

# Language Policy

## 1. Introduction

School of the Nations is committed to fostering an inclusive and diverse learning environment that respects the linguistic backgrounds and identities of all students, staff, and stakeholders.

We recognize the vital role language plays in promoting intercultural understanding, communication, and inquiry. Our Language Policy reflects our understanding that language is central to learning and that learning is a social process that involves diverse cultural backgrounds, the construction of meaning, and communication through more than one language.

This policy is an integral part of a set of policies and is a living document that is reviewed annually.

This Language Policy has been developed with the collaboration of a steering committee composed of the academic and executive directors, data coordinator, International Baccalaureate (IB) coordinators, section principals, admissions officer, lead teachers from the Portuguese and English programs, and parent collaborators.

## 2. Language Philosophy and Beliefs

At School of the Nations, language is seen as a pivotal tool for promoting unity, understanding, and cultural appreciation among diverse individuals. Following the principles of the International Baccalaureate (IB) and Bahá'í teachings, the School regards every teacher as essential to language education and supports the vision of a universal auxiliary language, believing in its power to unravel profound human insights.

The school provides a dual-language curriculum in English and Portuguese up to Grade 5. Starting in Grade 6, Spanish is introduced alongside the existing English and Portuguese courses. Additionally, French is offered to students in the After School Program.

The School's Language Policy revolves around three core principles.

1. **Practical Language Acquisition:** It engages students in listening, reading, speaking, and writing to hone communication skills, fostering cultural and social assimilation.
2. **Understanding Language Structure and Function:** This entails exploring linguistic designs, boosting proficiency, and enhancing communication efficiency.
3. **Using Language as a Reflective Tool:** This focuses on leveraging language to deepen comprehension and foster social skills, values, and interdisciplinary wisdom.

Moreover, the School emphasizes the importance of nurturing students' mother tongues and champions the significance of each, aiming for an inclusive atmosphere. Given its location in Brazil, special emphasis is placed on promoting the Portuguese language and Brazil's culture, encouraging deeper comprehension and a sense of belonging among students.

Continual professional development for staff ensures the Language Policy is theoretically sound and effectively incorporated into teaching methods. Parental involvement is also deemed crucial, with the School actively collaborating with parents to tailor a holistic language learning environment aligned with students' cultural identities and aspirations.

Incorporating Bahá'í beliefs and inspired by the teachings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the School's language philosophy aims to bridge cultural, individual, and national divides, nurturing global citizens who appreciate inclusivity. By adopting a diverse approach to language education and championing a universal language, the institution aspires to broaden international education and disseminate global knowledge.

In essence, School of the Nations places language at its educational core. The Language Policy strives to produce adept language users, fostering appreciation for various cultures and facilitating positive global interactions. By recognizing language's unique role in communication, reflection, and cultural expression, the School aims to further understanding, respect, and unity in its educational community. The School's ultimate vision is a Language Policy that shines a light on a universal language, guiding the way to a more harmonious global society.

### 3. Language Profile

As an international, dual-language institution, School of the Nations serves students representing twenty-four nations, with the primary languages of instruction being English and Portuguese. Approximately ten percent of our students originate from countries other than Brazil and, therefore, demonstrate greater proficiency in languages other than Portuguese. Congruently, ninety percent of our student body is more proficient in Portuguese or English. Nevertheless, our programs support all our students becoming multilingual.

Regarding English language proficiency, a significant portion of our students by Grade 5 meet US language usage and reading norms as established by NWEA MAP assessment normative data studies.

Our school is committed to preserving its international character and diversity; therefore, various languages are spoken among our school population. Proficiency in English is a hallmark of our pedagogical faculty, where 18 percent speak English as their mother tongue, seventy-five percent are multilingual and speak English with native proficiency, and seven percent are bilingual/multilingual and speak English at an intermediate level. Most of our assistant teachers speak Portuguese as their mother tongue, and all are highly proficient in English.

### 4. Language Acquisition

At School of the Nations, all teachers are language teachers, as learning occurs through language. "Language learning and teaching immerses students in the interplay between learning language, learning through language, and learning about language." (From Principles into Practice/Learning and Teaching/Language).

Our goal is to nurture critical readers and writers who engage in active discussions, love reading, and explore diverse forms of expression. Students are encouraged to express ideas and interact

with others holding varied views. Mastering language is pivotal for understanding its role across subjects, developing crucial life skills, promoting intercultural communication, and appreciating cultural diversity.

Our Language Policy aims to support developing proficient language users who can meaningfully engage with others, appreciate diverse cultures, and contribute positively to an interconnected world.

#### 4.1. Bilingualism

School of the Nations offers a schoolwide academic program that strongly emphasizes developing bilingualism in English and Portuguese. Research shows that the benefits of bilingualism are manifold and that “bilingual children tend to display higher levels of cognitive achievement; cope with complex tasks more easily; tolerate ambiguity better; are more cognitively flexible; and can effectively communicate with more people than monolingual children” (August & Hakuta 1997). We share the belief and practice of multilingualism as an essential tool for children living in an increasingly global and diversified world.

