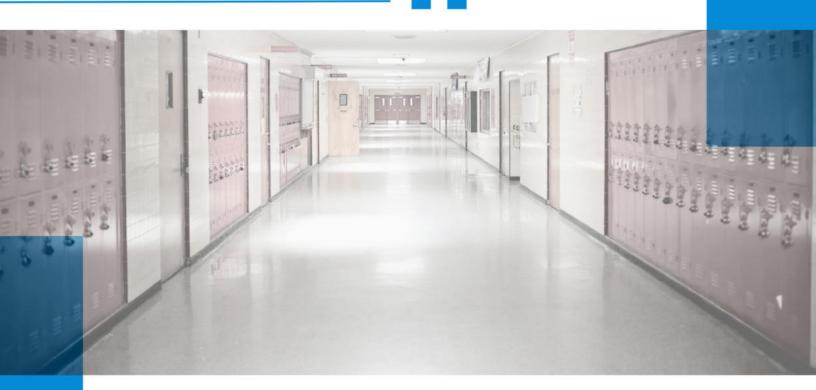




PROVIDING TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION ASSISTANCE TO MULTILINGUAL FAMILIES:



A GUIDE FOR
PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS
IN SOUTH CAROLINA



Providing Translation and Interpretation Assistance to Multilingual Families:

A Guide for Public School Districts in South Carolina

June 2024

Carolina Family Engagement Center

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CFEC is housed in the SC School Improvement Council at the University of South Carolina College of Education. It is funded by U.S. Department of Education grants (#U310A180058 and #S310A230032).

Introduction

School performance and student outcomes are directly impacted by family/systems engagement.[1] Outcomes include college, career, and military readiness; testing and performance scores; and student attendance, among others. There are over 350,000 Hispanic or Latino individuals in the State of South Carolina,[2] and approximately 140,000 people (approximately 100,000 of whom are Spanish-speaking) who have Limited English Proficiency (MLL).[3] Approximately 6% (45,000) of all students enrolled in public schools in South Carolina are Multilingual Learners (MLLs).[4] When MLLs and their families are unable to engage with services, resources, and information because of language barriers, school performance and student outcomes decline overall, negatively affecting South Carolina as a whole. Together, we can reverse this trend.

This resource guide was developed by the Carolina Family Engagement Center ("CFEC") [5] and Spanglish Consulting[6] to do just that by: (1) increasing awareness of federal laws requiring public school districts ("districts") and schools to communicate with MLL parents[7] in a language they understand and (2) sharing tools and resources that can assist South Carolina districts in meeting their obligations to MLL parents (both generally, and for Spanish-speaking MLL parents in particular).

CFEC embarked on this project as part of a broader effort to support South Carolina districts and schools seeking to increase their effectiveness in engaging Multilingual families in the education of their children. CFEC shares the commitment to ensure that students and their families experience the benefits associated with high levels of family engagement, such as higher student engagement and achievement, improved student behavior, and higher attendance rates. [8]

We hope this guide will help districts navigate the challenges they face in complying with federal language accessibility requirements. We also hope it will inspire community agencies and organizations to explore new ways to collaborate and support South Carolina's school districts at the state, regional, and local levels. Working together, in South Carolina, we can meet the challenges of language access and move our state closer to the shared goal of engaging all parents in the learning and development of our children.

Acknowledgement

CFEC would like to express its gratitude to the community leaders, stakeholder representatives, and Hispanic parents who participated in the development of this guide. Your contributions were invaluable. We look forward to continuing our collaborative efforts to ensure that all families can fully and meaningfully engage in their children's learning and development.

Using This Guide

At just over 70%, Spanish speakers make up the largest percentage of South Carolina's MLL population. [9] While this Guide is geared primarily toward meeting the needs of these MLL parents, Federal language assistance requirements apply to all families whose primary language is not English and who have a limited ability to communicate in English. [10] In addition to Spanish, Russian, Portuguese, Chinese, and Vietnamese are among the top 5 languages spoken in South Carolina schools. [11] South Carolina educators have anecdotally shared that they have also observed an increase in Ukrainian and Gujarati speakers.

