

Exceptional Children's Assistance Center (ECAC) Language Access, Cultural Competence, & Disability Access Policy

The Exceptional Children's Assistance Center (ECAC) ensures equitable access to and participation in its activities for all NC families, with special attention paid to ensuring access by families who are historically underserved due to poverty, disability, race, color, language, ethnicity, immigrant status or national origin, gender, or age. As a private non-profit parent organization, the Exceptional Children's Assistance Center is "committed to improving the lives and education of ALL children through a special emphasis on children with disabilities. ECAC affirms the right of all individuals, from all backgrounds and cultures, with or without disabilities, to an appropriate education and other needed services. We seek to make that right a reality by providing information, education, outreach, and support to and for families with children across the state of North Carolina."

ECAC has a long history of collaborating with schools, community, cultural and faith based organizations, hospitals, and local, state, and federal agencies to ensure that families throughout NC have access to our services. Our main office is located in the state's largest urban area and regional offices are located in the state capital, predominately rural Eastern NC, and in the Western NC mountains. These offices are all located in areas with significant numbers of underserved families.

ECAC collaborates with a large variety of government and community-based agencies in communities with high concentrations of traditionally underrepresented families. Our diverse staff is representative of NC's population and has the capacity to reach and engage families from all communities throughout the state. Parents are encouraged and supported to participate regardless of race, color, national origin, gender, age, disability, religion, or language. Native Spanish speaking families are the fastest growing minority population in our state and, other than English, Spanish is the most commonly spoken language. ECAC provides one on one assistance, trainings, and materials in Spanish. ECAC has three native Spanish speaking staff members who not only support families using ECAC services throughout the state but also have a growing list of local community resources to assist those families. All project activities are located in accessible buildings.

In North Carolina 809,075 individuals or 9.6% of the total state population speak a language other than English at home. **67.1% of these individuals speak Spanish, and 56.8% out of speak English less than "very well"**. North Carolina is one of the top ten fastest growing states and the 6th with the largest increase in population size. Approximately 20.5% of the total population increase between 2000 and 2006 and NC was directly attributable to immigrants, especially individuals who speak Spanish. (www.lep.gov).

ECAC projects such as, PTI (Parent Training Information), NCPIRC (North Carolina Parent Information and Resource Center, and HIC (Health Information Center) through partnership with Latino organizations, provide statewide workshops in Spanish upon request, and disseminate educational information for Latino parents in such language through exhibits and the Lending Library program. Each of these projects has an outreach program intended to identify the most

effective leaders in those organizations to ensure that we effectively reach the Latino population. NCPIRC works with Title 1 schools, community-based organizations and churches mostly through workshops, staff training, and exhibits. These institutions are very familiar with the language needs of the LEP state population, since most of their programs are designed for minorities and schools in improvement. The PTI in partnership with Latino organizations through out the state provides workshops in Spanish as needed. The outreach efforts ensure that the leaders of Latino organizations are aware of ECAC services. To effectively reach the Latino families who have children with disabilities, the PTI attends festivals sponsored by community-based organizations and participates in Latino radio stations to spread the word about our programs. The NC Family to Family Health Information Center frequently partners with community-based organizations and local support groups to provide workshops and materials to Latino families across the state. By providing our translated materials at health fairs and exhibits we are also able to reach non English speaking families.

ECAC ensures access by conducting the following activities:

- Identifying and using materials that are user-friendly for families with low-literacy; translating into multiple languages¹ and making them available in varied formats; piloting them with diverse families to ensure understandability and usefulness; and revising them as appropriate based on parent feedback;
- Operating a website that has information in multiple languages and that can be accessed by families and professionals who are blind or visually impaired; (new website will be launched by 5/1/11)
- Conducting workshops in multiple languages including sign language as needed, monolingual workshops in Spanish and workshops using simultaneous translation, and advertising availability of interpretation services on all outreach materials;
- Conducting activities that have disability-accessibility, and providing support to enable low-income families to access services;
- Hiring staff who are representative of the diverse communities we serve (current staff reflect NC's diversity), including staff who are low income, bilingual and/or who have disabilities;
- Conducting cultural competence workshops for our staff, parent volunteers, and professionals participating in activities to ensure that they are able to work with diverse families, and informing them at least annually of ECAC's language, culture, and disability access policies;
- Working with community and faith-based organizations with experience and expertise in working with and serving diverse communities, including organizations that have expertise in working with individuals with disabilities;
- Facilitating focus groups with diverse families to obtain their input and recommendations regarding strategies to ensure that ECAC's activities meet the needs of the full range of NC families. The focus group consist of participants who speak languages other than English, are racially or ethnically diverse, or who have disabilities themselves, as well as the needs of mothers, fathers, and professionals, and using their recommendations to improve services;
- Continually monitoring the impact of services to ensure that families and professionals who participate in ECAC activities reflect the full diversity of NC. To the fullest extent possible evaluate the project services to determine that they are high quality, useful, and meet their needs. Using information from surveys, focus groups, evaluations, and interviews to

