



## DEUTSCHE SCHULE RIGA

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### POLICY ON 1st GRADE LANGUAGE SELECTION REGARDING LATVIAN OR RUSSIAN

1. New 1st grade students at Deutsche Schule Riga, in addition to studying German and English, must also select between either Russian or Latvian as their 3rd language of study. Specifically, students must select one of the following four (4) study options:

- Latvian as a native language (only for children whose parents speak Latvian as a native language, and who live in a Latvian language home environment)
- Latvian as a foreign language (specifically designed by the Latvian Ministry of Education for its suitability for the Russian minority)
- Russian as a native language (only for children whose native language is Russian)
- Russian as a foreign language

2. Before you make your selection, please be aware of the following important considerations:

- Your choice highly likely will remain in effect for the entire twelve years of schooling. A later switching forth and back between Russian and Latvian is hardly possible.
- Students who later in life might want to attend a Latvian university should choose Latvian. Proficiency in Latvian is also required of adults who want to be considered for Latvian government positions or professional positions requiring licensing (such as for example school teachers or medical doctors).
- children who choose Russian still get one (1) additional lesson per week of minimal Latvian instruction anyway (but this is not enough to attend a Latvian university later).

3. Also, unfortunately it is not possible to study BOTH Russian AND Latvian to a high level of proficiency starting in 1st grade. Our 1st grade students already must absorb 16 weekly language lessons (6x German, 5x English, 5x Latvian/Russian). This is at the very limit of what a six year old child can deal with. In Germany, a 1st grade curricula features six (6) lessons of German, with English being introduced only in the 3rd grade, and only with two (2) weekly lessons, for a combined total of eight (8) weekly language lessons. If you think that your 1st grade child can absorb more than 16 weekly language lessons you may inquire about x-curricular private language lessons in a 4th language. Also, please keep in mind, that a 4th language (including Russian and Latvian again) is offered at DSR in the 5th grade (either Chinese, Spanish, Italian, French, or again Russian and Latvian – but only at the level of two weekly lessons. Again, taking two weekly lessons of Latvian starting with 5th grade will not be enough to attend a Latvian university later).

4. Finally, our native speaker programs are exclusively reserved for true native speakers. They are not suitable for children who bring only partial knowledge; such as children from mixed ethnic backgrounds or children who had limited exposure such as in another kindergarten or through a nanny. While we allow for the possibility that non-native speakers can keep up with native speakers during their elementary school years, experience shows that non-native speakers often “hit a wall” starting with 4th grade. At that level, the native speaker programs in both Latvian and Russian are incorporating increasing amounts of literature with increasing complexity. Those programs have intentionally been designed for native speakers who are immersed in respectively Latvian or Russian culture and language 24 hours and 365 days per year. Without reading extra Latvian or Russian books (in their free time) and without parents who naturally offer such an environment, even the most talented child is unlikely to succeed. The DSR is definitely unable to replicate such a Latvian or Russian language cultural environment.

The school is challenged enough to offer such cultural background immersion for the German language, which is obviously our main mission. Regarding Latvian, we also, we strictly adhere to all Latvian state standards, including our participation in the annual Latvian national standardized tests taking place at the 3rd, 6th and 9th grade levels. Parents who think that their non-native speaking child will profit by being placed into a native speaker program may accomplish the exact opposite. Our experience shows that the gap is often getting bigger over time, and not smaller (sometimes even despite extra private lessons).

Starting with 4th grade the non-native speakers often are dead last in the class and get bad grades, none of which is their fault. It can amount to psychological stress.

Being best in a class is far healthier for a child rather than being dead last and with no hope for improvement. However, if you feel very strongly about your non-native speaking child attending a native-language program, we might consider so under the following two conditions:

- your child must pass an initial test
- later, if admitted into a native speaking program, and based on academic standing, which we will measure in semestrial grade report cards, we reserve the right, **anytime, unilaterally**, to move a student from the native speaker program into the non-native speaker program.

School principal



Martin Farenfield