I. The Benefits of Language Access

The ability to communicate is essential to the success of any effort by a district or school to engage parents. Meaningful communication and access to services, resources, and information is simply not possible for MLL parents without language translation and interpretation assistance. Thus, family engagement strategies will be of limited or no benefit to these families if communication is not possible. Districts, schools, and students and their families will not be able to access benefits that arise from meaningful family

school partnerships. Prioritizing language access provides numerous benefits for students, their families, schools, districts, and the state as a whole. Language access ensures that MLL individuals have meaningful access to education. It also promotes engagement, prevents discrimination based on language barriers, strengthens the safety and quality of services, and ensures legal and regulatory compliance. There are several notable economic and performance-based benefits as well, including the following:

- Teacher Retention
- Improved Test and Performance Scores
- Improved College, Career, and Military Readiness
- Increased Family/Systems Engagement [12]

Additionally, compliance with federal mandates ensures that the South Carolina Department of Education, its districts, and its

schools avoid costly legal action and complaints and remain eligible for federal funding sources. Specific funding sources are discussed in section VI of this Guide.

II. The Legal Basis for Language Access

Existing federal laws require that districts provide MLL parents with the language assistance services needed to facilitate meaningful home-school communication and to access the same school information provided to other parents. Nonetheless, in our conversations with Spanish-speaking parents about the challenges they face when trying to engage with their child's school, the preeminent theme is the need for greater access to oral interpreters and written translations of information.[13]

The 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution, [14] the Civil Rights Act of 1964, [15] the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), [16] the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), [17] the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), [18] and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA) [19] are all important federal laws with a rich judicial history of court decisions reinforcing their relevance, impact, and enforceability in the context of language access. Federal law applies these language access requirements to entities who are Federal Funding Recipients.

The Code of Federal Regulations defines the term recipient as

"any State, political subdivision of any State, or instrumentality of any State or political subdivision, any public or private agency, institution, or organization, or other entity, or any individual, in any State, to whom Federal funding assistance is extended, directly or through another recipient, including any successor, assign, or transferee thereof, but such term does not include any ultimate beneficiary." [20]

Federal Requirements on Language Assistance

According to the US Department of Justice and US Department of Education, language assistance must be "free and provided by appropriate and competent staff, or through appropriate and competent outside resources" in the following example scenarios, among others: [21]

- Language assistance programs
- Special education and related services
- IEP meetings
- Student discipline policies and procedures
- Notices of non-discrimination
- Grievance procedures
- Registration and enrollment
- Report cards

- Requests for parent permission for student participation in activities
- Parent-teacher conferences
- Parent handbooks
- Gifted and talented programs
- Magnet and charter schools
- Other school and program choice options
- Expulsion hearings

The legal documentation or immigration status of a multilingual parent cannot be a factor in determining their entitlement to language assistance services. Federal and state laws, including Title VI and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, unequivocally affirm the right of all students and their families, regardless of immigration status, to meaningful access to educational resources and services. [22] Therefore, educators and stakeholders should approach language access with a commitment to inclusivity and fairness, ensuring that every individual, regardless of their legal status, receives the support they need for a successful educational experience.

The United States Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, has announced several new

language access initiatives and high-profile investigations in 2023, including increased enforcement measures. Prior to these increased enforcement measures, Charleston County School District was investigated in 2021 by the Department of Justice for violation of Title VI language access requirements resulting in a settlement agreement between the district and DOJ to take meaningful steps towards improving language access. [23] This Guide assumes that district and school leaders will be familiar with the full scope of their responsibilities under federal law with respect to communicating with multilingual parents, whether their primary language is Spanish or another language. If this is not the case, they should consult with legal counsel.

III. Language Access Policy and Implementation

Fortunately, abundant resources are available to help districts navigate the steps necessary to provide language assistance to MLL parents, including this Guide! Some of these steps may be challenging, including identifying funding sources, developing policies and procedures to support translation and interpretation delivery, recruiting and retaining qualified translators and interpreters, training district and school personnel, and notifying parents about the availability of these services.

The following pages contain resources and information to help guide, simplify, demystify, and advance this work.

Teamwork makes the dream work!

A comprehensive, systemic, district-wide approach is needed to avoid gaps in language assistance service, duplication of efforts, and cost inefficiencies.

