![District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education - OSSE logo]

Re-Entry to the 2020-21 School Year:

Strategies and Tools for Supporting English Learners (ELs)

Part 2: Partner with Families

Tuesday, July 28, 2020

Partnership means schools, families and communities are united in the goal of helping *all* EL students, including those who have disabilities, to unlock their full potential. In this vision, school leaders and staff assume the role of proactive initiators of collaboration to understand and serve multilingual families.

> **Communicate with families in their preferred language.**

Families have a right to receive communication in a language they can understand. Meaningful communication in a language they can understand is both a civil right and a pathway to cultivating inclusive, collaborative relationships.

Tips for Working with an Interpreter
Whenever possible, language assistance must be provided by appropriate, competent staff or outside resources. Students, siblings, friends or untrained staff should not be interpreters.

Before the meeting, if possible, brief the interpreter on who needs interpretation and what the meeting is about. Share with the interpreter what will be covered in the meeting, e.g., terminology, context or scenario.

Interpreters need to repeat everything that is said in the room. During the meeting, the interpreter:
- Needs to be next to the client at all times in order to hear the client, as well as interpret back what the provider is saying to the client (if in person);
- Needs complete silence in the background (if online);
- Has control over the flow of information;
- May ask for clarification from family and other staff members in the room;
- Cannot add or omit anything;
- Cannot give opinions; and
- Must keep everything that is said confidential.

During the meeting, these tips will help the interpreter keep up with the speaker and provide the family the information while keeping the flow of the conversation:

- Speak slowly and clearly;
- Use concrete sentences;
- Use clear, plain language;
- Avoid idioms, acronyms and jargon;
- Pause every two to three sentences; and
- Refrain from having side conversations.

Read [Language Access in Times of Crisis: Getting Started with Video Remote Interpreting](#), for more tips on choosing technology to support interpretation.

Translation Software Apps

Numerous translation software programs are available to make it easy to communicate with families in various languages. Examples of such programs are provided below. Local Education Agencies (LEAs) should evaluate which tools are suitable for use. Web-based translation software should be used with caution and is appropriate only when the translated document accurately conveys the meaning of the source document. Any use of web-based automated translation services must comply with the requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regarding personally identifiable information from a student's educational record.

Program	Overview	How to Use During Distance Learning
Microsoft Translator App	Offers translations of text and real-time speech. Parents receive written translations of teachers' speech/comments on their device.	See here for steps on how families can access translations of your remote video/conference calls. (Amharic support not available.)
Remind App	Allows two-way messaging with automatic translation.	For communicating with families via messaging. Ideal for basic messages, e.g. meeting invitations. (Amharic support not available.)
Talking Points App	Allows two-way messaging with automatic translation.	For communicating with families via messaging. Ideal for basic messages, e.g. meeting invitations. (Amharic support not available.)
Microsoft 365 Translate Feature	Has a translate feature currently available for Word, Excel, OneNote and PowerPoint to automatically translate documents in commonly-spoken languages.	Particularly helpful for translating documents. For details, see the English or Spanish instructions.
ClassDojo	Student and parent communication app that translates into 30 languages.	For sharing assignments, schedules and messages with families.

> **Seek input about recent and upcoming distance learning in families' preferred language.**

LEAs should ask families what worked well and what challenges or barriers they experienced with distance learning in the spring, in order to prepare for potential future distance learning periods. LEAs should also ask families for their insights into their students' social-emotional wellbeing and what supports they need for success.

Tools and Resources	How to Use
[Sample EL family survey in multiple languages](#) (DCPS)	Adapt this sample tool, developed by DCPS, for the unique parent and family community at your school, to assist educators in identifying whether any additional resources are needed to support their ELs with distance learning.
Pre-recorded OSSE Training: [English Learner Family Engagement Practices](#)	Gain awareness of the elements of a comprehensive EL family engagement program as outlined in the featured resource, OSSE's School Readiness Reflection Tool.

> **Establish a family engagement plan in which teams of educators jointly ensure ongoing communication with EL students and families.**

LEAs should maintain contact with families in a language they can understand.[1] Families will continue to need written translation or spoken interpretation services to stay connected with school updates. A communication plan for checking in with families at the close of the school year, during summer and at the beginning of the school year can help boost engagement upon re-entry to school. A communication plan can include communication topic, purpose, audience, timeframe, mode and follow-up strategy. Text is often the preferred method of contact, but LEAs should find out families' preferred method and update contact information regularly, since living arrangements and phone numbers may have shifted during this time.

---

[1] [Information for Limited English Proficient (LEP) Parents and Guardians and for Schools and School Districts that Communicate with Them](#); [Language Access Act](#)

Tools and Resources	How to Use
Sample Community and Family Toolkit (TESOL)	Adapt the descriptions of family engagement activities for the COVID-19 education landscape in order to guide families in the creation of an environment that fosters learning.
Reflection and Planning Family Engagement (WIDA)	Lead a jigsaw, based on this Focus Bulletin, to familiarize colleagues with best practices in EL family engagement and to plan for a comprehensive family engagement program at your school. Short on time? Try the following scavenger hunt and discussion activity with colleagues.
Strategies for EL Participation and Engagement during distance learning	Build family communication strategies around practices employed by LEAs and gain ideas for monitoring the outcomes of your family engagement efforts.
Strategies for EL Participation and Engagement PPT	Share resources related to COVID-19 and meeting basic needs, published in languages commonly used in DC, with families.
Sample student participation tracker	Use this sample spreadsheet to design a way to keep track of your LEA's EL student and family outreach during periods of distance learning. Analyze the data from the tracker in a team to determine if modifications to your outreach initiatives are needed.
COVID-19 24/7 Parenting (Parenting for Lifelong Health)	Use the COVID-19 parenting resources, in multiple languages, as a foundation for parent trainings.

Encourage home language and literacy development.

Multilingual families provide unique linguistic and cultural assets that help EL students to develop critical thinking and develop metalanguage awareness. During social distancing, many EL students communicate mostly in their first language, if it is the primary spoken language in their home. As bilingual/multilingual learners, EL students bring cognitive flexibility and resilience from their lived experiences and versatile backgrounds, and research shows that strong home language literacy skills help students build strong second language proficiency.[2] Schools can proactively and continuously encourage families to support their students' home language and literacy development, especially if distance learning is occurring.

Tools and Resources	How to Use
Family guide for home learning in English, Spanish, Amharic, French, Vietnamese, Korean and Chinese	Share in the family's preferred language and discuss together.
Language-focused family engagement WIDA Focus Bulletin	Use this brief bulletin and its guiding questions to spark reflection with staff on family engagement at your school.
Why reading to your kids in your home language will help them become better readers (Colorín Colorado)	Share with the family to help show how multilingualism is a superpower.
Home Habits for Distance Learning	Support the content of a family training with the ideas in this webinar to show multilingual families how they can assist their child during periods of distance learning.

---

[2] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2017). *Promoting the educational success of children and youth learning English: Promising futures* (Consensus Study Report)*. The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/24677