



The K-12 Educator's Guide to

Language Access and Support

Prepared by Language Network, Inc
www.languagenetworkusa.com



Contents

Introduction	3
Limited English Proficiency: Schools Feel the Strain	5
LEP Students, Families, and the Law	8
Language Access and Support in the Schools	10
Advantages of Working with Professional Language Providers	12
Concluding Thoughts	14



Introduction

The United States is a dynamic and diverse country. This diversity is apparent in our school systems today as there are millions of students from many different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Our American schools are tasked with serving a growing, diverse student population.

It is very common for students of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds to not speak English in the home environment. These students may often speak English at varying degrees of proficiency and their parents English proficiency is often limited to none.



Our schools and educators are facing a unique challenge to ensure equal educational opportunities. In addition, the parents and students are struggling to navigate and understand the education system.



The Federal government, as well as local California legislation, mandates that school systems provide language access and support for these limited English proficient (LEP) students and families. Some schools may only need additional language support for one or two languages; however, many schools in California have a growing need for support in multiple languages.

It is the purpose of this guide to explore language access issues and provide resources and support options for educators. Many school districts are seeking to provide language access to a growing and diverse multilingual classroom.

Limited English Proficiency: Schools Feel the Strain

So, how many limited English proficient students and families are in the schools today? The migration policy institute’s report titled, *“The Limited English Proficient Population in the United States”* estimates 61.6 million individuals in the United States speak a language other than English at home. Of those, about 25 million are classified as limited English proficient (LEP).

There are approximately 8 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 that live with at least one LEP parent or guardian. In addition, 2.3 million children are considered LEP as well. Many of these students are typically English Language Learners and may require special instruction and support at school.

8 MILLION CHILDREN
LIVE WITH AT LEAST ONE LEP
PARENT

According to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#), 9.3 percent of public school students are English Language Learners (ELL). While this is the national average, the percentage of ELL students in public schools varies widely depending upon geographical location.



Who is an English Language Learner?

English-language learners, or ELLs, are students who are unable to communicate fluently or learn effectively in English, who often come from non-English speaking homes and backgrounds.

In cities, ELL students made up an average of 14.1 percent of total public school enrollment.

In smaller suburban cities ELL student enrollment was an average of 8.7 percent.

In towns or rural areas, ELL students made up an average of 3.5-6% of the total student population.

“In the Los Angeles metro area, at least 185 languages are spoken in the home. 54% of the population ages 5 and up speak a language other than English.” (According to the [US Census Bureau](#))



How does this affect California School Districts?

As the student population becomes more diverse, school districts must devise the resources and means to provide language support in the classroom and across school programs.

Language access and support is not limited to special instruction in the classroom for English Language Learners. It also encompasses translation of written materials for communicating with families and parents of LEP students. Language support also encompasses on-site interpreting for school events such as orientations, parent-teacher conferences or telephonic interpreting between school staff and LEP families at home.

It's easy to see how quickly this can become a challenge if your district has more than one or two languages to support.

LEP Students, Families, and the Law

Providing language access and support for LEP students and their families is mandated by law. School districts receiving funding (federal and state) are required to accommodate language needs for enrolled LEP students and families – such as [Title III funding from the California Department of Education](#).

It is important for schools to consider these mandates to ensure compliance with all federal and California state laws concerning language support. We'll dive into some applicable laws below.

Guidance issued jointly by the U.S. Department of Justice and the [U.S. Department of Education](#) states: "Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI) and the Equal Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA), public schools must ensure that ELL students can participate meaningfully and equally in educational programs."



The Department of Justice further notes regulation affecting LEP parents in **Executive Order 13166**: “LEP parents are entitled to meaningful communication in a language they can understand such as through translated materials or a language interpreter and to adequate notice of information about any program, service, or activity that is called to the attention of non-LEP parents.”

For clarification on requirements placed on government funded schools, visit the [Department of Justice and US Department of Education guidance issued in 2015](#). This is a must read for school administration.

Title I and Title III: School programs and policies must be provided “to the extent practicable, in a language parents can understand.”

The **Individuals with Disabilities Act** requires schools to provide language access for IEP team meetings, assessments, or written notice of plans to initiate or change an Individual Education Plan.

Federal:

- **Equal Access and Non-Discriminatory Regulations**
 - **Civil Rights Title VI**
 - **EO 13166**
 - **1974 Lau v. Nichols**
 - **ESEA/NCLB**
 - **Title I**
 - **Title III**
 - **IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act)**

Additional information is provided by BRYCS, an organization dedicated to supporting refugees and their families. They offer a free toolkit for teachers and school personnel.

See the Toolkit, section five: [“Federal Requirements to Provide Interpretation/Translation in the Schools.”](#)

Language Access and Support in the Schools

Many school districts struggle with abiding by regulations, setting up systems for language access and utilizing the right funds to support LEP families. An important first step is to determine what language needs exist for the current school year.