A. Where To Begin

Language accessibility is a broad topic, and knowing where to begin can seem daunting. One good approach is simply to find a starting point and then put one foot in front of the other as you move toward your goals. Creating a language access plan [24] is a key strategy for developing an effective system for service

delivery. [25] "Language Access Planning" is a common practice for institutions in developing and implementing language access policies and programming. The Department of Justice and the Department of Education have developed toolkits and guidance to aid institutions in complying with language access requirements. [26]

B. Identifying Multilingual Parents and the Languages They Speak

Districts have an affirmative obligation to identify multilingual parents in need of language access in their districts. In South Carolina, for example, most districts utilize PowerSchool or a similar platform to administer a Home Language Survey to parents as a part of the initial school registration and enrollment process. However, it's important to note that some districts may employ a different system for this purpose. [27]

Although the survey's primary purpose is to identify students who may be multilingual learners, it must also include a question asking

parents, "In what language do you wish to have communication from the school?" NOTE: Districts are required to note multilingual parents' language preferences for both oral and written communications (they may be different) and store this information in its student information database (PowerSchool, for example). [28] All district and school personnel should have access to and be instructed to check PowerSchool or similar platform for information about parents' language assistance needs before communicating with parents.

Reminder:

The South Carolina Department of Education Title III Office recommends that districts create a language access plan and post it to the district's website so that it can be easily accessed by families and school personnel.

C. Roles and Responsibilities Within the District

Another important part of language access planning is to define who is responsible for overseeing language access planning, policy development, and service delivery at both the district and school levels. Some examples of key roles are Language Access Coordinator, Departmental Liaisons, Trained Bilingual Volunteers, Trained Bilingual Staff, Language Service Vendors, Community Liaisons, Community Stakeholders, and Educators. [29]

In addressing the needs of the growing MLL population, it is critical for district leadership to take a proactive step to ensure the proper resources and guidance are in place for educators and school administrators to effectively communicate with MLLs despite language barriers. There are over 70 school districts in South Carolina and each one must have an organizational structure to deliver services to MLL families. When a district lacks a language access plan or support to deliver these services, schools are left unprepared to provide services and may rely on temporary solutions such as using a child or an unreliable Google Translate app to facilitate language access.

Designating a district coordinator or liaison who oversees language access planning, policy development, and service delivery is essential for streamlining efforts, preventing gaps, and maximizing cost efficiencies. Without such leadership, school administrators and educators risk fragmented approaches, resource strain, service gaps, hindering a school's compliance with Title VI requirements. Centralizing these efforts under a district coordinator or liaison allows educators to focus on delivering quality education without the burden of navigating complex language access issues independently.

School staff and administration also play a critical role in the delivery of language access. For example, in many cases a school's front office staff will be the first person an MLL parent encounters when attempting to communicate with or visit a school. A positive first impression will lay the foundation for a productive partnership between family and school; a negative impression can delay the development of a trusting home-school relationship indefinitely. This, in turn, damages opportunities to improve family-systems interaction and ML outcomes. Front office staff can be among a school's most valuable resources when given the tools they need information, professional including development, recognition, and support - to excel in serving families.

An effective language access plan will ensure that all district and school personnel know how to assist multilingual parents in accessing assistance While language services. administrators, family engagement liaisons, public-facing staff, and others will need more information and professional development, every district employee who may encounter an MLL parent should know that (1) MLL parents must be granted access to language assistance and (2) how to connect MLL parents with the appropriate resources at the school or district level.

This information can be routinely incorporated into the employee orientation process and posted in locations visible to all employees, including cafeteria workers, custodians, and bus drivers.

D. Needs Assessment

Important:

Once MLL families have been identified, considering their perspectives during this process will help districts avoid making assumptions about their needs (and making decisions on their behalf). Inviting MLL families to provide feedback and participate in this process will improve family-systems engagement and make language access efforts more effective.

"Language Access Assessment and Planning Tool for Federally Conducted and Federally Assisted Programs," created by the US Department of Justice, is a helpful tool for needs assessment. [30]

It is important to identify both the needs of MLL parents and resources available at the district and school levels to meet those needs

before designated personnel begin to design and implement policies and procedures or offer improvements to existing ones. An internal assessment of current practices will provide baseline information for creating a framework. Through this process, areas for improvement will emerge, and steps needed at the district or school level to execute a language access plan can be defined.

