
SPARK Schools Language Policy

1. Introduction

1.1. The SPARK Schools Language Policy was developed based on requirements and recommendations of the Department of Basic Education’s “Language in Education Policy,” the National Education Policy Act, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, and the SPARK Schools Diversity Policy.

1.2. We affirm that multilingualism and equitable language rights are protected in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and that the promotion of multilingualism demonstrates our commitment to nurturing respect for diversity amongst our Scholars.

1.3 This policy informs the language planning and language management at SPARK Schools in the context of classroom teaching and learning to fulfill our mission to create global citizens.

2. Approach

2.1. There are eleven (11) languages granted official status in the Constitution.

2.2. The Constitution provides for the right of all students to receive education at public education facilities in the official language of their choice.

2.3. SPARK Schools is an independent school network, which has a responsibility to “meet all learning outcomes and assessment standards prescribed” by the Department of Basic Education’s national curriculum standards (Rights and Responsibilities of Independent Schools, Department of Basic Education, 2008).

2.4. SPARK Schools has the right to “choose their own curriculum and examinations” and “pursue a particular philosophy or methodology” (Rights and Responsibilities of Independent Schools, Department of Basic Education, 2008).

2.5. The Department of Basic Education has determined that “being multilingual should be a defining characteristic of being South African” and that “societal and individual multilingualism are the global norm today” (Language in Education Policy, Department of Basic Education, 2007).

2.6. Finally, “a wide spectrum of opinions exists as to the locally viable approaches towards multilingual education” with a school’s responsibility to “maintain home language(s) while providing access to and the effective acquisition of additional languages” (Language in Education Policy, Department of Basic Education, 2007).

3. Languages as Subjects

3.1. All SPARK Schools are English-medium schools, meaning that the primary language of instruction and behaviour management for all subjects, with the exception of additional languages taught, shall be English.

3.2. All SPARK Schools offer as a first additional language, mandatory from Grade R, the most populous previously marginalized African language of the province. For example, the first additional language offered in Gauteng is isiZulu, and the first additional language offered in the Western Cape is isiXhosa.

3.3. Proficiency in the additional language offered may be used as an indicator for promotion or retention in concert with a student's results in literacy and maths, the primary subjects used to determine promotion and retention.

3.4. Where SPARK Scholars require additional support to cement their understanding in a topic, a teacher may act as a translator or ask a helpful peer to translate. This "scaffolded" instruction is a form of structured bilingual education that supports student achievement.

4. Languages as Social and Cultural Media

4.1. SPARK Scholars are free to speak with their peers in the language in which they are most comfortable while on the playground, in common spaces, or in social interactions.

4.2. SPARK Scholars are free to speak with their peers in the language in which they are most comfortable while working collaboratively in groups in the classroom.

4.3. Acknowledging that language plays a significant role in cultural identity, SPARK parents/guardians are encouraged to continue speaking with their child in their home language, to instill cultural values and practices related to home language, and to support their child in expressing these cultural values and practices so that they can be shared with peers at school. We value diversity and the expression of diverse cultures at our SPARK events, when we celebrate public holidays at school, and through our themed units of study, as well.

5. Languages as Media of Communication

5.1. Where necessary due to the composition of the school community, a school leader may provide translation of weekly newsletters, homework instructions and announcements, and other policies sent home. This translation will always be accompanied with the original document in English.

5.2. Where necessary due to the composition of the school community, a school leader may facilitate community meetings and events with dual language translation.

5.3. Where necessary, practical, and accessible, a teacher may translate or request a translator in meetings with parents about a child's behaviour, academic progress, or overall development, providing written and verbal feedback in both English and the parent's most proficient language.

5.4. Vendors and partners will provide communication about their products and service in English, unless otherwise requested directly to the vendor, partner, or provider directly.

6. Rules

6.1. Discriminatory behaviour on the basis of language, intentional or otherwise, will not be tolerated at the School.

6.2. This applies when on the School grounds at any time, but also at other School related events, and also in instances where the Scholar can reasonably be recognised as a Scholar of the School (even if this is online).

6.3. Breaches of this Policy will be dealt with under the Code of Conduct.