



Success Indicator PI06: All school leaders, faculty and staff are knowledgeable about and experienced in the use of the various modes of communication often necessary for communicating with ELs and their families, including use of the District's interpreters via the telephone, human resources for translation, and translation tools. (5876)

Overview: Federal Law mandates that schools and school districts communicate with all parents using modes and means of communication that facilitate understanding. This mandate is based on the premise that effective communication about children's academic progress and about how to support their children's success outside of school promotes parental involvement, which, in turn, leads to greater student achievement. For the families of many English Learners (ELs), providing translated print materials and using translators for verbal communication is necessary to meet this goal. To be most efficient, all school personnel who communicate with ELs and their families, whether counselors, security officers, teachers, secretaries, or principals, must be familiar with the most effective, up-to-date ways to translate and interpret information.

Questions: What are the rules and regulations regarding translation services for EL parents? What should schools communicate to EL parents using translation tools and resources? How can school leaders ensure all personnel have access to and training on these translation resources?

What are the rules and regulations regarding translation services for EL parents?

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination in schools on the basis of race, color, or national origin. To further address educational discrimination, the 1970 memorandum ("DHEW Memo") to the Civil Rights Act added actions-steps that publically funded schools must take in order to promote equal educational opportunities for all students.

Related to translation services, the memorandum states:

School districts have the responsibility to adequately notify national origin-minority group parents of school activities which are called to the attention of other parents. Such notice in order to be adequate may have to be provided in a language other than English. ("DHEW Memo", 1970, para. 7)

Furthermore, the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 requires that public schools provide professional translators (written communication) and interpreters (oral communication) free of cost to limited English proficiency families and any individual school personnel ("Every", 2015).

How can school leaders ensure all personnel have access to and training on translation and interpretation resources?

Focused, meaningful, and practical professional development training is vital to ensuring that school faculty and staff members know how and when to effectively implement translation services and tools provided by their school district (e.g. LanguageLine, TransAct, and human interpreters) ("Dear Colleague", 2015). Meyer (2017) recommends

that school personnel also be given training on how to use translation resources that are not provided by the district, such as Google Translate, Skype Translator, Remind Translate, and TalkingPoints. Similarly, Castro et al. (2010) propose that school personnel receive professional training on using machine translation tools, but also note potential limitations of receiving strictly literal translations. These authors advise that training should include cultural competency and/or strategies for managing cultural variances and (mis)communications due to language differences (Goodwin & King, 2002; Guo, 2012).

Wisconsin Early Dual Language Learner Initiative suggests that training on using interpreters include establishing guidelines so that parents and interpreters know their roles and expectations during a conference (“How to Use”, n.d.). They recommend having interpreters and translators attend teacher professional development meetings to discuss their work and build staffs’ comfort level with the process.

What should schools communicate to EL parents using translation tools and resources?

Immigrant families may have different levels of involvement in their child’s school for a variety of reasons, such as time constraints, culture shock, their own schooling experiences, and their views on parental roles in education (Ariza, 2002; Beauregard, Petrakos, & Dupont, 2014). Effective communication has been found to improve relationships between LEP families and schools (Beauregard et al., 2014; Guo, 2012). However, one of the most cited reasons that immigrant parents may not be actively engaged with their child’s U.S. school is language difference (Denessen, Bakker, & Gierveld, 2007; Klein, 2008). Such findings suggest that schools and districts have work to do to comply with federal mandates. The following are some key areas and school functions that warrant translation into home languages, as well as suggestions for specific translation tools and resources that school personnel should utilize.

Information about students’ progress: Sirvani (2007) provides evidence for a positive correlation between students’ academic achievement and the extent to which teachers inform parents about their child’s academic progress. In-person conferences with parents with limited English proficiency need to have a district-provided human interpreter present (“Every”, 2015). The benefit

of human interpreters is that the interpretation is more accurate than machine interpretations. The downside of human interpreters is that, if they need to come in person, there is going to be a considerable wait time between requesting and receiving their services (Meyer, 2017). Therefore school personnel should request interpreters well in advance of parent conferences. In order to acquaint interpreters with technical terminology and the general purpose of the meeting, teachers should meet with interpreters prior to having the actual meeting with a parent (Castro, Ayankoya, & Kasprzak, 2010). Moreover, teachers are not the only school personnel who hold conferences with parents; police officers, counselors, and nurses may set up conferences with parents to discuss disciplinary, emotional, or health issues. Consequently, all of these school personnel need to be familiar with the district’s human interpretation services.