Here are a few questions to consider when assessing needs at the district and school level:

- What are the points of contact for individuals who do not speak English?
- Are there reception areas in schools where MLL parents regularly engage? Do those areas have signage and resources informing MLL parents of the availability of interpretation and translation services? Are the personnel working in such locations prepared to communicate with MLL parents?
- Have "vital documents" been translated into the most common non-English languages spoken within the district?
- What is the level of engagement between MLL parents and district or school personnel?
- Does the district/school currently have any language access policies, and if so, what are they? How are they effectively implemented?
- Does the district have contracts in place with language service vendors? If so, what are the vendors, and how can they be reached? Are personnel aware of the protocol?
- Who will implement and enforce language access policies if a Language Access Coordinator is not hired?

E. Providing Notice to MLL Parents that Language Translation and Interpretation Services are Available

The US Department of Justice's Coordination Regulation requires that districts:

"...display prominently in reasonable numbers and places posters which state that the recipients operate programs subject to the nondiscrimination requirements of Title VI, summarize those requirements, note the availability of Title VI information from recipients and the federal agencies, and explain briefly the procedures for filing complaints. Federal agencies and recipients shall also include information on Title VI requirements, complaint procedures and the rights of beneficiaries in handbooks, manuals, pamphlets and other material which are ordinarily distributed to the public to describe the federally assisted programs and the requirements for participation by recipients and beneficiaries. To the extent that recipients are required by law or regulation to publish or broadcast program information in the news media, federal agencies and recipients shall insure that such publications and broadcasts state that the program in question is an equal opportunity program or otherwise indicate that discrimination in the program is prohibited by federal law.

Where a significant number or proportion of the population eligible to be served or likely to be directly affected by a federally assisted program (e.g., affected by relocation) needs service or information in a language other than English in order effectively to be informed of or to participate in the program, the [district] shall take reasonable steps, considering the scope of the program and the size and concentration of such population, to provide information in appropriate languages to such persons. This requirement applies with regard to written material of the type which is ordinarily distributed to the public."[31]

Districts can use several low- or no-cost tools to provide notice of service availability to MLL parents, including identifying the language(s) spoken by an MLL parent if that information is not available with the student's data. For example, districts can provide staff with "I Speak Cards" to use when they need to communicate with an MLL parent. "I Speak Cards" repeat the same written message in English and in multiple other languages so that

an MLL can identify for the service provider which of the languages on the "I Speak Card" they speak. Front office staff can present this card to a parent, and the parent can point to the language he or she understands. "I Speak Cards" are available to download at no cost on several government websites. [32] This is only one example of the different tools available to districts and schools. Other examples can be found in the Appendices to this Guide.

IV. Spreading the Word

Districts are responsible for offering language assistance – it is not up to MLL parents to ask for it. [33] We have observed, however, that many MLL parents are unaware they are

entitled to assistance. This hurts in two ways: if they don't know language assistance is available, they can't ask for it; also, if they do not have language assistance, they can't ask for it.

Reminder:

Notices about language assistance should reassure parents that these services are free of charge.

The Appendix of this Guide contains examples of existing tools in both English and Spanish that districts and schools can use to notify multilingual parents that they are entitled to free language assistance from a qualified interpreter or translator. This information can be made available online on the school's website or the district's learning management system and/or physically posted in the main office, at the front desk, and in other areas that parents may visit, such as ESL or Newcomer classrooms; the offices of guidance counselors and social workers, and athletic facilities. The information can also be sent to parents via email, text, or regular U.S. Mail. Examples include the DOJ/USDE fact sheet linked on the first page of this guide, addressing common

questions about the rights of multilingual parents to school information in their primary language. It can be downloaded in multiple languages at www.LEP.gov. Also included are examples from other states, including a family-friendly fact sheet created by the State of Washington. [34]

Community partners and faith-based organizations that serve MLL parents in the local community can also be enlisted to spread the word. This can be done verbally or by providing these organizations with signs, posters, and flyers for distribution. Working with trusted community partners can help build trust between MLL communities and the school districts that serve them.

TIP:

Some of your MLL parents may not have had an opportunity to complete school themselves and may have difficulty reading and/or writing in their native language. Consider using pictures or internationally recognized pictograms or icons to enhance understanding of written notices or providing notices in both oral and written formats.

V. Creating a Welcoming Environment for Multilingual Parents

Research has long suggested that a welcoming school environment positively impacts levels of family engagement. [35] Multilingual parents tell us that they often feel anxious when they attempt to interact with their child's school because of the language divide or the perceived power imbalance. The accessibility, attitude, and demeanor of district and school staff who interact with these parents, as well as the tone of written notices and communications, can have a significant impact on whether a multilingual parent feels welcomed and comfortable engaging through an interpreter or translator.

