

Language Access Plan to Ensure Effective Communication with Students and Families

Overview

Owatonna Public Schools (OPS) is a linguistically diverse community of students and families. The number of languages spoken by OPS students and families changes annually but has generally been more than 20 for several years. Currently, the most commonly spoken languages other than English are Spanish and Somali, spoken by hundreds of students and their families. Most other languages are spoken by fewer than five students. Regardless of how common a student's or family's language may be, Owatonna Public Schools supports their linguistic needs through implementation of this language access plan.

Owatonna Public Schools' language access plan provides a blueprint for bringing the district into compliance with state and federal language access requirements (see Policy Foundation below). OPS's language access plan is designed to ensure equitable access to school and district services to students and their families whose home language is not English. The plan was developed collaboratively among various departments, including the Multilingual Learner, Communications, Technology and Innovation, and Special Education Departments. Consultation with our Success Coaches (i.e. cultural liaisons) was particularly helpful. Although this document provides more details about language related services, a brief summary of these services includes:

- remote and in-person interpretation with district Success Coaches
- written classroom translation for students and families
- Language Line for translation and live phone-based interpretation
- Translate My Slide for instruction
- TransAct for state and federally mandated communication
- One-click website translation
- Campus notifications in home language
- Talking Points for classroom communication
- American Sign language interpretation
- Relay Services
- Screen Reader software

Section 1: The Plan

Identification and Assessment of Language Assistance Needs

As indicated above, there are two primary customers for language access services, one, students who benefit from language support and, two, parents and guardians who require an interpreter.

Students

Broadly described, there are two groups of students who benefit from language support. One group is Multilingual Learners (MLs), also called English Learners (ELs). This group includes students whose home language is American Sign Language (ASL). The second group is students whose Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) stipulate language support. This could include, for example, students who are deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, or speech disabled. The identification of MLs follows a state and federally mandated process and is described in Owatonna Public Schools' Language Instruction Education Program (LIEP) document, linked at our district's [Multilingual Services webpage](#). The identification of students who benefit from language support as related to an IEP is also a state and federally mandated process and is described in Owatonna Public Schools' [Special Services webpage](#).

Families

Families are identified for language assistance upon enrollment. When enrolling, parents or guardians indicate whether they need an interpreter. This creates a flag in the district's student information system (SIS), Infinite Campus, indicating "Parent Requires Interpreter." The relevant school(s) is informed of this flag so that personnel use appropriate language access services, described in detail below.

Description of Language Access Services

In this section, each language access related service is identified and further details are provided, including the **target customer, likely point(s) of service, district personnel responsible for implementation, and district personnel responsible for procurement, maintenance / supervision, and review of that service**. It is the responsibility of the Coordinator of Multilingual Learner and Equity Programs (henceforward "ML Coordinator") to coordinate the development and periodic review of OPS's Language Access Plan. It is the responsibility of all OPS staff to implement the language access plan and its various services relevant to their work.

Multilingual Success Coaches

The role of the multilingual Success Coach is to serve as the first line of communication between multilingual students, families, and schools. They are involved at all possible points of service – schools, classrooms, the district office – as well as in a multitude of situations such as conferences, IEP meetings, attendance meetings, disciplinary meetings, enrollment, home visits, and more. They are accessible at all buildings. When a Success Coach is hired, they personally meet all of the students they will support and contact all parents and guardians who are flagged in the SIS as needing an interpreter. Parents and guardians can then request assistance by directly contacting their school's Success Coach. All multilingual Success Coaches are fluent in English and at least one other language, Somali or Spanish. Most Success Coaches are hired through the District Office. They are most directly supervised by the ML Coordinator, who works at the District Office.

Written Classroom Translations

As stated above, multilingual Success Coaches are employed to directly serve in schools. Part of their job is to translate documents so that teachers and administrators can effectively communicate with students and their families. Various types of documents are translated, such as field trip notifications, classroom newsletters, program recruitment and applications, conference and event notification, among much else. If a Success Coach is unavailable, teachers and administrators complete the Translation & Interpretation Request Form, which is submitted to the ML Coordinator. The ML Coordinator sends the translation request to an available Success Coach for completion and ensures the request is fulfilled.

