



All parents and guardians have a right to fully participate in school and district programs, regardless of their English proficiency level.

Under California and federal law, all parents/guardians have an equal right to participate in their children's education because school districts have an obligation to provide English learners with access to meaningful opportunities to learn English and participate in school programs and activities.

School districts are required to:

"Meaningfully" communicate with all parents/guardians in a language that they can understand.

Provide all parents/guardians—regardless of their spoken language—with the same access to information about school and district programs, services, and activities as an English-speaking parent.

Some of the school-related information that school districts should provide in English and other languages include:

- Registration and enrollment in school programs and activities
- Report cards
- Parent-teacher conferences

15% Rule:

Under California law, if 15% or more of the students enrolled in a particular public school speak a primary language other than English, school districts are required to:

- Send all notices and documentation to parents/guardians in that language as well as in English (and parents/guardians may respond in that language or in English).
- Keep track of all the languages spoken and by how many students, parents/guardians.
- Employ professional staff who are trained to provide complete and accurate oral interpretation and written translation, which includes having knowledge of specialized terms and maintaining ethics and confidentiality. Translation or interpretation must be available for any school or district meeting and any materials related to these meetings.

See your district's data on what languages are spoken here: bit.ly/15percentmLrg.

- Special education and related services
- Requests for parent/guardian permission for students to participate in school activities
- Surveys about what home languages students/their families use
- Information about "reclassification," when a student is changed from an English learner student to a Reclassified Fluent English Proficient student (RFEP)
- Student discipline policies/procedures
- Language assistance programs
- Grievance procedures and notices of nondiscrimination
- Parent handbooks



Common challenges and possible solutions:

I need interpretation or translation to fully participate at a school or district meeting.

Send an email (which can be in your home language) to your principal or a district administrator to request oral interpretation or written translation. If possible, do this **three** business days before the meeting. Specify the language in which you need the interpretation/translation, date/time of the meeting, and document(s) you need translated.

Share your concerns if you find that the quality of the translation or interpretation prevents you from participating fully. You can request the interpreter receive training to provide accurate and full interpretation.

My school requested that my bilingual child interpret for me at a meeting instead of a professional.

Schools and districts should not rely on children or untrained/unqualified individuals to provide interpretation. Schools/districts must ensure interpretation staff is fully competent. Follow steps in #1 to request a professional interpreter.

My school says the interpretation and translation that I need is too expensive, and that I have to pay for it.

Parents/guardians are not required to pay for interpretation and translation. Schools are obligated to ensure meaningful communication with families, regardless of their spoken language. Send an email (which can be in your home language) to your principal and copy a district administrator on the email. Describe your interpretation request and your principal's initial response informing you about a requirement to pay. Follow-up in three days if you don't get a response.

In any of these cases if your issue is not resolved favorably you can:

- Follow-up with another email.
- Contact the district superintendent, complaint resolution officer, or staff member in the Office of Equity (attach your original correspondence).
- Contact the Office for Civil Rights at the US Department of Education by calling **(415) 486-5555**, filing an online complaint, or submitting your complaint via email to **OCR.SanFrancisco@ed.gov**.

Legal citations:

- **California Education Code Section 48985(a)**: Describes requirements to notify parents in languages other than English.
- **Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title I, Part A, and Title III**: Details requirements for parental notification.
- **Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964**: Prohibits discrimination based on race, color, and national origin.
- **Lau v. Nichols (1974)**: Upholds a school district's obligation to provide English learners with supplementary English classes to ensure that they have a meaningful opportunity to learn English and participate in school programs and activities.
- **Equal Educational Opportunities Act, 1974**: Reaffirms school districts' responsibilities to take affirmative steps to remove any language barriers that English learners may face that prevent them from having an equal opportunity to participate in the mainstream educational program.

Please visit section 4 (page 35) of our full Resource Guide for Multilingual Learners for more information:
bit.ly/PA-MLRG



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