School District 197



Language Access Plan

isd197.org/LanguageAccess

SCHOOL DISTRICT 197

West St. Paul + Mendota Heights + Eagan Area

SCHOOL DISTRICT 197
Language Access Plan

In School District 197, we believe...

- People thrive when they feel connected, trusted and affirmed.
- Communication and collaboration strengthen school, family, and community relationships.
- Our diversity makes us stronger.
- We are all accountable for removing barriers and creating equitable systems.

OUR COMMITMENT

School District 197 is committed to ensuring every family has equitable access to information. We recognize that the many languages spoken by our families are a powerful asset that strengthens our schools and community. Our Language Access Plan builds on this strength by removing communication barriers and ensuring families can engage with our district in a language they understand.

Our Language Access Plan outlines how School District 197 provides meaningful access to educational programs and services for students and families who communicate in a language other than English, affirming that multilingualism enhances learning, connection, and belonging across our district.

More than 50 languages are spoken in School District 197 homes. Spanish and Somali are the most common after English, with about 18% of families speaking Spanish and 2.5% speaking Somali. Our most frequently spoken languages include: English, Spanish, Somali, Amharic, Afan Oromo, Hmong, Arabic, Kiswahili/Swahili, Pashto, Chinese, and Tigrinya.

This rich linguistic diversity enhances the cultural and educational fabric of our school district. By honoring and supporting the languages spoken in our community, we create a more inclusive, welcoming, and connected environment where students and families can thrive.

All families have the right to:

- Receive school and district communications and information about their student's education in their preferred language
- Access an interpreter for important meetings about their student
- Receive these services free of charge

DEFINITIONS

- **English Language Development (ELD) -** a program in School District 197 that provides academic English language support to students with English Learner status
- **English Learner (EL) -** a student whose primary language is not English and requires language support as defined by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE)
- **Interpretation -** rendering a spoken or signed communication from one language to another
- **Language Access Plan -** a written document that describes how the district, schools and programs will provide language services to students and families who prefer communication in a language other than English
- **Language Services -** various resources facilitating communication between speakers who communicate in a language other than English, in a timely and meaningful way
- **Meaningful Access** - refers to language assistance that results in accurate, timely, and effective communication at no cost to the individual.
- **Multilingual Learner** - a student who is developing proficiency or is proficient in more than one language
- **Multilingual Staff** - staff who are fluent in multiple languages but are not trained interpreters. They can assist with simple tasks, but should not interpret in meetings with families unless they have been trained to serve as "qualified interpreters"
- **Preferred Language** - the language in which families request services, resources and communications from schools, programs and the district
- **Qualified interpreters** - trained professionals who follow the National Code of Ethics and Standards to facilitate communication between individuals who do not share a common language (this includes, but is not limited to, Certified interpreters who have passed state or national exams)
- **Translation** - converting written text from one language into another, maintaining the original material's intended meaning. A sight translation (reading a document aloud) may be used in place of written translation at a family's request or for languages that rely on oral tradition (i.e. Hmong, Somali).
- **Vital Documents** - materials that are essential to a family's ability to access services in School District 197 (enrollment forms, report cards, Individualized Education Plans and notices, disciplinary notices)

LANGUAGE IDENTIFICATION

Families: Preferred Language

During enrollment, parents and guardians identify their preferred language. This information is recorded in their profile within the district's student information system, Infinite Campus. This enables staff and schools to identify families who need language assistance and provide appropriate language services. Educators are encouraged to ask families about their communication preferences. Families can update their preferred language at any time by contacting their school.

Students: English Learner (EL) Identification

All families complete the Minnesota Language Survey (MNLS) during enrollment, which identifies a student's language experiences through parent or guardian responses. If the survey indicates a potential English Learner, the district administers a state-approved language proficiency assessment to determine whether English language development services are needed and identify the student with EL status. Families are notified in the required timeline if their child qualifies for EL services using the District's Parent Notification Form. The notification includes the amount of time and type of EL service the child receives and informs guardians of their right to refuse services. Detailed information about ELD services in School District 197 can be found in our English Language Development Program.

NOTICE OF LANGUAGE SERVICES

School District 197 is proud to provide language services in a variety of ways. Families are informed of language services through school/district handbooks, webpages, and e-newsletters.

INTERPRETATION

School District 197 provides interpretation from qualified interpreters for communications related to academic progress and outcomes (conferences) as well as progress, determinations, and placement of students in specialized programs and services. In addition, interpretation is available during enrollment and for informational meetings.

How to Access Interpretation Services

Staff: The Staff Hub on the district website has detailed information for a staff member to schedule district interpreters (Spanish). Certified interpreters are prioritized for Special Education due process meetings. For instances when our district interpreters are unavailable or to meet other language needs, including American Sign Language (ASL), the Staff Hub also includes a list of agencies for staff to contact.

