

Working with Language Interpreters

Building strong relationships with your students' families is paramount for the success of your students. This partnership between families and principals can promote students' abilities to learn and succeed in school. Parents or guardians who are not fluent English speakers are entitled to free access to language resources and assistance, such as trained interpreters and translators. These services create a warm and welcoming school environment for the parents who may have limited English proficiency, as well as improve the educational outcomes for students.

Requirements when using an interpreter:

- Parents or guardians of students who are English learners must have access to the same quality information as parents or guardians of students who are not English learners. By supporting the use of an interpreter, you are increasing accessibility for your students and their parents or guardians.
- The interpreter is a team member who shares the same goal as you and the teachers in your building: to provide clear, effective communication to your students and their parents or guardians.
- Trained interpreters must comply with ethical standards, and are a trustworthy linguistic and cultural resource. It may be important to reassure your students' families of this.
- Interpreters should not be close relatives or friends of the family. Friends and family members may not be impartial participants in a meeting about a child. They also may not have training on U.S. school and district policies or practices. Having a child interpret for parents or guardians may create stress within the family—particularly if the child's academic performance is the topic of discussion. However, parents or guardians can bring a family member or friend for support.
- When possible, use the same interpreters consistently in order to build familiarity with school processes and to develop a good working relationship.

What to consider when selecting an interpreter:

- Work with trained adult interpreters. If the interpreter is a contractor, ask the interpreting agency about screening and training procedures.
- Interpreters need training on your school and district data privacy policies. If families suspect an interpreter will not keep information confidential, the information gathered may not be accurate, and parents or guardians may lose trust in the school.



- In some cultures, successful communication with an interpreter may require consideration of the interpreter's gender and ethnicity or clan affiliation. For example, it may be inappropriate to provide a male interpreter to communicate with a female parent or guardian. In addition, a parent or guardian from one ethnic group or clan may have conflict with an interpreter from a different ethnic group or clan within the same country.

Strategies to use if finding an interpreter is difficult:

- Contact districts with greater numbers of students from the language for which you need an interpreter and ask for recommendations.
- Contact a professional interpreting agency, particularly one that has "video remote interpreting" as an option. Video remote interpreting uses web cameras or videophones so that everyone can see and hear the interpreter.
- Contact local hospitals or county offices for recommendations.
- Find out whether your state department of health or state judicial branch has an interpreter roster.

Three steps to take when interacting with an interpreter:

1. Brief the interpreter before the meeting:
 - a. Communicate the purpose of the conversation, clarify your expectations of the interpreter during the meeting, and preview any materials you will be using.
 - b. Review any specific terminology, such as test names, common acronyms, or other technical language that the interpreter may need to understand.
 - c. Plan for the meeting time. Interpretation takes longer than a normal conversation because each statement is presented in two languages.

2. Support clear communication during the meeting:
 - a. Arrange seating so that you are facing and speaking directly to the parents or guardians, and so the interpreter can see and hear everyone in the meeting.
 - b. Make introductions and clarify the interpreter's role.
 - c. Make frequent pauses to allow the interpreter to speak.
 - d. Check to make sure the parent or guardian understands what you have said about a topic before moving on to the next topic.
 - e. Be conscious of your own language: avoid jargon, slang, or overly complicated language. If you must use jargon or technical terms, explain them ahead of time.
3. Debrief the interpreter in private after the meeting:
 - a. Ask the interpreter for an observation about the student's performance, the parent's or guardian's understanding, or advice to improve future communication.

Adapted with permission from MN Department of Education's English Learner (EL) Companion to Promoting Fair Special Education Evaluations: Chapter 5..

For more information, see the following brief by the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf>

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See parent-educator toolkit at: www.nceo.info

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