It may be apparent to educators at the schools which students need language support, but it can be less obvious which parents are LEP. To be compliant with federal and state law, schools cannot simply rely on students to identify their LEP parents or to provide interpreting for their parents.

As a benchmark for identifying LEP students we recommend utilizing the [California Department of Education's statistics on EL students](#).

It's important for compliance reasons to do a home language survey to identify LEP families. The school survey should be translated into languages common in the district. For those languages less common, we recommend a cover letter with a statement in the less common language explaining that oral interpretation of the form is available. This will ensure that parents accurately report their languages needs on the form.”

Once families and students are properly identified as LEP, school districts can create support plans to address specific needs. Language access includes both the spoken word (interpretation) and written word (translation).

Interpreting Support:

Since Federal and State laws mandate LEP parents must have access to the same information as English speaking parents regarding school matters, interpreting support may be needed.

For LEP students, there are occasions that may require interpreting services.



Common Interpreting Settings:

- Parent-Teacher Conferences
- Orientation and School Registration
- Disciplinary Hearings
- Counseling Sessions
- IEP Meetings
- Formal Testing Sessions

Common Translation Needs:

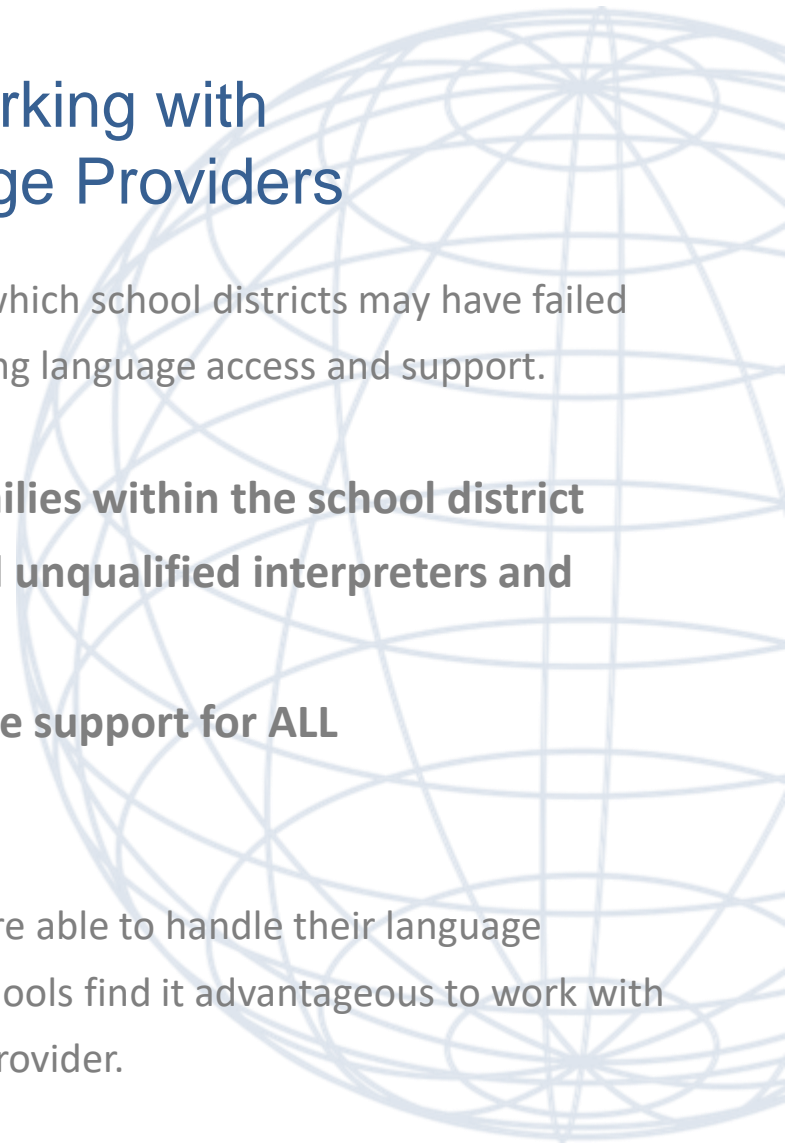
- Special Education and Services
- Language Assistance programs
- Student Discipline Policies
- Registration and Enrollment
- Parent Handbooks
- Parent Permission Notices
- Gifted and Talented Programs
- Report Cards
- Other School Programs

Translation Support:

School systems may require translation support in many departments and settings. This covers any scenario a parent may need to receive written communication in their native language.

An effective language support plan can help schools meet the needs of their LEP population while remaining compliant with state and federal laws.

Advantages of Working with Professional Language Providers



There are three key areas in which school districts may have failed to meet federal standards regarding language access and support.

- 1. Failure to Identify LEP families within the school district**
- 2. Reliance on untrained and unqualified interpreters and translators**
- 3. Failure to provide language support for ALL communications**

While some school systems are able to handle their language support needs in-house, many schools find it advantageous to work with a professional language support provider.

A professional language support provider ensures excellent communication with LEP families and students across a broader scope of languages. Working with a professional language provider also assists with compliance for any applicable laws.