¹ ECAC translates all materials into Spanish and selected materials into other languages as appropriate.

improve appropriateness and effectiveness of the project for diverse families and professionals;

- Targeting intensive services to families who are most underrepresented and in greatest need, and in geographic areas where underrepresented families live, taking into consideration that families who face barriers to equitable participation often require more intensive, focused, and targeted services to ensure they understand and can use information and skills;
- Conducting outreach about project services in ethnic media and via community and faith-based organizations that serve the most underrepresented families;
- Making information available in multiple formats and through multiple mechanisms, including the web, hard copy of information, easy-to-read versions of information, and trainings that can be varied to meet participant needs (for example, conducting a basic rights in special education or an IDEA/ESEA workshop over several sessions for families with limited literacy, limited English skills, or limited cognitive abilities, or conducting workshops in the evening, during the weekday, and on weekends, or conducting workshops via teleconference or the web for parents with limited transportation or who have physical disabilities that limit their travel);
- Conducting activities at multiple times, such as in the evening, during the weekday (for example, lunch hour and evening “after children’s bedtime” webinars and conference call training sessions that fathers and working mothers may find easier to participate in), or weekends (including Saturdays and Sundays to respect diverse religious beliefs and practices);
- Using research-based practices that have been proven effective with diverse populations;
- Asking diverse families and professionals themselves how they can most easily and effectively access services, and varying services to meet those expressed needs; and
- Ensuring that ECAC subcontractors have language, culture, and disability access policies.

Responsible Parties:

ECAC’s Executive Director and Assistant Director under the direction of the ECAC Board of Directors, are responsible for implementation and monitoring of ECAC’s language, culture, and disability access policies, including ensuring that ECAC staff are aware of and compliant with these policies. ECAC’s TA Coordinator ensures language access to ECAC’s technical assistance activities. ECAC’s webmaster maintains the website connections to web-based language translation programs to ensure that ECAC’s website is accessible in multiple languages. ECAC’s Project Directors are responsible for ensuring that products developed by their project staff are translated at least into Spanish, and for considering the need to translate those products into other languages. They also ensure that workshop and support materials are translated into needed languages and that workshops are available in multiple languages as needed.

LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN OBJECTIVES & ACTIVITIES

OBJECTIVE 1:

Assess family language access needs and ECAC capacities on an ongoing basis.

Activity 1.1: ECAC collects data by “language spoken” each year by September 30. Collected data is reviewed by ECAC’s Executive Director and Management team for planning, budgeting, and development and implementation of annual Language Access plans.

Activity 1.2: Every three years, ECAC management involves the entire staff and facilitates a cultural and linguistic competence self-assessment using the National Center for Cultural Competence’s Cultural and Linguistic Competence Family Organization Self-Assessment tool. This tool is designed to assess the knowledge base of staff around cultural and linguistic competence and the effectiveness of the Language Access Plan.

Activity 1.3: ECAC solicits the feedback of LEP families regarding the effectiveness of its training and technical assistance for LEP families on an annual basis by ensuring that LEP families are part of the pool of families contacted for follow-up surveys.

OBJECTIVE 2:

Within 2 months of the product development, translate vital documents into the LEP languages largely served by ECAC.

A “vital document” is defined as outreach and educational materials published by ECAC that inform families about their rights, effective practices or available training, technical assistance, and support services. This provision also applies to all contractors/vendors that ECAC funds to carry out services to our constituency.

Activity 2.1: ECAC routinely surveys all existing English language forms, outreach and educational materials (including fact sheets, resources guides, and powerpoint presentations), and other resources to identify documents that should be translated. ECAC’s Project Directors discuss the highest priority documents and timelines for translation.

Activity 2.2: ECAC’s bilingual staff with expertise in written translation will translate all vital materials. In addition, if staff do not have the expertise to translate materials in an identified language, ECAC contracts with community-based organizations with expertise in written translation to translate the materials. ECAC has bilingual staff “proof” the translated documents, and then conducts focus groups with families when materials have been translated to assess quality of translation, provide effective quality controls, and involve LEP families in the process.

Activity 2.3: ECAC makes translated materials available to the public through multiple agency points of contact, our website, parent education events, outreach activities, and the toll free

Parent Info line. The main ECAC office is staffed by three bilingual staff who provide telephone technical assistance through the Parent Info Line.. A series of recorded teleconferences on education, health rights, and resources in Spanish including accompanying powerpoint presentations and resource materials are archived on ECAC's website.

Activity 2.4: ECAC's Spanish speaking staff responds to written correspondence and email. Responses in languages other than Spanish are provided through collaboration with community-based organizations and volunteers.

OBJECTIVE 3:

Provide oral language service on an ongoing basis through a diverse bilingual workforce, partnerships with immigrant and community-based agencies, volunteers, and the language line.