When districts and schools proactively notify multilingual parents about the availability of language assistance services, it sends a positive message to parents: "Yes, we really do value your involvement, and we want to partner with you." Moreover, when front office staff, administrators, or faculty greet multilingual parents in a friendly way and know the basic procedures for connecting them with an interpreter, this too, sends a message that the school values them and wants to communicate. When schools display other messages such as welcome signs or directions in Spanish or recognize and honor their cultures in other visible ways, this also helps multilingual parents feel welcome and encourages them to engage with their children's school. [36]

Providing district and school personnel, including front office staff, with professional development in effectively communicating with people from different cultures or languages, as well as how to implement the procedures for providing language assistance to multilingual parents, will help create a welcoming school climate for all families.

VI. Delivering Interpretation and Translation Services

Key Terms:

- Interpreter: An interpreter transfers oral or signed communications or information from one language to another. [37]
- Consecutive interpretation: when the speaker and interpreter "take turns" interpreting. The speaker pauses periodically to allow the interpreter to relay what has just been said, and then the interpreter renders that message into the target language. [38] This is also sometimes called "stop-and-start" interpretation.
- **Simultaneous interpretation:** when an interpreter interprets into another language what is being spoken almost simultaneously with the speaker. Usually, the listener hears the interpreter's words through headphones.
- Translator [39]: A translator renders written text from one language into another. [40]

Districts and schools are not the only institutions required to provide language assistance to Multilingual Learners. Other organizations, such as state agencies and medical facilities, are also required to provide these services. Given market demand and technological advances, the industry providing these services has grown in recent years and offers a greater variety of more cost-effective options to districts. South Carolina also

provides a list of translation and interpretation service providers for general information purposes. [41] It is important for districts, particularly smaller ones, to consider the potential cost savings that can be achieved by collaborating and pooling resources when engaging written translation service providers or phone service providers, taking advantage of economies of scale.

A. Who is Qualified to Interpret or Translate

Federal civil rights laws require that districts and schools provide translation or

interpretation from "appropriate and competent individuals" free of charge to MLL parents [42].

The English Learner Tool Kit published by the U.S. Department of Education in 2016 provides the following guidance:

Appropriate and competent translators or interpreters should have proficiency in target languages; ease of written and oral expression; knowledge of specialized terms or concepts; as well as be trained on their role, the ethics of interpreting and translating, and the need for confidentiality. [43]

Students, including the child or sibling of the multilingual parents, friends or neighbors, and

untrained school or district staff, are not qualified to interpret or translate, even if they are bilingual. [44]

As explained by the American Translators Association (ATA):

Untrained "bilinguals" are a major risk in an interpreting situation . . . bilinguals may speak two languages fluently, but lots of people described as bilingual are not really that fluent or even accurate. Most importantly, they are not necessarily good at moving information between two languages, especially when the pressure is on. [45]

Situations requiring technical interpretation, such as IEP meetings for children with disabilities, may require qualified interpreters with knowledge of the technical terminology required. IEP meetings, for example, involve complex discussions and the use of specialized terminology which not all interpreters may have the training to facilitate. Interpreters used for technical interpretations must possess not only fluency in both languages but also an understanding of the subject matter at hand. The use of untrained or inexperienced interpreters can lead to misunderstandings, inaccuracies, and, ultimately, ineffective communication. By using qualified interpretation, schools can ensure that MLL families receive accurate information and can actively participate in their child's specific educational requirements.

Additionally, the use of untrained bilinguals does not take into account confidentiality, bias, or accuracy and completeness. The use of untrained bilinguals as translators and interpreters do not constitute meaningful or

lawful accessibility for MLL parents since untrained bilinguals are not trained in the rules of ethics and confidentiality, are not familiar with specialized terminology and do not relay information in both an accurate and understandable manner. [46] Except in a true emergency, children, friends of MLL parents, and untrained school staff must not be used in place of qualified translators or interpreters. [47] Should an emergency arise, there needs to be appropriate, timely follow-up with the multilingual parent by a qualified interpreter or translator, however, to ensure that information was communicated accurately.[48]

Recognizing that financial barriers may hinder individuals from pursuing their training, districts may consider investing in training programs offered by the district or community organizations. This approach can help harness the potential of existing staff members and enhance language services within the district. Collaboration among districts in offering training can also be an effective way to share the costs.

