



► Frequently Asked Questions: Language Access in Schools

This resource is meant to be a general guide for people with disabilities, not legal advice. For legal advice specific to your situation, please talk to an attorney.

About Language Access in Schools

Education law requires that public schools consider the language needs of children who have limited English proficiency in the child's programs and activities¹. This includes meaningful participation for parents whose first language is not English. This guide explains meaningful participation and gives information for parents about language rights at their child's school.

¹ 34 C.F.R. § 300.324 (a)(2).

I don't speak English. Does my child's school have to give me paperwork in my language?

Yes. School districts must communicate with non-English-speaking parents in a language they understand. Schools must let these parents know about any program, services, or activity they communicate with English-speaking parents about.

Advocacy Tip

If your child's school isn't giving you paperwork in your language, message or email someone at the school to explain that you need them in a different language. You can write this message in your preferred language or use a translator app.

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What does my child's school have to give me in my language?

Schools must communicate with non-English-speaking parents about these things:

- ▶ Language help programs
- ▶ Special education and related services
- ▶ Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings and paperwork
- ▶ Complaint processes
- ▶ Notices about nondiscrimination
- ▶ Student discipline policies and procedures
- ▶ Registration and enrollment
- ▶ Report cards
- ▶ Asking for parental permission for the student to do school activities
- ▶ Parent / teacher conferences
- ▶ Parent handbooks
- ▶ Gifted and talented programs
- ▶ Charter schools or any other school / program choice options

This is not a complete list.

Advocacy Tip

Schools may not give you all paperwork from this list in your language right away, even if staff know you don't use English. Try writing to the school to tell them you need the specific document in another language. It's easier to refer to an email or message than a phone call or conversation.

I don't speak English. Does my child's school need to bring an interpreter to Individualized Education Program meetings?

Yes. Schools must make sure parents understand Individualized Education Program team meetings, including bringing qualified interpreters for parents who don't use English.

"Qualified" means the person has knowledge in both languages of any special terms or concepts and has been trained in the ethics of interpreting – including confidentiality.

Advocacy Tip

You can write to your child's special education director or case manager to specifically ask for an interpreter before any Individualized Education Program meetings. If you meet with the school and they use an interpreter who doesn't seem qualified (for example, they are summarizing instead of translating each word), you can ask for the meeting to stop and resume when the school has a trained interpreter available. It is your right to understand your child's education! Staff may not know the interpretation isn't good unless you tell them.

Other Resources

For more information about this topic, please see the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction guide, *"Providing Language Assistance to Parents,"* in:

- ▶ **English:** dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sped/pdf/par-language.pdf
- ▶ **Spanish:** dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sped/pdf/Providing_Language_Assistance_to_Parents_Spanish_Version.pdf