When student progress is relayed over the phone, whether it’s a reading specialist explaining a student’s literary progress or a vice principal going over a student’s behavior, the school personnel needs to be knowledgeable about available interpretation resources. Many districts partner with telephonic interpretation services, such as LanguageLine Solutions (Interpretation, 2016; English Learner, 2016). Telephonic interpretation services are easy to use, often simply requiring a district provided access code, and are paid for by the district. However, if the district does not have a telephonic human interpretation service available, schools and parents should use Skype Translator, which is a free machine interpretation service available on laptops and cell phones.

If information on student progress is provided in writing, there are numerous translation tools that schools can use. School districts usually provide translated versions of general academic forms, such as report card notifications and standardized test results. If the school district does not provide translated versions of these academic documents, school personnel can either request the district to translate the documents, or can upload the documents into Google Translate. Teachers and parents can use apps like TalkingPoints (free) and RemindTranslate (paid for) to have text messages instantly translated between dozens of languages at the click of a button. Emails can be made accessible for limited English proficiency parents by requesting the district to translate the text of the email, although this process may take days. For a quick translation of emails, school personnel can



simply copy and paste the text into Google Translate, a free online service that operates in over 100 languages. While machine translators tend to be quick and easy to use, they are prone to inaccuracy because they usually translate words and phrases literally. Paper documents, emails, and texts that are machine-translated should come with a message to LEP parents that there may be inaccuracies. For example, a document that is uploaded into Google Translate should include a note of apology asking readers to forgive any errors.

Information about and invitations to school events and activities:

Whenever a school sends information home to parents about school events, that information needs to be translated for LEP parents (“Every”, 2015). Flyers that are specific to an upcoming or ongoing event, such as a middle school choir performance or third grade family potluck, can be translated by uploading the document into Google Translate. Forms that are general to the whole school district, such as a parent volunteer FAQ, parent volunteer background checks, parent volunteer disclosures, general field trip parent consents, current school year important dates, and school schedule change forms, should have pre-translated versions available through the school district website. If the district does not provide pre-translated versions of these general forms, then school personnel can upload them into Google Translate or make a request that the district provides a translated copy.

Information about academic opportunities: Schools need to keep parents informed about academic opportunities available to students (“Every”, 2015). Some school district websites provide translated versions of general documents, such as gifted and talented information, scholarship opportunities for high school seniors, and high school directories (“Language Services”, 2017). It is necessary that schools provide a translated version of this information to LEP parents, preferably through a professional translation provided by the district (“Toolkit”, 2015).

Information about Federal, State, and District Mandates: Schools are legally obligated to translate government mandates for LEP parents (“Every”, 2015). Many school districts either directly provide translated documents through the district’s website or give school personnel access to translated documents through private translation companies, like TransAct (“Language Services”, 2017). In order to be compliant with federal,

state, and local laws schools need to provide translated copies of information pertaining to Title III, adequate yearly progress, ESSA resources, supplemental education services, public school choice, Title I eligibility, privacy rights, homeless education, unsafe schools, section 504, and more (“Every”, 2015).

Information about ways to support students’ school success: A statistical study of Mexican-Americans concluded that parental involvement at home is positively related to student test scores (Altschul, 2011). Written parent notifications (such as paper pamphlets and flyers) that educate parents about, for example, child development, homework help tips, and the importance of reading everyday, can be quickly and freely translated by being uploaded into Google Translate. It is crucial that any school personnel who creates and distributes parent notifications, whether the principal, secretary, counselor, nurse, or teacher, is experienced with Google Translate and knowledgeable about the extent to which their district can help provide translations.

Information and invitations to be involved in school decision-making: In a case study of Mexican migrant families of secondary students in the US, Trevino (2004) found that parents were significantly more likely to attend school-wide meetings that were presented with Spanish interpretations. Not only should written invitations to school meetings be translated, but there should also be human or machine interpreters available at every school community meeting or parent meeting to facilitate parental engagement. Whoever are responsible for organizing and conducting school/parent meetings, whether parent liaison, secretary, or other school personnel, need to be familiar with the translation resources they have available.

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