



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

Translation and Interpretation Services in New York City Public Schools

In New York City public schools, parents who do not speak English have a right to free translation and interpretation services in order to communicate with their children's schools and other Department of Education (DOE) offices and participate in their children's education. Parents have the right to have their children's school records and other important documents translated into their native language and to have interpreters available at meetings with school and DOE staff.

Who has a right to translation and interpretation services?

All parents whose primary language is not English have a right to free translation and interpretation services. A student does not need to be identified as an English Language Learner (ELL) for a parent to request translation or interpretation.

Parents should never be told to bring their own interpreters and children should never be asked to translate or interpret for their parents.

In which languages are services available?

Translation and interpretation must be available in the nine most common languages other than English— Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, French, Haitian Creole, Korean, Russian, Spanish and Urdu. However, all parents, including those who speak other languages, may request translation and interpretation services in their native language.

When is the DOE required to provide translation?

The DOE must provide translation of all documents containing important information about your child's education in a timely manner. This includes:

- General notices, such as information about parent teacher conferences, student and parent handbooks, and school application forms
- Documents about your child, such as report cards and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)

When is the DOE required to provide interpretation?

The DOE must provide interpretation services so that you can communicate with school staff and DOE staff about your child's education. For example, schools must provide interpretation services at parent-teacher conferences and IEP meetings. Family Welcome Centers must provide interpreters when parents are enrolling their children in school. Superintendents' offices must provide interpreters when parents call with school-related questions.

How do I get these services?

You should request translation and interpretation services directly from your child's school or the DOE office that you are talking to about your child's education. For interpretation, the DOE may provide interpretation in-person or over-the-phone. Over-the-phone interpretation is available 8am to 3 pm, Monday through Friday.

Your child's school must determine your primary language and whether you need help communicating with the school within 30 days of your child starting school. Your child's school must also keep a record of your primary language.

All Schools must give you a copy of the Bill of Parent Rights and Responsibilities, which includes information about your right to translation and interpretation services. All schools must also post signs clearly stating that translation and interpretation services are available.

Do schools know that they must provide me with translation and interpretation services?

Yes! All schools have Language Access Coordinators who educate school staff about their obligation to provide parents with translation and interpretation services.

What should I do if I am not provided translation and interpretation services?

If you are not provided translation or interpretation or receive poor quality services, please call 311 or the DOE's complaint line at (718) 935-2013.

Still have more questions?
Please Call the Jill Chaifetz Education Helpline
Monday through Thursday • 10 am to 4 pm
1-866-427-6033 (toll free)

This fact sheet does not constitute legal advice. This fact sheet attempts to summarize existing policies or laws without stating the opinion of AFC. If you have a legal problem, please contact an attorney or advocate.

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