Professional language companies will partner with you to address the needs of your student populations more completely. Thus, they can solve a valuable piece of the complex compliance puzzle and increase the school's ability to serve their community even in less common languages.



Common Scenarios a School District may need to Outsource Language Support:

- Limited staff proficiency in languages spoken by LEP parents in the district
- Multiple less common languages spoken in the district, making blanket interpreting or translation difficult
- Overflow of language services needed to accommodate large LEP population

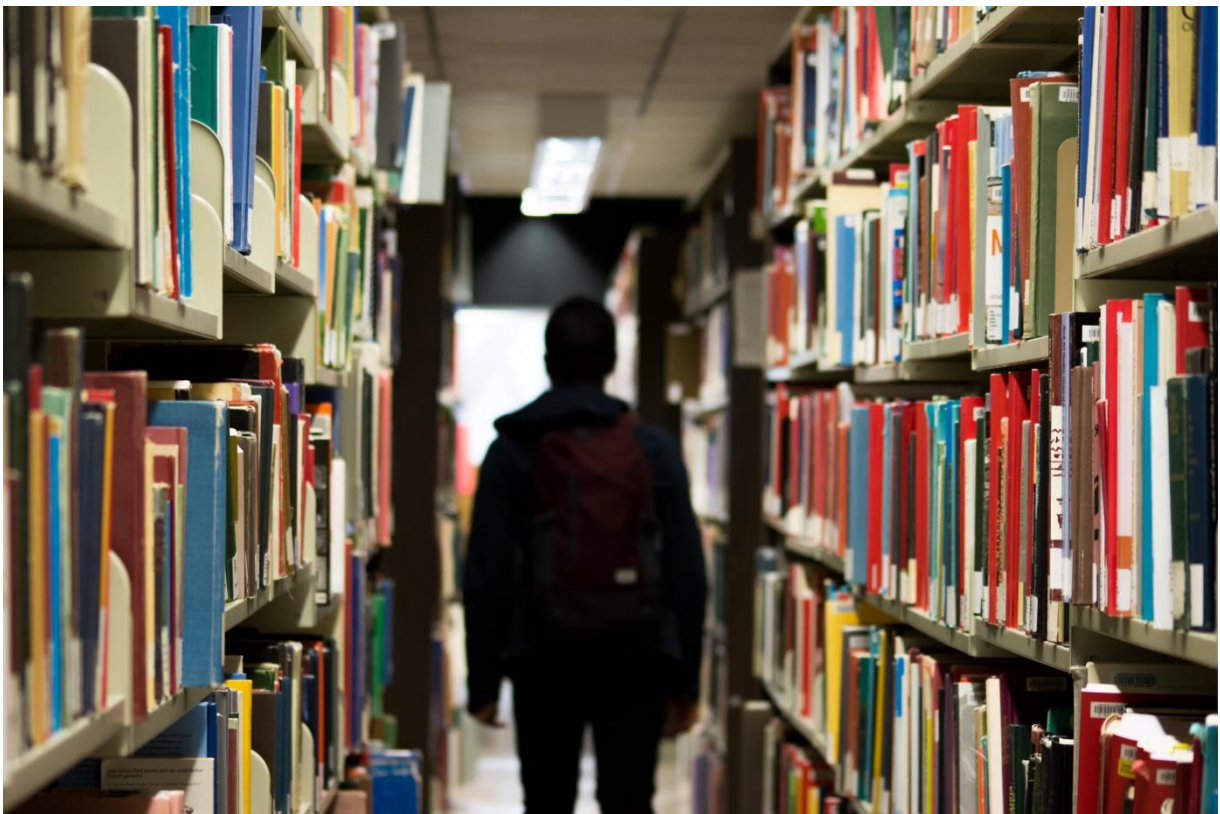
Ways a Professional Language Company can help the School District:

- Providing overflow and backup support for high volume language needs
- Understanding cultural issues involved in language support
- Increasing coverage for less common languages in the district

Concluding Thoughts:

More than ever before, schools are facing a growing population of limited English proficient students and families. Administrators, teachers, and staff are having to balance providing language access to all their LEP families with limited resources and budget to accomplish this task.

In addition to limited resources (budget and bilingual staff) schools must deal with legal and compliance issues. It is imperative for schools to find local and professional resources for language support. This support must include both translation (written materials) and interpretation (spoken word in-person or over-the-phone).





For over 26 years, Language Network has provided quality language services to schools and SELPAs across the state of California. We specialize in document translation and interpretation both on-site and over-the-phone.

We cover over 200 languages -- which include the less common languages spoken in California.

Our mission is to empower our clients to communicate across linguistic and cultural barriers and enrich the communities we serve. We believe there is no substitute for accurate and culturally relevant language support.

In an effort to support our local schools, we provide certified services at affordable rates.

Have translation or interpreting needs?

Want to learn more about your language support options?

Contact our team for assistance:

Office: 949-733-2446

Email: staff@languagenetworkusa.com