In addition to instruction in Portuguese and English, Spanish classes are offered to all students starting in Grade 6. We also offer French classes beginning in Grade 2 as part of our After School program.

#### 4.2. Language in Each School Section

##### 4.2.1. Language in the Early Years—Early Childhood Education

In the Early Years, our central focus is on fostering a holistic developmental journey for children, encompassing both language skills and social-emotional growth. Through dynamic play-based and inquiry-driven learning, we provide a nurturing space for children to cultivate their language abilities and emotional intelligence. In tandem with our commitment to language development, we create an environment that brims with linguistic diversity, offering a vast repertoire of books, songs, and interactive activities in Portuguese and English. Our unwavering commitment to creating an environment that is both language-rich and socially and emotionally nurturing stands at the core of our educational approach. This commitment ensures that all children not only flourish academically but also develop into well-rounded individuals equipped with essential life skills, resilience, and a deep sense of self-worth—qualities that will continue to serve them long after their time in our educational community.

Our core commitment revolves around creating a language-rich and emotionally supportive atmosphere. We believe that effective communication and emotional intelligence are vital life skills. This philosophy extends to our full immersion program, which leverages visuals and technology to enhance learning. By integrating these tools, we provide children with a comprehensive foundation for successful learning journeys while fostering an appreciation for languages and cultures.

##### 4.2.2. Language in Elementary School

In the Elementary School, we continue to develop students’ language skills in English and Portuguese through a balanced literacy approach, which includes reading, writing, speaking, and

listening activities. We use a variety of strategies to support language development, including differentiated instruction, cooperative learning, and visual aids and technology.

Our Elementary program is grounded in the WIDA standards, which guide our English Language Learning (ELL) program. The mission of the ELL program is to foster the growth of language by empowering learners to obtain ample mastery of the English language so they may confidently engage in the critical thinking skills necessary to excel at School of the Nations. Our program prepares ELL students to use English academically and socially, enabling active participation in their mainstream classes and the community.

For students with a first language other than Portuguese, we also offer a Portuguese Language Learning program (PLL) to cultivate comprehensive language skills in Portuguese, enabling students to engage effectively in critical thinking and social interactions. Our PLL program aims to prepare students for academic and social success by offering high-quality, individualized instruction that fosters intercultural understanding and self-awareness as language proficiency is developed.

#### 4.2.3. Language in Middle School

In Middle School, students' language experience evolves as they better understand figurative language and learn to use language proficiently. They delve into various literary genres, from classics to modern works, enhancing their vocabulary and comprehension while appreciating diverse communication styles.

The curriculum promotes cognitive development, critical thinking, language proficiency, and academic language skills. It also aims for students to make sustainable decisions, communicate effectively, and ethically contribute to society.

We offer English, Portuguese, and Spanish classes to foster multilingualism. We also provide additional language support for students who need it through our ELL and PLL programs. These programs are offered in different formats depending on needs.

#### 4.2.4. Language in High School

In High School, we offer a four-year program in which the main language of instruction is English. We also offer Portuguese and Spanish as Additional Languages.

For students who will attend Brazilian universities, the school offers differentiated Portuguese language instruction based on diagnostic testing, electives that offer advanced writing in Portuguese, Brazilian Social Studies taught in Portuguese, and preparation for national university entrance exams in Portuguese as part of our After School Enrichment Program.

##### 4.2.4.1. Diploma Program—DP

The School is in the process of implementing the Diploma Program (DP). Currently, as a candidate school for the DP, the School will offer English and Portuguese as Language A, language and literature courses. Additionally, the school will offer Portuguese and Spanish as Language B Acquisition and ab initio courses.

### 4.3 Additional Language Program

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“Second language acquisition is considered a lifelong learning process.”

Anna Escalante

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The School offers programs in English and Portuguese explicitly designed for students needing additional instructional support to acquire basic language skills. The English/Portuguese Language Learning programs (ELL & PLL) are offered from Grades 2 through 9. When students enroll, they are evaluated by one of the School’s English and/or Portuguese Coordinators, after which ELL and/or PLL classes are recommended. Students remain in the program until they can communicate successfully with teachers and classmates and have acquired functional reading and writing skills.

### 4.4 Mother Tongue Support

Most of our students speak Portuguese or English as their first language and, therefore, are supported by our bilingual context. We believe parents and the wider school community play a crucial role in supporting students’ mother tongues. We encourage parents to support their child’s first language development by providing resources, suggestions for activities, and opportunities to hear and speak the language in various situations at home.

For students whose first language is other than Portuguese or English, the school focuses on the following strategies.