Language Line

Language Line is a phone based interpretation service purchased by OPS. Language Line provides interpretation services in hundreds of languages, including all known languages spoken by OPS students and families. As mentioned above, OPS employs multilingual Success Coaches to serve students and families in Somali and Spanish. This leaves a relatively small number of families without access to language services at important times. Language Line is intended to address these families' language access needs. Language Line is accessible by district employees at all locations and is valuable in various situations such as conferences, situationally specific teacher-parent communication, district communication with families, and much more. Language Line also offers translation services. It is the duty of the ML Coordinator to procure, maintain, and review the use of Language Line. It is the responsibility of all staff to use Language Line to serve linguistically diverse students and families when direct support with a Success Coach is not possible.

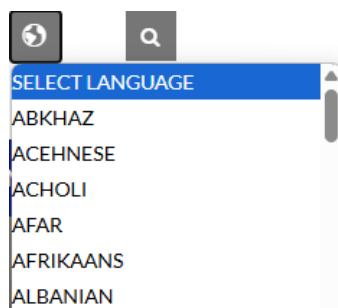
Translate My Slide

Translate My Slide is a Google Slides app extension. With only a few clicks, teachers and students are able to translate slides into their preferred language. This service is available to anyone in the ISD761 domain. In other words, anyone with an Owatonna Public Schools email account can use the Translate My Slide service. Teachers can use it to translate Google Slides prior to presenting and share these translated Google Slides with particular students. Or, teachers can share Google Slides in English with students, and students can translate them into whatever language they prefer. It is the responsibility of the ML Coordinator to procure, maintain, and review the use of this service. The ML Coordinator informs teachers how they can acquire Translate My Slide. It is the duty of teachers to share this resource with students they believe will benefit.

TransAct

TransAct.com is a website that "provides Minnesota schools and districts with access to required parent notification letters in English and multiple other languages. Schools and districts are required to ensure that all [federally mandated] communication with parents is in a language and format accessible to them. These documents can be customized... as needed. All Minnesota districts and charter schools can utilize the TransACT website with free access. Individuals within the district can activate their free account at TransACT.com." TransAct is procured, maintained, and reviewed by the Minnesota Department of Education. While it may be valuable to various staff, it is particularly important with respect to Title III requirements and, therefore, is a service used by the ML Coordinator for related Title III communication. All staff are encouraged to explore TransAct to see if there are valuable resources related to their work in communicating with linguistically diverse families and students.

One-click Website Translation



The Owatonna Public Schools website features one-click translation. Visitors can click on the globe icon and select a language. One-click translation is effective for most text. Some content is not translatable, including certain visualizations with embedded text. This is designed to ensure that all multilingual families have access to current web-based school and district communication. The Director of Innovation and Technology is responsible for maintenance and review of this service.

Campus Notifications in Home Language

As noted above, the district's student information system (SIS) is Infinite Campus, commonly simply called "Campus." When families enroll their children, they can opt to have notifications sent to them in their home language. These home language notifications are either pre-recorded messages or text. For example, when there is a school closing due to a weather event families will get a pre-recorded message in their home language if their home language is Spanish or Somali. Responsibility for effective implementation is widespread. Communications makes sure we have 1st language translations of all possible messages as both voice recordings and text. The Coordinator works with the Success Coaches and IT to make sure these recordings get to Communications. At enrollment, the assisting Success Coach helps the family opt in for translated messages. It is the responsibility of Communications and the ML Coordinator to monitor this service.

Talking Points

Talking Points is a free web-based program that allows school employees to communicate with families in their preferred language. Messages are sent as text-messages. The Talking Points app is not necessary on the parent side for this communication to work. Talking Points is used by school administrators, teachers, and Success Coaches. It is the responsibility of the ML Coordinator to keep personnel informed of this resource. And, it is the responsibility of all staff serving their linguistically diverse families to avail themselves of this easily implemented tool.

