

Family Engagement & Communication

Communication with Parents and Language Access

School districts must provide vital communications in a language that a parent or guardian can understand (WAC 392-160-010). Under Title VI and the Equal Educational Opportunity Act, LEAs must provide language assistance to EL families effectively with appropriate, competent staff or appropriate and competent outside resources. Vital communications include written and oral communications that contain information that is critical for accessing educational programs and opportunities or is required by law. This also includes communications that could have negative consequences for a student's education if the information is not provided in an accurate or timely manner.

Vital oral communications that require an adult interpreter may include, but are not limited to, parent-teacher conferences, special education meetings, and meetings regarding student discipline. Vital written communications that require translation may include, but are not limited to, program information and applications, discipline notices, consent forms, complaint forms, notices of rights, and letters or notices that require a response. Translation or interpretation of vital information must be done by a qualified adult and never by a student.

To ensure compliance with these requirements, school districts should develop a process to identify the language needs of students' parents and guardians. To assist districts in this process, questions relating to parents' or guardians' preferred language are included on the state's Home Language Survey. Since parents' or guardians' preferred language for communication may change over time, it is suggested that districts periodically update this information. School districts should also inform the district and building staff how to access and coordinate translation and interpreter services when needed.

In most cases, interpretation and translation services are a general education responsibility when such services are related to a school district's core instructional services (BEA), general operational/administrative protocols, and requirements.

School districts may be able to utilize program-specific funding for interpretation or translation services when the purpose of the communication is for specific programs. For example, Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program (TBIP) funds can be used to provide translation or interpretation services for TBIP-related communications. Title III funds can supplement TBIP to provide information to parents about the district's English language development program. Title III funds can be used to support the costs of interpretation and translation services that serve to accommodate and facilitate parent outreach requirements under Title III. However, neither TBIP nor Title III can fund translation or interpretation services for school policies, discipline, health issues, free-and-reduced-lunch programs, state-mandated testing, promotion and graduation requirements, parent-teacher conferences, school newsletters, all-school events, special education procedures, or other information that is also communicated to parents of students who are not eligible for TBIP.



To learn about phone interpretation or access online training and sample translated documents, visit [OSPI's Interpretation and Translation Services](#) website.

Parent Notification of Eligibility

Parental permission is not needed to assess a student's English language proficiency for placement purposes except during circumstances as outlined in the Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program Procedures for Eligibility and the state procedures for identifying Title III-eligible Native American students. Districts must notify parents when a student initially qualifies for English language development support services. Districts must also send parents/guardians their student's results on the annual state language proficiency assessment and notification of whether the student continues to qualify for services.

Parent notification of initial placement or continued eligibility must be sent to parents no later than 30 days after the beginning of the school year or within two weeks of placement if the student qualifies for language support services during the school year.

Notification	Required by TBIP?	Required by Title III?
Potential Eligibility, Prior to Placement Testing	No	Only when testing Native American students who are not eligible for TBIP.
Initial Placement in Program	Yes (with parents' right to opt out of services)	Yes (with all eight Title III-required components)
Continued Placement in Program	Yes (with parents' right to opt out of services)	Yes (with all eight Title III-required components)
Annual Score Report	Not required but recommended	Yes
Transition from Program	Not required but recommended	Yes

Although TBIP legislation does not specify the information to be included in the parent notification letter, Title I requires that the parent notification letter include the following components (ESEA Title I Section 1112 (e)(3)):

- the reasons for the identification of their child as an English Learner and need for placement in a language instruction educational program.
- the child's level of English proficiency, how such level was assessed, and the status of the child's academic achievement.
- the method of instruction used in the program in which their child is, or will be, participating, and the methods of instruction used in other available programs, including how such programs differ in content, instruction goals, and use of English and a native language in instruction.
- how the program in which their child is or will be participating will meet the educational strengths and needs of the child.

- how such program will specifically help their child learn English as well as meet age-appropriate academic achievement standards for grade promotion and graduation.
- the specific exit requirements for such program, the expected rate of transition from such program into classrooms that are not tailored for English Learners, and the expected rate of graduation from secondary school for such program if funds under this title are used for children in secondary schools.
- in the case of a child with a disability, how such program meets the objectives of the individualized education program of the child; and
- information pertaining to parental rights that includes written guidance detailing:
 - Parents' right to have their child immediately removed from such program upon their request; and
 - Parents' option to decline to enroll their child in such program or to choose another program or method of instruction, if available; and
 - Assisting parents in selecting among various programs and methods of instruction, if more than one program or method is offered by the eligible entity.

OSPI provides districts with a [template notification letter for both initial and continued eligibility that includes these required components](#). It has been translated into several languages. The expected rate of graduation (component 6) can be reported as the most recent district five-year graduation rate found on the Limited English tab in Appendix F of the Graduation and Dropout Statistics Annual Report (under Graduation and Dropout Statistics). The expected rate of transition (component 6) can be reported as the median number of years that students remain in program in the district.