1. Educating staff through professional development opportunities, moving forward with an “additive bilingualism” attitude in supporting the diverse mother tongues spoken at our School.
2. Integrating knowledge of other languages across the curriculum: when language is discussed, students participate in explaining or discovering how their first language works.
3. Using translanguaging as a pedagogical tool to help minority language speakers thrive.

We also support maintaining and developing students’ mother tongues, providing guidance to uphold their linguistic and cultural heritage. Recognizing the influence of language on identity and cultural connections, we strive to create an inclusive environment where all languages are valued and celebrated.

### 4.5 Resources

School of the Nations provides an array of resources to uphold its Language Policy. The library holds a diverse collection of books, periodicals, newspapers, and other materials in multiple languages to cater to the eclectic interests of our multicultural student body. Each year, the collection undergoes enhancements to meet the evolving needs of the school community.

Moreover, we provide modern educational platforms to further our students' language proficiency and academic growth. The selection of these platforms is grounded in empirical evidence, contextual requirements, and relevance to each academic division.

Furthermore, School of the Nations offers After School programs to complement the curriculum, allowing students to delve into arts, sports, technology, and language enrichment. These programs are meticulously crafted to align with the School's vision, mission, and values, thereby enriching the learning experiences both within and beyond the classroom.

## 5. Language and Culture

### 5.1. Intercultural Understanding

We believe language and culture are deeply intertwined, and understanding other cultures is crucial for developing open-minded and compassionate global citizens. Teachers incorporate cultural aspects into language lessons, encouraging students to explore and appreciate diverse cultural perspectives.

### 5.2. Language in the Community

We actively seek opportunities for students to engage with language beyond the classroom, such as at school events and presentations, cultural exchanges, enrichment clubs, on the playground, in the halls, and during celebrations of learning.

### 5.3. English-Speaking Environment

The School strives to create an English-speaking environment on school premises. Faculty members are expected to use English in all areas of the School. Portuguese teachers must know English well enough to converse with peers and take part in staff meetings and training sessions.

### 5.4. Whole-School Events

The School promotes annual schoolwide events to celebrate cultural diversity and develop internationally-minded people.

Our Nations Festival provides opportunities for our community to learn about and celebrate the rich diversity of the human family and recognize the interconnectedness of human life. Each grade from Nursery to Grade 12 studies a different country, its culture, and traditions. Families in the community are invited to contribute, as are embassies. The festival offers the school community the opportunity to reflect on the uniqueness, beauty, and talents that world cultures bring to our community.

Our Book Fair is a remarkable opportunity for students and the wider community to immerse themselves in language and culture through books, literary works, and publications connected to the focal country of study and the School's annual theme. The culmination transpires on the day of the event, when students showcase their creations, encapsulating the essence of the theme.

Additionally, our traditional *Festa Junina* is a cultural celebration of the host country for the whole community. This vibrant festival showcases the traditions of Brazil, bringing together an array of musical performances, fun activities, and irresistible delicacies. Dances also provide opportunities to explore the interconnectedness of diverse cultures.

## 6. Language within the Admission Policy

School of the Nations strives to provide students with the highest quality academic and moral education programs. An essential part of our effort to prepare students to become responsible world citizens is to uphold and foster an international atmosphere within the School.

The School recognizes and values the benefits of diversity. To preserve its international character and diversity, it reserves the right to prioritize applicants who are members of a minority group or citizens of countries not represented in our student body.

During the admissions process, we assess the language proficiency of applicants in English and Portuguese. We provide additional language support to students who need it through our ELL and PLL programs. Beginning in Grade 4, students enrolling in School of the Nations must have a minimum of English language proficiency, which the section principal evaluates.

## 7. Professional Development for Teachers

At School of the Nations, we believe all teachers are language teachers. We provide ongoing professional development and support for our faculty that focuses on language learning to ensure a common understanding of best practices. This includes workshops, seminars, and resources on language instruction and assessment. These professional development opportunities are offered during pedagogical weeks, half-days, international webinars, and conferences throughout the year.

## 8. Parent and Community Involvement

We believe that parents and the wider school community play a crucial role in supporting language development. We encourage parents to support their child's language development at home by providing resources and suggestions for activities. We also engage with the broader community to promote language learning through events, partnerships, and cultural exchanges.

## 9. Assessment and Evaluation

We assess and evaluate language development through various methods, including formative and summative assessments, observations, and student self-assessments. We use assessment data to inform instruction and to evaluate the effectiveness of our language programs. We also use assessment data to identify students who may need additional language support.



## 10. Policy Review

This policy is subject to official annual reviews. The next scheduled review will take place in **August 2024**. It will include all relevant stakeholders, including the academic and executive directors, data coordinator, IB coordinators, section principals, admissions officer, lead teachers from the Portuguese and English programs, and parent collaborators. The Language Policy will be communicated to the school community through the School's website and the Student-Parent Handbook.