“Oral language services” means the provision of oral information necessary to enable limited or non-English proficiency families to access or participate in programs or services offered by ECAC.

Activity 3.1: ECAC services include placement of bilingual staff in public contact positions; the provision of experienced and trained staff who speak the language of origin; contracting with telephone interpreter programs (the Language Line); contracting with private interpreter services as needed; and using interpreters made available through community services organizations that are publicly funded for that purpose.

Activity 3.2: ECAC will include this provision in contracts/subcontracts with all contractors/vendors that ECAC funds to carry out services to its public.

Activity 3.3: ECAC will ensure that all staff are aware of its policy that use of family members as interpreters is prohibited unless all other mechanisms have been exhausted (for a very low incidence language), and then only with the consent of the parent. Use of children as interpreters is absolutely prohibited.

Activity 3.4: ECAC has three bilingual family information and support staff that speak Spanish and are available to speak to non-English speaking families. ECAC prioritizes hiring of bilingual staff particularly in all outreach positions. ECAC also contracts with the Language Line for families who speak languages other than the languages spoken by ECAC staff. ECAC works with community-based and immigrant-serving organizations to assist in communicating with non-English speaking families. ECAC pays bilingual staff for utilization of their oral and written language translation skills.

Activity 3.5: ECAC informs LEP families of the availability of language assistance via its website as well as a recorded message in Spanish on its answering machine attached to its toll-free number.

Activity 3.6: ECAC informs LEP families that they may access simultaneous translation at workshops, mini-conferences, and statewide conferences, and contracts with qualified, trained interpreters to translate oral presentations simultaneously with the English language presentation using simultaneous translation equipment.

OBJECTIVE 4:

Enhance the capacity of ECAC staff to effectively provide language access to and serve LEP families.

Activity 4.1: ECAC will conduct one linguistic or cultural competence professional development activity with ECAC staff each year.

Activity 4.2: ECAC will establish an on-going Cultural Competence and Language Access workgroup that will oversee implementation and assessment of the Action Plan. The work group will be facilitated by the TA Coordinator and all bilingual staff serve on the workgroup.

OBJECTIVE 5:

Regularly conduct outreach activities highlighting ECAC programs and services and targeting LEP populations to be served by ECAC.

Activity 5.1: ECAC participates in and cosponsors events in LEP communities including fairs, community meetings, educational workshops, leadership training, etc..

Activity 5.2: ECAC disseminates information through LEP media outlets including LEP TV, newspapers, and radio.

Activity 5.3: ECAC routinely distributes flyers, brochures, and other printed materials in non-English languages, particularly Spanish, through community-based organizations serving LEP families.

Activity 5.4: ECAC disseminates information in Spanish through its own and partner websites.

Certification of Language Access Plan Approval for Parent Center

ECAC's language access plan meets the standards and criteria outlined in the following checklist:

APPROVAL CHECKLIST

A successful Language Access Plan aligns the overall furnished information or rendered services, programs or activities to improvement objectives with the following three criteria. To qualify as an approved Language Access Plan for a specific covered entity, the plan must meet these criteria. It is critical that Language Access planning not be viewed or treated as a separate exercise. There must be strong connections between the proposed program, services, or activities of the covered entity and the plan improvements.

_____ The plan establishes clear goals and a realistic strategy for the covered entity to provide public services, programs, and activities for the State residents with limited or non-English proficiency.

_____ The plan provides for a sufficient budget to acquire and maintain the public services, programs, and activities that will be needed to implement the strategy for improved data collection, oral language services and written language services.

_____ The plan includes an evaluation process that enables the Parent Center's Board, Executive Director, and Project Directors to track and monitor progress toward the specified goals and make mid-course corrections in response to new developments and opportunities as they arise.

Approved by:

Parent Center Board President: _____ Date: _____

Parent Center Executive Director: _____ Date: _____

PTI Director: _____ Date: _____

PIRC Director : _____ Date: _____

Exceptional Children's Assistance Center

Language Access & Services to LEP Families Budget

Line item/category	Language Access	% of ECAC total Exp
Bilingual Staff Salary	32,227	3.24%
Bilingual Staff Fringe	10,313	3.24%
Facilities for Bilingual Staff	4,712	4.13%
Supplies for Bilingual Staff	330	2.20%
Printing of Bilingual materials	1,000	10.00%
Duplications of Bilingual materials	5,750	9.99%
Communication cost for Bilingual Staff	6,219	9.87%
Language Line (other than Spanish)	395	100.00%
Postage for Bilingual materials	1,689	9.94%
Travel/Mileage for Bilingual Staff	4,200	9.81%
Meetings/Conferences/Workshops	6,390	9.97%
Sub Contract Management (PIRC/Bus Office)	1,320	8.80%
 Total	 \$74,545	 2.66%

Note: 9.6 % of this state's residents do not speak English at home
ECAC's over all budget is around \$2.8 million per
year