

# Using Interpreters for Communication with Schools

In Ohio, schools and families work together to help children succeed. They do this by talking and sharing important information with each other. Schools must share information in the languages families prefer. Your family can get help from interpreters to ask questions and share your ideas or concerns with the school.

## Interpretation and Translation

### Who are Interpreters?

Interpreters are professionals who help individuals who speak different languages communicate. They listen to one person speak in one language. They share that information to others in a different language. Interpreters may also help describe cultural differences. Think of them as a bridge toward understanding your child's teacher.

*An interpreter can help a family who speaks Somali communicate with their child's teacher who speaks English. The interpreter can share what the parent or caregiver says to the teacher in English. Then they share what the teacher says to the parent or caregiver in Somali.*

### Types of Interpreters

- In-person interpreters are present with the family and interpret in person. Over-the-phone interpreters provide live interpreting over the phone.
- Video interpreters communicate through video. They use a device like a smartphone or computer.
- Sign Language interpreters provide interpretation for individuals who have hearing loss. Some people prefer to communicate through sign language. Many sign language interpreters are trained on structured American Sign Language vocabulary. This may not be the same in other cultures and languages.

## Who can be an interpreter?

Interpreters must be trained and certified. Interpretation requires special skills and training. Schools may not rely on students, siblings, or untrained adults to be interpreters.

Children who interpret for their parents may experience increased stress or pressure. This is especially true if conversations include terms or topics they do not know. When using someone who is not trained as an interpreter, there is a greater risk of misunderstanding between the school and families. This is because they may not understand all the educational processes, systems or terms used by the school.

## What is translation?

Translation is when information is written from one language to another. A person who is trained to do this is called a translator. Some community organizations provide translation services for free or at a low cost.

## What is a school's role in providing interpretation and translation?

- In Ohio, schools must translate written materials.  
Schools may ask families to bring translations of school transcripts when enrolling their child to a new school. In these cases, you may need to pay a fee to get the transcripts translated. Some community organizations may provide translation services at a lower cost or for free.
- Schools must provide interpreters and translation for free to families who request it.
- The interpreter must respect the family's privacy.
- Schools should make sure that interpreters are trained to help in education settings.

## When can interpreters help?

You can ask for help from an interpreter anytime you need to talk to someone at your child's school. This can be useful when you are meeting with your child's teacher or other staff members.

### Here are some examples:

- [Parent-Teacher Conferences](#)
- Meetings about your child's special education needs
- Meetings with the school counselor
- Home visits: when school staff visit your home to get to know your family
- School events for families
- School board meetings: gatherings where decisions are made regarding school policies and other important matters that affect the students, families, and schools

## How do I request an interpreter?

When scheduling a meeting at the school, you can tell the person scheduling the meeting that you need an interpreter. It is important to make the request as soon as possible. That way, the school has time to find an interpreter.

There are other individuals at the school that may also be able to help you request an interpreter like:

- English language teacher
- Family liaison
- School counselor
- Your child's teacher
- Office aide or secretary

## Questions You Can Ask about Interpreters

Here is a list of questions you can ask when requesting an interpreter:

- Can I have my child, a family member, or a friend interpret for me?
- How do I request an interpreter for school meetings?
- Is there a specific process or form I need to complete to make sure an interpreter is available for school events?
- How far in advance should I request an interpreter when I need one?
- How do I know if the interpreter will respect my privacy and not share anything with others?
- How can I provide feedback about the quality of the interpretation services I receive?

## Tips For Parents Using an Interpreter

1. Set aside extra time for meetings or events with an interpreter. Communicating with an interpreter often takes extra time.
2. When speaking, look directly at the person you are meeting with. Do not look at the interpreter. This allows the other person to see any gestures you make. This can help them understand you better.
3. The interpreter is there to help you communicate with the school.
4. It may seem like the interpreter is ignoring you or that they are serious. It may be that they are focusing on helping everyone understand each other.
5. Interpreters must respect the privacy of families. They are not allowed to tell others about what families share with schools.
6. Try speaking in one or two short sentences at a time. It is important to focus on

- sharing a complete thought. Then, pause to give the interpreter time to share what is said.
7. The interpreter may raise their hand or give a different signal. This means they need you or someone else to pause.
  8. If something is unclear, the interpreter may ask you to repeat yourself.
  9. It is important to note that sometimes, cultural interpretations may not be understood completely, such as hand gestures or colloquial phrases.



## Additional Resources

- The [Building Successful Communication Between Parent or Guardian and Teacher page from the University of Minnesota](#) provides more information about how to work with an interpreter in various languages. You can listen to or read the information.
- Learn more about [Working with Language Interpreters on the University of Minnesota website](#). It has information in English, Arabic, Simplified and Traditional Chinese, and Vietnamese.
- [USA Hello](#) provides resources for families about interpretation, translation, and other important topics about education.
- [Information for Limited English Proficient Parents and for Schools and School Districts that Communicate with Them from Colorín Colorado](#) is a fact sheet available in multiple languages. It answers common questions about the rights of parents and guardians who do not speak, listen, read, or write English proficiently because it is not their primary language.

## Mobile Applications

- [Google Lens](#) allows you to use your phone to translate words just by scanning text

with your camera or using a photo. You can search what you see, get things done faster and understand the world around you.

*These resources aim to bolster academic, student wellness, and college and career outcomes for Ohio's multilingual learners. Resources were created through a collaborative effort between the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce and The Ohio State University's Center on Education and Training for Employment along with a dedicated group of family advocates, community leaders, school district personnel, and teachers.*