learn languages at different rates. By applying strategies and approaches to support all learners, we aim to develop biliteracy and bilingualism in all learners. As students become effective communicators in Spanish and English, we foster their identity and instill in each learner an appreciation for languages and cultures as they develop into internationally minded citizens of the world.

OUR CONTEXT

With the collaboration and vision of parents and teachers, ALBA (Academia de Lenguaje y Bellas Artes) School was conceptualized in the fall of 2003. The initial creation of ALBA School was sparked by Milwaukee's desire for a bilingual learning environment where parents and families could become truly active in their children's education. ALBA School's bilingual environment embraces both language and cultural diversity and builds on ethnic background and knowledge to deliver a positive and strong bilingual

education. We are dedicated to partnering with diverse families so that their children develop solid language skills, a love of the arts, appreciation of cultural roots, and the confidence to do well in school.

The student population is composed of students that are 98% Latino, 1.4% White and 0.6% other races. Spanish is the mother tongue for 86% of our students. The other 14% of our student population speaks both languages at home or solely English.

LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING AT ALBA

The pedagogical framework at ALBA embraces a constructivist approach to learning providing hands-on, inquiry based experiences that allow students to develop knowledge and meaning through real life contexts in both Spanish and English. Opportunities to use language to develop the Learner Profile attributes are interwoven throughout every aspect of teaching and learning. Students read, write, listen, and speak in both Spanish and English and across the content areas as they investigate the six transdisciplinary themes and MYP units throughout the school year. Within each unit of inquiry, students use language to drive inquiry, questions, and investigation. They use language to explore learning through the seven key concepts and as they develop approaches to learning skills they need in order to be successful. Students use language as they reflect and communicate their informed choices, and to take action that will help their peers, school staff, and the wider community.

ALBA students participate in a *developmental* bilingual program. This means students are first instructed in the native language—Spanish. We make certain that students possess strong literacy skills in Spanish, before they begin to learn English. Students begin informal English language instruction through the support of an ESL (English as a Second Language) Specialist. The ESL teachers collaborate with classroom teachers and specialists to support English language development within the units of inquiry at each grade level.

In each of the primary grade levels (Kindergarten – Grade 2) the amount of English instruction increases until the students in Grade 3 reach a 50/50 level. For example, third and fourth graders at a 50/50 level have worked up to a routine of receiving one week of instruction in English and one week in Spanish. Bilingual skills are important, and so students continue to receive literacy instruction in both languages everyday from Grades 3 through 8. To truly be bilingual, students must maintain Spanish skills throughout their academic careers.

Teachers are trained to provide scaffolding for students who may not yet be fully proficient in the language of instruction, ensuring equitable access to the curriculum.

Language Allocation Plan

Grade Level	Spanish Allocation	Daily Instructional Minutes in Spanish	English Allocation	Daily Instructional Minutes in English
K3	100%	360	0%	0 min
K4	90%	365 min	10%	40 min
K5	80%	315 min	20%	80 min
1st	80%	315 min	20%	80 min
2nd	65%	265 min	35%	140 min
3rd-5th	50%	200 min	50%	200 min
6th-8th	50%	200 min	50%	200 min

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AT ALBA

In the early childhood program, K4 and K5 students enroll for a full day of school. Students receive traditional early and beginning literacy instruction in Spanish daily. K3 Head Start students attend a half day program completely in the native language, Spanish.

The primary grades focus on building the bridge from social English, acquired in the early childhood program, to beginning literacy and academic content language in English. This process can be summarized as moving from BICS to CALP. (Cummins, 1996).

Jim Cummins is well known for defining language learning into stages: BICS-Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills and CALP-Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency. (Cummins, 1994) BICS can be related to playground talk or the kind of speech that happens between children. It is also the type of speech that an immigrant living next door might use to communicate. CALP is the language better known as academic language. Often, academic language is equated with college or university level studies, but in the work of English Language Learners, “academic” means being able to function and think at higher levels in the language. Solving story problems in math or conducting a literary character analysis would require the use of CALP. In essence, any learning above and beyond basic conversations and survival skills requires the use of CALP.

