

# Language Practices

## *Stevenson Elementary*

### **Overview:**

At Fridley Public Schools we use a research-based, standards-driven, balanced literacy approach to instruction. In balanced literacy, teachers model proficient reading behavior through read alouds and shared reading. Students demonstrate their newly developed reading skills in guided and independent reading activities. This same gradual release model of teaching is also used for writing instruction.

Within this model, students work to meet their grade level standards in reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and presenting. The scope and sequence of specific skills is dictated by the Minnesota State Standards.

We identify five essential components of literacy instruction.

- Phonemic Awareness
- Phonics
- Fluency
- Vocabulary
- Comprehension

At Stevenson Elementary, every teacher is a language teacher, and language learning occurs in all areas throughout the school. We believe in the importance of learning an additional language, value the linguistic diversity of our community, and work to support the mother-tongue development of our students and families.

### **Language Instruction:**

#### *Primary Language:*

The primary language of instruction at Stevenson Elementary is English. We use a research based, standards driven, balanced literacy approach to language instruction.

With this approach:

- teachers model proficient literacy behaviors,
- teachers and students work together to practice literacy skills, and
- students demonstrate their newly developed skills in independent literacy activities.

Within this model, students work to meet their grade level standards in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. The scope and sequence of specific skills is dictated by the Minnesota State Standards.

#### *Primary Language Non-negotiables:*

- All students are engaged in literacy activities for a **minimum** of **90 minutes** per day.
- Different components of literacy may be happening in the classroom simultaneously.

- Teachers use a gradual release model of instruction (model first, then provide differentiated guidance, and then students work independently).
- Teachers will conduct reading groups with every child. Guided reading groups should be flexible. Students may be grouped based on common reading levels or on specific skills that need development.
- Every student participates in a guided reading group at least three times per week with their classroom teacher.
- Students reading below grade level meet with a teacher (classroom, reading intervention teacher, and/or special ed) for additional reading instruction every day.
- Students will practice reading at their independent level every day.
- Students will have opportunities to write every day for a variety of purposes. Writing is taught through Benchmark Literacy and practiced in content areas.
- Unit of Inquiry content is integrated with reading and writing.
- Interventions take place outside of and in addition to the core literacy block.

*Additional Language:*

Stevenson Elementary offers Spanish as an additional language, and all students, grades K-4, receive direct Spanish language and culture instruction. We offer students a second language at the elementary level because research supports that language acquisition occurs best at an early age, and it is an integral part of being an internationally-minded school.

The focus of Kindergarten to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade instruction is learning the spoken word. In 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades, students learn to communicate in both the written and spoken forms. Learning about the diverse cultures of the Spanish-speaking world is a focus in all grades.

Second language acquisition occurs best in the elementary years by integrating a balance of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning activities. Students engage in many activities while learning concepts including, but not limited to, singing songs, playing games, participating in project based learning, interacting with literature, using manipulatives, technology, and participating in cooperative learning groups.

For students already fluent in the Spanish language, this is their chance to be the experts and share their knowledge. Our goal for them is to achieve Spanish literacy. We differentiate classroom instruction to meet their individual needs.

**Interventions:**

*Classroom:*

In September of every school year, all students grades K-4 are given a set of literacy assessments to determine their individual needs. Prereaders at Stevenson Elementary are assessed on concepts of print, onset sounds, letter names, and letter sounds. Emerging and developing readers are assessed on oral reading fluency in addition to

Fountas and Pinell benchmark reading assessment. The results of these assessments are used to determine how a classroom teacher and/or reading teachers will differentiate instruction and provide intervention support.

### **English Language Learners:**

The purpose of EL is to provide English reading, writing, listening and speaking support to students who qualify for services. We provide services to EL's by co-planning SIOP interactive strategies and lessons with the mainstream teachers or by pulling EL students into small groups for English language instruction.

At Stevenson Elementary, we assess new students for EL if their families indicate on their registration form that they speak a language at home other than American English. We use the WIDA W-APT test as our assessment tool to determine if a student needs ELL services.

### **Mother-Tongue Support:**

At Stevenson Elementary, we believe in the need to support our families whose native language is not English. We encourage our parents and students to speak and develop their mother tongue at home. This strengthens the child's language skills while instilling a sense of importance about his/her culture. In addition, we use a number of resources to support mother-tongue development and assist in our communication with these families.

- We interpret written communication into the mother-tongue of the parents as much as possible.
  - TransACT – The web-based program TransACT ([www.transact.com](http://www.transact.com)) provides us with a comprehensive set of forms and notices, written in a wide range of languages.
  - Some specific communications are translated into Spanish, the second largest spoken language at Stevenson Elementary
- Interpreters are used regularly when communicating directly with families at school.
  - EL teachers coordinate interpreters through local, professional interpretation companies to facilitate the communication between teachers and the families who require this.
  - We have access to the Language Line as another interpretation service. This is a national service that allows for a three-way conference call between a staff member, parent/guardian, and the interpreter.
- We have bilingual materials and materials written in students' mother-tongues.
  - Teachers have access to <http://www.readinga-z.com/> which allows them to print off leveled reading materials in Spanish.
  - The media center has materials printed in numerous languages: Spanish, Urdu, Somali, Hmong, Vietnamese, Arabic, and Hindi.
  - While introducing non-Spanish speaking students to the language in Spanish class, fluent Spanish speakers are developing literacy skills.

**Review of Language Agreements:**

Our Building Leadership Team will review the language policy as needed, especially at times where there may be changes in our language practices.

During our PYP self-study and evaluation (once every five years), a committee will be formed to review all areas of the language policy. The committee will be made up of the building principal, PYP coordinator, three or more members of the building leadership team, and teacher volunteers. The purpose of this committee will be to review the current language policy, revise the policy as needed, and plan how to communicate our language policy to the staff.