

TOOL 8: TRANSLATING AND INTERPRETING MATERIALS FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires schools to ensure meaningful communication with limited English proficient (LEP) parents in a language they can understand and to adequately notify LEP parents of information about any program, service, or activity of the school that is shared with non-LEP parents.

Schools must provide written translations of “vital documents” for any language that makes up 5 percent or more of the school population.

“Vital documents” include the following:

- All section 504 and IDEA documents
- Disciplinary notices and procedures
- Emergency notification forms and other forms most commonly used to communicate with parents
- Report cards and student progress reports
- Notices of parent-teacher conferences or meetings
- Documentation regarding the availability of academic options and planning, including gifted and talented programs, enrollment opportunities and pre-requisites for AP/honors classes, alternative language programs, college preparedness planning, and counseling and guidance services
- Screening procedures that request information from parents about the child’s language background and the parents’ preferred language for communication with the school
- Requests for parent permission for student participation in school-sponsored programs and activities
- Announcements distributed to students/parents that contain information about school activities for which notice is needed to participate (e.g., testing, school performances, co-curricular activities, activities requiring an application)
- Registration/enrollment forms
- Parent handbooks and fact sheets

If written translations are not provided for languages that make up less than five percent of the school population, oral translation of this information must be provided.

How to Identify LEP Parents

- Remember that an LEP parent may have a child who is proficient in English—don’t assume that only EL students will have LEP parents.
- Use the Home Language Survey to identify families where a language other than English is spoken at home.
- Include a notice in your enrollment materials, student/family handbook, website, and other widely disseminated materials letting LEP families know how they can request language assistance.
 - This notice should be translated into at least the top 5 languages common in the school and communities that the school serves.

- Maintain a running record of LEP families and their needs–update it as new information becomes available.

Providing Effective Communication

- Use appropriate, competent staff.
 - Not all bilingual staff will be considered appropriate or competent to provide language assistance.
 - The school must ensure that interpreters and translators have knowledge in both languages of any specialized terms or concepts to be used in the communication at issue.
 - The school must ensure that interpreters and translators are trained on the role of an interpreter and translator, the ethics of interpreting and translating, and the need to maintain confidentiality.
- Use appropriate, competent, outside resources.
 - The use of web-based, automated translation programs/apps to translate documents is discouraged; translations may not be accurate, and confidentiality issues could arise if a web-based system stores information that has been translated.
 - If schools use such programs, they must take steps to ensure that the translations are accurate and that confidential information is protected in accordance with federal and location privacy laws.
- Do not rely on students, siblings, friends, or untrained school staff to translate or interpret for parents.
- Ensure that qualified interpreters are available for IEP meetings, parent-teacher conferences, enrollment or career fairs, disciplinary proceedings, etc.
- Maintain a running list of resources available for translation and update the list at least annually.
- Ensure that school staff are aware of parents that need translation and how to access resources for translation.
- Include a translator function on the school’s website.