

# Language Access Resources

This resource was adapted from the Washington State Governor's Office of the Education Ombuds document **Communicating With Families With Language Access Needs: Tips for Educators When Using a Qualified Interpreter (Telephonic or In Person)**.

## Overview

Qualified interpreters play an important role in effective communication with and for students and families who either speak a primary language other than English or are deaf or hard of hearing (HOH) and use American Sign Language or another system of visual communication. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, schools and school districts have obligations to provide qualified interpreters for students and families who need them. Understanding and complying with these obligations ensures that events are accessible and inclusive.

## Understand Your School District's Process for Accessing Interpreters

Schools and school districts must ensure qualified interpreters are available to help communicate with families when needed. That may include having individuals on staff who are qualified to interpret, having a contract with outside agencies that provide in-person interpreters, and maintaining an account with a telephonic interpreter. It is important to ask families what works best for them.

Many districts have written guidelines for accessing interpretation services for families who use a primary language other than spoken English. You can determine who in your district is responsible for providing language interpreting services. In some schools, it is the English Language Learners (ELL) department. For others, it may be the Americans with Disabilities Act/504 coordinator. Even if the student speaks English and does not receive language learner services, the ELL department is a resource for families who need interpretation in languages other than English. Similarly, the special education department can be a resource for families of students with disabilities.

## Schools and Districts May Be Eligible to Use Interpretation Vendors on Contract

Washington state has contracts that state, local, and Tribal governments can access. Qualified districts will have a signed master contract usage agreement (<https://des.wa.gov/services/contracting-purchasing>).

The Department of Social and Health Services manages statewide sign language interpreter contracts through its Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

Below is a list of contracts that are typically accessible to school and school districts:

- In-person, spoken interpreter services for languages other than English
- Telephone-based interpreter services for languages other than English
- Phone interpretation
- Contracts for in-person interpreters for deaf/HOH families
- Telecommunication relay services for deaf/HOH families
- Video remote interpreting services for deaf/HOH families
- Communication facilitator services for deaf/HOH families

## Resources

### COMMUNICATION MODES FOR DEAF/HOH FAMILIES

- Sign Language Interpreters: An Introduction: <https://www.nationaldeafcenter.org/resource/sign-language-interpreters-introduction>
- Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing: <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa/office-deaf-and-hard-hearing>
- Washington School for the Deaf: <http://www.wsd.wa.gov/outreach/>
- The National Institutes of Health's 10 Tips for Using a Sign Language Interpreter: <https://www.edi.nih.gov/blog/communities/10-tips-using-sign-language-interpreter>

### LEGAL OBLIGATIONS FOR LANGUAGE ACCESS

- Schools' Civil Rights Obligations to English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/ellresources.html>
- Section 504 and ADA Obligations of Public Schools: <https://www.nad.org/resources/education/k-12-education/section-504-and-ada-obligations-of-public-schools/>

## Additional Assistance

Have questions or need more information? Contact the Governor's Office of the Education Ombuds.

**Toll-free phone:** 1.866.297.2597 (Phone interpreter services available)

**Email:** [oeoinfo@gov.wa.gov](mailto:oeoinfo@gov.wa.gov) | <http://www.oeo.wa.gov>