VII. Staff Training

Providing regular training for teachers and public-facing administrators is essential for effectively implementing a language access plan. Without such training, educators may inadvertently overlook the intricacies of language access policies, procedures, and best practices. The need for training is particularly

crucial for personnel who frequently interact with MLL parents in various settings such as reception areas and classrooms. Through comprehensive training, educators gain the skills to adeptly navigate language barriers, ultimately improving their performance and the quality of service delivery to MLL students.

Personnel who may interact with English Learners should, at minimum, be trained in the following categories

- How to Access and Use Language Assistance Services at Points of Contact
- 2. How to Work with Interpreters and MLL Individuals
- 3. Interpreter Roles and Responsibilities
- 4. Standards for Written Translation [49]

School personnel should receive regular training to stay updated on the language access policy and procedural updates. This includes training all current and new staff members to familiarize them with the district's language access policies,

procedures, and resources available to facilitate communication. On-demand training accessible to educators year round may help those who need refreshers or clarifying guidance as language access needs fluctuate throughout the school year.

VIII. Monitoring and Evaluation

Once language access practices have been implemented, it is important to monitor and evaluate its effectiveness. Generally, there are two main functions of a language access policy monitoring and evaluation plan: (1) to collect and analyze usage data for budgeting, reporting, and demographic analysis and (2) to evaluate which areas are effective, which areas could use

improvement, and which ones might need a total overhaul. Both districts and schools should have consistent, systematic methods of monitoring and evaluating their language access plans. Data management may vary from district to district, and there is no "one-size-fits-all" data collection and evaluation system that will work across all language access planning procedures.

Therefore, districts should carefully review the following examples for guidance before choosing the right option for the organization.

- Is This working? Assessment and Evaluation Methods Used to Build and Assess Language Access Services in Social Services Agencies [50]
- Community Toolbox: Developing an Evaluation Plan [51]

IX. Funding Language Access Initiatives

South Carolina districts are required to keep up with federal standards regarding language access, and those that are compliant with such standards are eligible to receive federal grants and other funds. Here are a few sources of funding for language access programs. [52] More details are provided in the appendices to this Guide.

To help implement many of the statutes listed in Section II of this Guide, there are funding opportunities for schools complying with those statutes. Various state-allocated and competitive grant programs are available under ESSA, the Every Student Succeeds Act (formerly ESEA, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act). These programs provide

resources and financial support to schools that meet the requirements outlined in ESSA, ensuring access to funding for initiatives aimed at improving education.

The United States Department of Education (ED) provides grants to states aiming to improve their educational offerings for MLL students. The ED's Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) offers grant programs "to prepare professionals for teaching and supporting English Learners." [53] In 2022, OELA announced it would award \$120 million over five years under the National Professional Development Program (NPD) "to support educators of English learner students." [54]

Conclusion

Educational institutions are responsible for ensuring that ML students and parents, regardless of their linguistic backgrounds, have equal access to educational services, resources, and information. We hope that this guide helps schools and districts navigate the tools, strategies, and steps needed to achieve this for the MLL parents they serve.

We've highlighted the benefits and legal basis for language accessibility, the importance of a systemic approach, implementation resources, information about deploying translation and interpretation services, and the roles and responsibilities of district personnel. But the overarching message remains: language access benefits everyone, not just families and students.

As South Carolina's districts engage in this work, it's crucial to remember that language

access is not a one-time initiative but an ongoing commitment. It's a reflection of our State's dedication to educational excellence. By prioritizing language access, schools can become spaces where all students have the tools they need to succeed.

Our shared goal is clear: to build an educational environment where every student, irrespective of the language they speak at home, can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally, for the benefit of South Carolina's schools, communities, and people. Together, we can turn this vision into a reality. [55]

If you are a school district interested in learning more about how your school district can make language access a reality in your school, we welcome you to contact CFEC [56] for additional assistance.

Resources

U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. DCL Fact Sheet: Rights of Limited English Proficient (LEP) Parents under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. January 2015. Accessed [April 21, 2024]. URL: https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-MLL-parents-201501.pdf; See also U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. "Education and Title VI." Last accessed April 1, 2024. URL: https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/hq43e4.html

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List of Sources of Funding for Language Access Programs. 16. Funding sources for Language Access Programs

Appendix A

Resources Linked in the Guide

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