American Sign Language (ASL) Interpretation

ASL is a visually perceived language based on a naturally evolved system of articulated hand gestures and their placement relative to the body, along with non-manual markers such as facial expressions, head movements, shoulder raises, mouth morphemes, and movements of the body.

Relay Services

Relay Services are telephone accessibility services to people who are deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, or speech disabled.

Screen Reader Software

Software programs that allow blind or visually impaired users to read the text that is displayed on the computer screen with a speech synthesizer or braille display.

Timeline

The Language Access Plan (LAP) is implemented beginning with the 2025-2026 school year.

- **February 2026:** Final board adoption following public hearing.
- **Spring 2026:** Distribution of the LAP to all staff and publication on the district website and in the *Parent & Student Handbook*.

- **Annually (each September):** The ML Coordinator and Success Coaches review operational procedures before the start of school, updating internal guidance and retraining staff as needed.
- **Every two years:** Formal review and revision by the ML Coordinator, Director of Innovation & Technology, and Director of Special Education, with updates presented to the School Board for approval.
- **Ongoing:** New technologies, interpretation vendors, and communication tools are evaluated for inclusion in the plan.

Notice of Services

OPS notifies students, parents, and guardians of available language services through multiple channels:

- **Parent & Student Handbook:** A concise summary of services and how to request them is printed annually as required by Minn. Stat. § 123B.32.
- **Enrollment Process:** The Home Language Questionnaire and “Interpreter Needed” flag within Infinite Campus alert staff and trigger initial contact from the building’s Success Coach.
- **District Website:** The *Language Assistance Services* page (linked from the isd761.org homepage under District Services) describes interpretation, translation, and technology tools, with contact information for each school’s Success Coach.
- **Public Meetings:** Notices for conferences, advisory councils, and school board meetings include the statement, *“Interpretation or translation services are available upon request—please contact your school or the district office”* in multiple languages.

Training for Staff

- **Success Coach Certification:** Multilingual Success Coaches receive ongoing professional development through the **National Association of Educational Translators and Interpreters of Spoken Languages (NAETISL)**.
- **Annual District Updates:** At the start of each school year, the ML Coordinator disseminates information to all licensed and support staff on the availability of interpreters and the use of Language Line.
- **Targeted Sessions:** Office personnel, counselors, administrators, and teachers receive additional support to match specific, specialized requests with language services (e.g. using video interpretation for Special Education evaluation in Vietnamese)
- **Continuous Support:** Updated guidance is shared through the intranet and periodic emails from the ML Coordinator.

Plan Maintenance

The ML Coordinator is responsible for monitoring and updating this plan.

- **Data Monitoring:** Translation requests and usage of Language Line and other language access technologies are tracked annually to assess demand and identify gaps.
- **Feedback Loop:** Success Coaches and building administrators provide feedback on service quality and unmet needs during scheduled check-ins.
- **Revisions:** Substantive updates are reviewed by the Superintendent’s Cabinet and approved by the School Board every two years or sooner if regulations change.

- **Documentation:** The most current version is posted publicly on the district website and archived internally for compliance reference.

Community Engagement and Partnership

OPS recognizes that trusted community partners strengthen language access.

- **Local Partnerships:** The district collaborates with local organizations such as **Steele County Public Health**, United Way, and faith-based groups to disseminate information and gather feedback.
- **Advisory and Outreach:** Success Coaches attend community events, cultural celebrations, and newcomer orientations to promote awareness of district language services and encourage family participation in school life. They participate in the feedback loop to inform the district of community concerns related to language access.

Emergency Communication Protocol

In emergencies—such as severe weather, transportation changes, or building lockdowns—OPS ensures multilingual notification through:

- **Infinite Campus Messenger:** Pre-recorded voice and text alerts in Somali, Spanish, and English sent to all opted-in families.
- **District Website & Social Media:** Posted updates with automatic one-click translation enabled.
- **Talking Points:** Rapid text messages from principals or Success Coaches in the recipient's preferred language.
- **Media Coordination:** The Communications Department works with local media and community organizations to reach families.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Translation Services

OPS may use AI-based translation tools for **non-confidential, general communication** such as newsletters and event flyers.

