

Communicating With Parents Who Don't Speak English: A Guide for Teachers and Staff

Suppose one of your students has been coming to school late and her grades are starting to slip. You call home to discuss with the parent, but it's clear that the woman who answers the phone doesn't understand English. You hang up and wonder how you can communicate better with your student's family.

Did you know that Albemarle County Public Schools has an interpreting and translating system that can help staff bridge the gap with limited English speaking parents? Here is some basic information that can help get you started:

- Each school has a fund for interpreting (spoken communication) and translation (written communication). The principal may designate one person in the school to make requests or ask each staff member to make his or her own requests when needed. The principal may also give general guidelines for using funds; for example, he or she may decide that translating a school-wide newsletter is a priority, but classroom newsletters should be approved on a case-by-case basis.
- Common uses of interpreting include SBIT and IEP meetings, parent conferences, events, and calls regarding illness, absences, missed work, and other concerns. Common requests for written translation include newsletters, discipline letters, field trip permission forms, and event flyers.
- Access to several sources for interpreting ensures service for all languages spoken in our schools.
 1. **Interpreter List**
For face-to-face meetings, a live interpreter is usually the best choice. The [Interpreter List](#) (ACPS login required), which includes frequently updated contact information for many trained interpreters and translators who have experience working in local schools, is available at <http://www2.k12albemarle.org/dept/instruction/esol/For%20Staff/Pages/default.aspx>. The interpreter can help you contact the parents with possible appointment times that will fit everyone's schedule.
 2. If there is not an interpreter available on the Interpreter List, you can request an International Rescue Committee (**IRC**) **contracted interpreter** by emailing Nancy Lam at nlam@k12albemarle.org. Include the student's name, date, time and location of the request.
 3. The Interpretalk **phone language line** is available for unplanned needs and for languages not available through the list or IRC. It is especially helpful if a parent comes into the school unexpectedly. A phone call on a speaker phone enables you to address minor concerns quickly, and if needed, schedule a later meeting with a live interpreter. You also can make direct phone calls to parents by just giving the dispatcher the parent's phone number when you request an interpreter. A [handy reference sheet](#) (ACPS login required) for accessing the service is available at <http://www2.k12albemarle.org/dept/instruction/esol/For%20Staff/Pages/default.aspx>. You can post a printed copy by office phones.
- Finally, ESOL program staff are always glad to help troubleshoot issues or offer suggestions if you are having difficulty finding an interpreter using any of these resources, or if you would like ideas for improving communication with limited English families. Contact Elaine Cecelski (973-7921 or eccecelski@k12albemarle.org) or Laura Brown (296-3872, ext.3 or lbrown2@k12albemarle.org).