Pauline Gibbons has given a particularly clear description of BICS, or as she refers to it playground language, that summarizes our goals of the English environment for K4 and K5:

This playground language includes the language, which enables children to make friends, join in games and take part in a variety of day-to-day activities that develop and maintain social contacts. It usually occurs in face-to-face contact and this is highly dependent on the physical and visual context, and on gesture and body language. (p. 3)

Once the children enter the primary grades, the classroom teachers will then provide the necessary instruction to bridge social English learned in the early childhood grades to more specific academic content language. This is the change in instructional linguistic emphasis from BICS to CALP.

Most limited-English proficient students attain mastery of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills, (BICS) in English, which includes oral skills in face-to-face interaction with native speakers and functional use of the language, in 2 years (Ovando and Collier). At ALBA School, most students are proficient in BICS and moving toward emergent Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency, (CALP) upon beginning second grade. The primary and intermediate grades also use the second language for content based instruction. Student progress in the second language is closely monitored by the teachers since language acquisition is a highly individualized process.

Students in the intermediate and middle grades further develop and solidify their literacy skills in English while applying them to the abstract concepts of the content areas through meaningful interactions and concrete experiences. A third language, French, is introduced to students in 7th and 8th grade.

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND THE COMMUNITY

ALBA's neighborhood has a population density twice that of the City of Milwaukee, and has very low educational attainment with nearly 50% having not completed high school. The concentration of ELLs at ALBA, 66.9% of students, is nearly five times higher than Milwaukee Public School District's average, and ten times higher than the state average. The school not only serves as an education entity for students, but also as a resource for parents and the community.

ALBA has a cooperative agreement with professors at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. Faculty members offer their assistance and services in the implementation of English language development and arts programs.

SUPPORTING LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AT ALBA

Inside the classroom, students have access to a variety of books in Spanish and English, bilingual classroom teachers and paraprofessionals/teacher assistants, and their classmates with whom to model and practice language. Reading interventions are provided to support students as they develop their literacy skills in Spanish and English. Students are provided with opportunities to read, write, listen and speak across all content areas. At ALBA, students benefit from these rich linguistic resources to support their linguistic and academic development in both languages of instruction:

- Classroom libraries
- School Library
- Media Center
- City Library
- Accelerated Reader Program
- Sharp Literacy
- America Scores
- The Written Curriculum
- English as an Additional Language Support Teachers
- Learning Support Teachers
- Paraprofessionals and teacher assistants

THE ROLE OF THE MOTHER TONGUE

At ALBA, we support the development and maintenance of the mother tongue through:

- instruction in the mother tongue every day for every student.
- print rich classroom environments and a large Spanish library collection to support all reading levels in biliteracy development.
- instruction using comprehensible input using techniques, research based strategies, and best practices to support language acquisition.
- integration of the arts into the daily curriculum in order to foster communicative growth, while cultivating a school community that celebrates bilingualism.
- communication with families is provided in the mother tongue as well as in English.
- monthly parent meetings and trainings

THE ASSESSMENT OF LANGUAGE

Our beliefs about how knowledge is constructed and how languages are acquired are reflected in our assessment practices. A variety of assessment tools are used in all classes to measure student growth and mastery. At ALBA, we believe in assessment that is:

- Ongoing
- Diagnostic
- Formative
- Summative
- Informative

Please refer to the ALBA Assessment policy for further details regarding student assessment.

PARENTS AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

We believe that parent involvement and support is important to a child's development. Teachers provide parents with information about their child's linguistic and academic progress via report cards, parent-teacher conferences and the sharing of student assessments. We encourage parents to continue supporting their children's growth in their home languages by speaking to them in their native languages and reading to them daily at home.

OUR REVIEW CYCLE

As a school community, the ALBA staff, administration and Governance Board has been involved in the development of the Language Policy. This policy will be reviewed and revised biannually.

Works Referenced

Cummins, J. (1994). *Schooling and language minority students: A theoretical framework* (2nd ed.) Los Angeles: California State University, National Evaluation, Dissemination and Assessment Center.

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Gibbons, P. (1993) *Learning to learn in a second language*. Sydney, Australia: Heinemann.

Ovando, C. J., & Collier, V. P. (1985) *Bilingual and ESL Classrooms: Teaching in multicultural contexts*. New York: Mcgraw-Hill