

Connecting with Multilingual Families

Effective Interpretation and Translation Practices

Definitions	
Interpretation	Translation
Spoken communication	Written communication
Real-time during meetings	Produced and shared through forms and notices



Who needs an interpreter?

All multilingual families who need language support to access information and engage in their child's education.

When is an interpreter required?

Whenever a multilingual family or guardian is involved in school activities or decision-making for their child, schools are legally required to provide interpretation or translation services. According to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR), these services ensure that families with limited English proficiency can meaningfully participate in their child's education. To promote equitable access, schools must provide interpretation or translation for any program, service, or activity that is called to the attention of parents who are not proficient in English. This includes, but is not limited to: educational meetings, Individualized Education Plan (IEP) conferences, family events, and general written communication.

How is language need determined?

- Ask family members about their preferred language and method of communication upon school enrollment and update each school year
- Enter the information in a district-shared database with an identified code for interpreter or translation need
- All educators check the database to ensure scheduling of interpreters or translated documents

✓ Do	✗ Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use plain language to the extent possible • Use consistent, trained interpreters • Provide materials ahead of time • Use culturally relevant references 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use children as interpreters • Use apps for legal/critical communication • Assume spoken English = literacy fluency • Assume literacy in home language • Ask interpreters to explain/advocate

Interpretation and Translation Guidance

Who can interpret or translate?	Trained and/or certified interpreters and translators. They have the skills to communicate complex terminology and follow a Code of Ethics including confidentiality rules. This is especially important in any legally connected communication such as an Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) or disciplinary meetings.
What makes an interpreter qualified?	Office of Civil Rights guidance states, "Qualified interpreters have knowledge in both languages of any specialized terms or concepts to be used in the communication at issue, and are trained on the role of an interpreter and translator, the ethics of interpreting and translating, and the need to maintain confidentiality."
What about tools like Google Translate?	Google Translate may be useful for informal communication, but it should not be used for official school communication where accuracy, privacy, and legal compliance are required.

Key Terms

Simultaneous interpretation: Interpreting while the message is spoken.

Consecutive interpretation: Interpreting during a pause in speaking.

Low-incidence languages: Languages that are less common.

Dialect: A form of language that is similar to , yet distinct from, the target language and may require special interpreter skills.

Dominant language/language preference: The language a speaker feels most comfortable using.

Literacy abilities or reading and writing comfort: The level of reading and writing skills a person has in one or more languages.

"If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart." – Nelson Mandela

Interpreter Tips

- Schedule well in advance
- Speak directly to the family
- Pause often to allow for interpretation
- Avoid idioms or jargon

Ethical Standards

Interpreters and translators must be accurate, impartial, honest, and keep information confidential. They also need to act professionally and respect everyone involved. *Paraphrased from Code of Ethics, American Association of Interpreters and Translators in Education (AAITE)*

Helpful Resources

[Project Momentum Language Access Plan Template](#)

[Minnesota Department of Education \(MDE\) Language Access Plan Information](#)

[Working with a Spoken Language Interpreter](#)

[MDE Code of Ethics for Educational Interpreters](#)

[TransACT.com](#) All Minnesota schools have free access to TransACT translated materials. Choose log in/register or New User.