- AI translations are reviewed by a bilingual Success Coach before publication whenever possible.
- OPS adheres to MDE guidance: AI translations supplement but never replace professional human translation when legal, educational, or confidential information is involved.

Section 2: Procedures

Overview

These procedures ensure that all Owatonna Public Schools (OPS) staff provide consistent, equitable language assistance to students and families. They apply to all district employees who interact with families or students, including administrators, teachers, support staff, and Success Coaches.

Procedures

Responding to Telephone and In-Person Requests

- **Initial Response:** When a caller or visitor appears to have limited English proficiency, staff should courteously obtain assistance from a building Success Coach or, if unavailable, connect to **Language Line** for live interpretation. At each building site, it is recommended that front office staff have a prepared, translated message that informs limited English proficient individuals with the procedure that will be followed. For example, visitors should be informed that a bilingual Success Coach will be obtained or that Language Line will be used.
- **Accessibility:** For individuals who are deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, or speech-disabled, OPS uses **relay services** and, when necessary, coordinates with the Director of Special Education to arrange in-person or video ASL interpretation.

Tracking and Recording Language Preferences

- **Enrollment Process:** Parents indicate their home language and interpreter needs on the Home Language Questionnaire (HLQ).
- **System Flag:** The “Parent Requires Interpreter” flag in Infinite Campus alerts school staff.
- **Ongoing Updates:** Office staff and Success Coaches verify language preferences annually at conference time and update records as needed.
- **Reporting:** The ML Coordinator reviews language-preference data annually to monitor demographic shifts.

Informing Families about Available Services

Staff will:

1. Explain that interpretation and translation are **free services** offered by OPS.
2. Provide written or verbal notice of services during enrollment and at the beginning of each school year.
3. Refer any family inquiries to the building Success Coach or the ML Coordinator.

Responding to Correspondence

- **Letters and Emails:** When written correspondence is needed, staff first request assistance from their local Success Coach. If they are unavailable, staff should submit a **Translation & Interpretation Request Form** to the ML Coordinator.
- **Voicemails:** If a voicemail is received in another language, forward it to the relevant Success Coach for translation or callback using Language Line.
- **Timeliness:** Every reasonable effort should be made to reply in the family’s preferred language within two school days.

Procuring In-Person Interpreter Services

- Success Coaches provide in-person interpretation for Somali- and Spanish-speaking families.
- For other languages, staff contact the ML Coordinator, who schedules a qualified interpreter through Language Line or an approved vendor.
- For ASL interpretation, coordination occurs through the Director of Special Education.
- Staff may not use students, siblings, or untrained individuals as interpreters for any official purpose.

Procuring Telephone or Video Interpretation

- Staff may access **Language Line** via the district account; directions and access codes are available from each school’s administrative assistant, Success Coach, or ML Coordinator.

- Telephone or video interpretation may be used for short interactions, meetings, or emergencies when an in-person interpreter is not available.

Translation of Documents

- All translation requests first go through local Success Coaches and second through the **Translation & Interpretation Request Form**.
- Success Coaches handle Somali and Spanish translations.
- The ML Coordinator arranges other translations through contracted vendors.
- Before public release, translated materials of high importance (e.g., district-wide notices) may be reviewed by bilingual staff for clarity and cultural appropriateness.

Language Access Complaints

- Families may file concerns about interpretation or translation quality by contacting their local Success Coach, school office, or the ML Coordinator.
- Complaints are logged, investigated, and responded to within ten business days.
- If the issue involves special education or civil-rights compliance, it is referred to the Director of Special Education or the district's Human Resources Department as appropriate.

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Section 3: Policy Foundation

State

- Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.32 states:
 - Subd. 1. Language access plan required. Starting in the 2025-2026 school year, during a regularly scheduled public board hearing, a school board must adopt a Language Access Plan that specifies the district's process and procedures to render effective language assistance to students and adults who communicate in a language other than English. The Language Access Plan must be available to the public and included in the school's handbook.
 - Subd. 2. Plan requirements. The Language Access Plan must include how the district and its schools will use trained or certified spoken language interpreters for communication related to academic outcomes, progress, determinations, and placement of students in specialized programs and services; and how families and communities will be notified of their rights under this plan.