Districts must retain a copy of all parent notification letters in students' cumulative files to demonstrate program compliance.

Parent Waivers

Under the Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program, WAC 392-160-015(2), parents have the right to opt their children out of TBIP services. Such a waiver of services must be documented and kept on file by the district.

However, an administrator knowledgeable about the program must communicate the benefits of program participation to parents or guardians in a language they can understand.

Districts must document the parent refusal of TBIP and Title III services and keep a signed copy of the document in the student's cumulative file. The state provides a [template form with translations that districts may choose to provide to parents for this purpose](#).

English Language Learners whose parents have waived TBIP/Title III services are reported to the state with an instructional model code of "P". Districts do not receive supplemental TBIP or Title III funding for these students but must still periodically review their progress with school staff and annually assess the student's progress toward English language proficiency. The [January 7th, 2015 Dear Colleague Letter](#) states that districts retain the responsibility to ensure that the

student has an equal opportunity to have his or her English language and academic needs met when parent/guardian(s) decline TBIP program participation. Districts can meet this obligation in a variety of ways, including adequate training to classroom teachers on second language acquisition.

Students under a parent waiver must continue to take the annual state English language proficiency assessment until the student meets program exit criteria. TBIP-eligible students who have met exit criteria are eligible for academic supports through TBIP funding if they are not at grade level, regardless of whether they were previously under a parent waiver.

A parent may choose to withdraw the waiver at any time with a written request. In this situation, the district changes the student's instructional model code in CEDARS and begins providing English language development services to the student.

Title III Family and Community Engagement Requirements

Title III requires that LEAs:

- provide and implement effective activities and strategies that enhance or supplement ELD programs for English learners which must include parent, family, and community engagement activities.
- inform parents on how they can be active participants in:
- assisting their children to learn English,
- achieving high levels in core academic subjects, and
- meeting the state's academic content and student academic achievement standards as all students are expected to meet.
- implement an effective means of outreach to parents which must include holding, and sending notice of opportunities for, regular meetings for the purpose of formulating and responding to recommendations from parents of English Learners.
- strengthen and increase parent, family, and community engagement in programs that serve ELs.

Title III can fund:

- Parent trainings supplemental to trainings offered to all parents, such as ESL classes, technology, homework support, understanding the US school system, and ways parents can help their children succeed academically.
- Costs for parent meetings if agenda items are specific to the EL program.
- Academic enrichment activities for children at meetings for parents of multilingual/English learners.
- Translation/interpretation specific to the EL program.
- Supplemental activities in situations where the LEA is already meeting its obligations to ensure meaningful communication with EL families in a language the families can understand.
- Other activities as approved in Title III family and community engagement plan, such as home visits.

TBIP and Title III CANNOT fund:

- Parent outreach coordinator or liaison whose duties are to communicate information specific to basic education (discipline, attendance, academic progress in core content areas, school procedures, graduation requirements).
- Family engagement activities which are disassociated from the goals of 1) improving the English language skills of ELs and 2) assisting parents and families in helping their children improve their academic achievement and becoming active participants in the education of their children.
- Childcare
- LEAs' language access obligations to families for non-EL specific messaging, as specified under Title VI and the EEOA.

Food at Family Engagement Meetings – Reasonable and Necessary Costs:

Generally, there is a very high burden of proof to show that paying for food and beverages with federal funds is necessary to meet the goals and objectives of a federal grant. When an LEA hosts a meeting, the LEA should structure the agenda for the meeting so that there is time for participants to purchase their own food, beverages, and snacks. In addition, when planning a meeting, LEAs may want to consider a location in which participants have easy access to food and beverages.

While there may be some circumstances where the cost would be permissible, it is likely that those circumstances will be rare. LEAs, therefore, will have to make a compelling case that the unique circumstances they have identified would justify food and beverage costs as reasonable and necessary.

Funds of Knowledge Toolkit:

The [Funds of Knowledge Toolkit](#) provides resources for gathering information about students' "funds of knowledge" which is a term originally used by Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (1992) to describe the historical accumulation of abilities, bodies of knowledge, assets, and cultural ways of interacting that were evident in U.S.-Mexican households in Tucson, Arizona. Although these funds of knowledge were demonstrated as culturally, socially, and cognitively complex, it was pointed out that educators were not using them as a resource to enhance their students' academic progress. Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti's (2005) work on teachers engaging families outside of school contexts provided rich examples of how to recognize particular funds of knowledge and apply them in a school setting. In the past decade, many scholars have extended the funds of knowledge concept in a variety of different ways (see Hogg, 2011, and Rodriguez, 2013 for reviews of the literature).

Home Visits Toolkit:

The [Home Visits Toolkit](#) provides practical tools to support classroom teachers and other educators in conducting home visits as a means of increasing collaboration with families of multilingual English learners and engaging families to learn more about their funds of knowledge.

For more resources on ensuring meaningful communication with parents, see the [U.S. Department of Education's EL Toolkit Chapter 10](#).