How to Access Interpretation Services - Continued

Families: When families visit a school or district site, the front desk staff will have individuals to indicate their language. This will enable staff to arrange appropriate language assistance, either in person or via LanguageLine. The Family Hub on the district website has an Interpreter page for families to request interpretation services for meetings. Families can also contact their schools directly to make this request. (It's important to note that district staff are expected to ensure interpretation services are provided to families for general informational meetings and scheduled individual student meetings, so the need for families to initiate a request in these cases should be minimal.)

Important Guidance: **Reliance on untrained students, siblings, friends, or staff to interpret is not acceptable.** Students and untrained adults should not act as intermediaries in parent/guardian communications.

TRANSLATION

School District 197 proactively translates many vital documents into Spanish, including district policies, regulations, and procedures. In addition, district procedures for staff include the expectation that any written communication being sent broadly to families must be provided in both English and Spanish.

Website Translation: Families can view all district and school websites in their preferred language by selecting their language preference using the language menu on the home page.

Digital Communication Translation: School District 197 uses communication tools that:

- Send information in families' preferred languages
- Allow families to choose their preferred language for viewing communications
- Enables staff to send and receive text messages in the family's preferred language

How to Access Translation Services

Staff: The Staff Hub on the district website includes a page listing our guidelines for translation requests as well as translation expectations for family communications.

Families: Families can request a translation by contacting their school.

Important Guidance: Reliance on unapproved automated translation tools (such as Google Translate) is not recommended. In addition, when families cannot read written materials, oral interpretation may be necessary.

STAFF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

School District 197 staff are responsible for ensuring meaningful and timely access to information in a family's preferred language. This includes principals, teachers, office staff, counselors, social workers, school nurses, district staff and other personnel.

Staff Training

Preparing staff to support multilingual families includes in-person meetings and new staff training. These sessions include reviewing our district translation and interpreting services and the guidelines for accessing them.

Multilingual Family Support

School District 197 employs a variety of staff who work either directly or indirectly to support our multilingual families:

Districtwide Translators/Interpreters: School District 197 employs two Spanish-speaking translators/interpreters.

District "On Call" Qualified Interpreters: School District 197 is creating a pool of multilingual staff who can serve as "on call" qualified interpreters during busy times of the year (like Fall and Spring conferences). Please note that multilingual staff who are serving as "on call" interpreters will focus their attention on interpretation and not be acting in the other capacity (teacher, cultural liaison, etc.)

English Language Development (ELD) Professionals: Highly qualified, ELD licensed teachers provide multilingual learners additional instruction in English language development to ensure students can access grade-level content.

Cultural Liaisons: School District 197 employs Cultural Liaisons to support our diverse community, helping families feel a sense of belonging and empowered to engage in their children's education. There are seven Spanish-speaking site based liaisons and one Somali-speaking districtwide liaison.

Special Services Professionals: Due to their unique role in working with families, our special services staff receive specific annual training and reminders on expectations for translation of documents and coordination of interpreters as well as the inclusion of multi-model communication styles, like the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) methods for family meetings.

English Language Development

All EL students receive the greatest part of their instruction in general education classrooms. However, the district's English Language program incorporates a content-based English language development model:

- Classroom instructional supports
- Collaboration between General Education and EL teachers
- Stand-alone ELD classes with EL teachers
- Sheltered content classes co-taught by EL and Gen Ed teachers
- Intensive newcomer instruction

LANGUAGE ACCESS COMMUNICATION

School District 197 actively shares the Language Access Plan to ensure families and staff are aware and have the training and resources to use it effectively.

Families: The Language Access Plan is shared in the Family Handbook, Student Handbook and in newsletters. It is available in an ongoing way via the Family Hub on the district website.

Staff: The Language Access Plan is shared in the Staff Handbook and through staff newsletters. It is available in an ongoing way via the Staff Hub on the district website.

Community: The Language Access Plan is available on the district website.

LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN APPEAL PROCESS

Families may contact the school principal to appeal the accommodations of the language access plan if they believe the plan was not followed. The principal will respond to the appeal within five school days. If the family is not satisfied with the outcome, the family may appeal to the Assistant Superintendent or the Director of Special Services (if an instance is related to an IEP meeting).

LANGUAGE ACCESS REVIEW

School District 197 reviews and evaluates the Language Access Plan in an ongoing way to ensure it effectively meets the needs of our diverse community. The School Board will formally review and make updates to the plan every two years as required by Minnesota Statute 123B.32.

PURPOSE AND LEGAL FOUNDATION

The Language Access Plan provides information about the Language Access tools, processes, and resources available for students, families, and staff in School District 197.

The purpose of this Language Access Plan is to ensure that School District 197 provides timely, meaningful, and equitable access to information and services for families and community members who prefer to communicate in languages other than English. It is designed to remove language barriers and empower all families to engage in their children's education. This plan aligns with Minnesota Statute 123B.32 and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which require school districts to provide and utilize processes and procedures that effectively assist students and adults who communicate in a language other than English.

Scan QR code to visit Language Access Plan online