



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Washington State Multilingual Learners: Policies and Practices Guide

2024

CHAPTER 7: FAMILY COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Family Communication and Language Access

School districts must provide vital communications in a language that a parent or guardian can understand ([WAC 292-160-010](#)). Under Title VI and the Equal Educational Opportunity Act, LEAs must effectively provide language assistance to EL families with appropriate, competent staff or appropriate and competent outside resources.

Vital communications include written and oral communications containing information critical for accessing educational programs and opportunities or required by law. This also includes communications that could have negative consequences for a student’s education if the information is not provided accurately or timely. Vital oral and written communications may include but are not limited to, those listed in the table below.

Vital Oral Communications include:	Vital Written Communications include:
• Parent-teacher conferences • Special education meetings • Meetings regarding student discipline	• Program information and applications • Discipline notices • Consent forms • Complaint forms • Notices of rights • Letters or notices that require a response

A qualified interpreter or translator must translate or interpret vital information 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 in the state’s [Home Language Survey](#). Since parents’ or guardians’ preferred language for communication may change over time, districts must provide families the opportunity to update this information annually. School districts should also inform the district and building staff how to access and coordinate translation and interpretation services when needed.

In most cases, interpretation and translation services are a general education responsibility when they relate 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:

- 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 accommodate and facilitate parent outreach requirements under Title III.

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.

Family 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 MLs.

Family Engagement Activities

Family engagement is an important and required component of programs for multilingual learners. Activities for family engagement can include a wide variety of opportunities for families of multilingual learners to develop their knowledge and skills in supporting their children to be successful academically and in their language development. These include activities such as:

- Parent trainings supplemental to trainings offered to all parents, such as ESL classes, technology, homework support, understanding the U.S. school system, and ways parents can help their children succeed academically.
- Family meetings or events that are specific to the TBIP program including academic enrichment activities for children during those meetings or events.
- Supplemental activities in situations where the LEA is already meeting its obligations to ensure meaningful communication with ML families in a language the families can understand.
- Other activities approved in Title III family and community engagement plans such as home visits.

All of these activities can be funded using Title III funds and provide increased engagement and connections between the family and the school. Title I, Part A, may also be a source for funding family engagement for families of multilingual learners.

Funding Restrictions

While Title III can be used for a wide range of family engagement activities, there are some specific activities that may not be funded using Title III or TBIP which include:

- 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 MLs 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 during family engagement activities
- Language access obligations to families for non-ML-specific messaging, as specified under Title VI and the EEOA

Food at Family Engagement Meetings

Generally, there is a very high burden of proof to show that paying for food and beverages with federal funds is a “reasonable and necessary cost” to meet the goals and objectives of a federal grant. When an LEA hosts a meeting, the LEA should consider the following options:

- Provide “light refreshments.” Follow district guidelines to determine the amount allowable for light refreshments.
- Use Title I or other more flexible funds to provide meals/refreshments.
- Consider partnering with a school organization like the PTA to offer refreshments or low-cost food for purchase.

Family Engagement Resources

WIDA offers many useful resources for family engagement and for professional development of educators on working with multilingual families. These include:

- [ABCs of Family Engagement](#) – This short handout enumerates six key considerations for building relationships with families and strengthening family engagement practices including guiding questions to consider and use for discussion.
- [Language-Focused Family Engagement](#) – This WIDA Focus Bulletin includes a reflection tool for educators on the four pillars of language-focused family engagement as well as examples from schools and discussion questions for professional learning.
- [Promoting Equity for Young Multilingual Children and Their Families](#) – This WIDA Focus Bulletin is centered on the early learning environment and establishing positive relationships with multilingual families to encourage home language use and strong partnerships.

WIDA also offers shorter versions of family engagement materials called WIDA Snapshots. Many of these are focused on early learning and strong connections with families.

- [Engaging with Families of Young Multilingual Children](#) – This WIDA Snapshot uses the ABCs of family engagement with a focus on early learning.
- [Gathering and Reflecting on Families' Language and Cultural Goals](#) – This WIDA Snapshot focuses on conversations with families of young multilingual learners and can be used to prepare for family conferences.
- [Multilingual Children and their Families](#) – This WIDA Snapshot provides ideas for how to promote use of home languages with families of young multilingual learners.

OSPI offers additional tools for supporting family engagement as part of the [Whole Child Initiative](#). These tools include:

- [Introduction Module: Authentic Family and Community Engagement](#) which is an introductory video that explains the purpose of the toolkit and videos.
- [School Leader Toolkit](#) which includes 10 family and community engagement modules.
- [Learning Module Playlist](#) which provides a series of videos to introduce each of the modules.

These tools can be used in schools to engage with all families, including multilingual students and their families.

Funds of Knowledge Toolkit

The [Funds of Knowledge Toolkit](#) provides resources for gathering information about students' "funds of knowledge," which is a term initially 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 recognizing and applying funds of knowledge in a school setting. In the past decade, many scholars have extended the funds of knowledge concept in various 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 learners and engaging families to learn more about their funds of knowledge.

References

González, N., Moll, L.C., & Amanti, C. (2005). Funds of knowledge: Theorizing practices in households, communities, and classrooms. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Hogg, L. (2011). Funds of knowledge: An investigation of coherence within the literature. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27, 666-677.

Rodriguez, G. (2011). Power and agency in education: Exploring the pedagogical dimensions of funds of knowledge. *Review of Research in Education*, 37(1), 87-120.

Vélez-Ibáñez, C.G., & Greenberg, J.B. (1992). Formation and transformation of funds of knowledge among U.S. Mexican households. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 23(4), 313-335.

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