- Subd. 3. Regular review. The board must review the plan every two years and update the plan as appropriate.
- Minnesota Learning for English Academic Proficiency (LEAPS) Act of 2014, Chapter 272, H.F No. 2397, Article 1. The law has three principal goals for all English Learner (EL) students: 1) academic English proficiency; 2) grade-level content knowledge; and 3) multilingual skills development.

Federal

- Equal Educational Opportunity Act (EEOA) requires states and school districts to provide equal educational opportunity to students learning English by taking appropriate actions to overcome language barriers.
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) upholds language access rights for bilingual families by requiring that students be tested in their home language and Individual Educational Plans (IEP) be written in the appropriate home language. IEP meetings must be conducted in the family's home language using a highly trained and qualified interpreter.
- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was enacted as part of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964. It prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance.

Definitions

American Sign Language (ASL) – A visually perceived language based on a naturally evolved system of articulated hand gestures and their placement relative to the body, along with non-manual markers such as facial expressions, head movements, shoulder raises, mouth morphemes, and movements of the body.

Relay – Telephone accessibility services to people who are deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, or speech disabled.

Screen Reader – Software programs that allow blind or visually impaired users to read the text that is displayed on the computer screen with a speech synthesizer or braille display.

Interpretation – The act of listening to a communication in one language (source language) and orally converting it to another language (target language). Interpreter must retain the same meaning as the original message without omitting information, summarizing or otherwise altering the message and without adding the interpreter's own thoughts or opinions.

Interpreter – A person who provides interpreting services.

Simultaneous Interpretation Equipment – Equipment that allow a group of people to listen through headsets to information interpreted into their primary language. This method is most appropriate for large group settings and meetings where multiple languages are being interpreted simultaneously.

Language Assistance Services – Oral, expressive, written, and technological supportive services that help students and families communicate effectively with school staff. These services ensure students and families can participate fully in school services, activities, and programs.

Limited English Proficient (LEP) – Individuals whose primary language is not English and who have limited ability to communicate effectively in English, including writing, reading, speaking, and listening comprehension. Federal law uses this term to refer to the intended beneficiaries of language access services.

Emergent Multilingual Speakers – Individuals whose primary language is not English and who have limited ability to communicate effectively in English but are in the process of developing their English language proficiency. Language access industry leaders and advocates prefer the use of this term when referring to the intended beneficiaries of language access services.

English Learner (EL) – A status assigned to students whose primary language is not English, who lacks the necessary skills to understand, speak, read, and write in English but are receiving English language development instructions in a public school or charter setting.

Home Language – The language that is most commonly used in the home by members of a family, or the language that parents use when speaking with their children.

Primary Language – An individual's native tongue or the language in which an individual most effectively communicates.

Sight Translation – The oral interpretation of a written document. This occurs when an interpreter reads a document and then provides a complete oral interpretation of the information that it contains.

Remote Interpreting – Interpreting that is provided via telephone or video call.

Translator – A person who provides translation services.

Translation – The restating of written text from one language (source language) into an equivalent written text in another language (target language).

Vital Document – Materials deemed vital to ensuring access to educational services, programs, and activities, or contain information required by law to translate or provide in audio format.

Matt's Notes:

- Tell new teachers about the Language Access Plan and related services. Especially Language Line and how to access it. Identify the languages that teachers may encounter and for which LL will be most helpful.
- Establish review protocol
- Determine procedure for reaching out to families who will not benefit from SC support in Spanish and Somali (eg. Nuer speaking families). Should the Coordinator annually reach out to families with Language Line to let them know how they can request language services / support? Should the Coordinator annually inform all teachers when they have a student whose family speaks a language other than Somali and Spanish and identify the best way to communicate with them?
- Need to run a list of PRI by household if possible, as well as by student and grade level.
- Consider annual update to all staff about language access services