

H.B. 302: EDUCATIONAL LANGUAGE SERVICE AMENDMENTS



A bill to equip teachers to communicate with families learning English

"In the implementation of all policies, programs, and responsibilities adopted in accordance with this public education code, the Legislature, the state board, local school boards, and charter school governing boards shall:

- (a) respect, protect, and further the interests of parents in their children's public education; and***
- (b) promote and encourage full and active participation and involvement of parents at all public schools."***

Utah Code, Section 53E-2-201(2)

Utah's enduring—and codified—commitment to “respect[ing], protect[ing], and further[ing] the interests of parents in their children's public education” extends to families learning English. This bill requires schools to have a plan to communicate with these families and establishes a procurement advisory council to ensure existing interpretation and translation services meet the needs of Utah's students and their families.

English Learner Family Engagement

Families learning English may need interpreted (oral) or translated (printed) information to:

- Enroll their children in school and ensure appropriate placement, English language supports, disability supports, and social-emotional services are provided;
- Understand their student's schedules, support coursework, and monitor progress;
- Participate in school community councils, PTAs, or become classroom volunteers; and
- Consent to field trips, extracurricular participation, movies, or sexual education.

LEA Family Engagement Policy Addendums

Teachers and school support staff work tirelessly to support all students—but often have questions about when to use interpretation and translation services (which forms? how often?); what types of services to use (phone interpretation? in-person interpretation? what about unique dialects? a teacher down the hall speaks Spanish, can I ask them?); and how to access those services (what is the appropriate etiquette? who do I have to notify to make a request? do I need to use my classroom budget?). For schools that have recently received several Pashto or Dari-speaking Afghan refugees, these questions are even more urgent.

All schools should have a plan for communicating with students and families learning English. This bill requires schools to include families learning English in their family engagement policies. These policies should outline how the school district recommends school staff use interpretation and translation services. This bill instructs the Utah State Board of Education (USBE) to create a model policy that can be adapted by schools to meet the needs of their student populations and available resources. Schools with diverse linguistic populations may have lengthier, more detailed policies; schools with only a handful of English learners may have shorter policies. All schools across the state will be ready when children and families learning English enter their doors.

Statewide Cooperative Contracts for Language Services

The Utah Division of Purchasing and General Services procures statewide cooperative contracts for interpretation and translation services that school districts can opt into using. Teachers and administrators have reported several challenges to using those contracts, including:

- Schools don't know these contracts are available;
- The contracts do not meet the needs of school staff, students learning English, and their families; and
- Schools aren't getting what they pay for, such as "I-Speak" cards, posters, or informational guides that are a part of the contract.

These challenges result in the underutilization of statewide cooperative contracts for language services, increasing costs for schools and decreasing the quality of home-school communication. If interpretation or translation services are hard to use, school staff may opt to use bilingual students, uncertified or compensated bilingual staff, or third-party apps like Google Translate. While the use of services procured by the Division of Purchasing assures privacy, neutrality, and accuracy in interpreted or translated interactions, use of these alternatives does not. Even if schools independently solicit services to replace the statewide cooperative contracts, those services do not take advantage of the state's economy of scale and represent a duplication of staff time and administrative burdens.

Procurement Advisory Council

This bill creates a procurement advisory council co-chaired by staff from the Division of Purchasing and USBE. In addition to the Co-Chairs, **the council includes:**

- A family learning English;
- Teachers and administrators from school districts with high and low densities of students learning English;
- An LEA procurement agent and the State Board's Purchasing Director or designee;
- One or more employees of the state board who manage or administer services or programs for an English learner student and the student's family;
- An individual representing a community organization that directly serves English learner students and the students' families;
- A member of the Division of Multicultural Affairs; and
- An individual who works to assist English learner or minority students navigate school and community resources, such as a refugee liaison.

This council will ensure the Division of Purchasing has the requisite information about the needs of Utah's students to procure contracts that meet those needs. The council will also ensure that DoP and USBE communicate about the best ways to share information about the statewide cooperative contracts with LEAs. The council will report to the Education Committee annually on the existing use and efficacy of all contracts. The council is set to sunset in 2025, after a structure of coordination has been established.