

PARENT CENTER POLICY FOR LANGUAGE ACCESS, CULTURAL COMPETENCE, & DISABILITY ACCESS

Parent Center ensures equitable access to and participation in its activities for all [State] families, with special attention paid to ensuring access for the most underserved families due to poverty, disability, race, color, language, ethnicity, immigrant status or national origin, gender, or age. Parent Center's mission embodies a focus on families of children with special needs, particularly underserved families and children at greatest risk: "The mission of the Parent Center is to empower families and inform and involve professionals and other individuals interested in the healthy development and educational rights of children and youth. Parent Center's foremost commitment is to children and youth with the greatest need due to disability, poverty, discrimination based on race, sex, or *language, immigrant* or foster care *status*, geographic location, or other special circumstances." Parent Center locates our offices and services in northern, central, and southern areas of the state, and in urban, suburban, and rural communities, collaborating with schools, community-based organizations, hospitals, and local, state, and federal agencies. Parent Center's main office is in [Underserved City], with regional offices in Underserved City 2 and Underserved City 3 (all communities with significant numbers of underserved and limited English proficient families), and community resource centers in urban, rural, and suburban communities throughout the state housed in churches, disability organizations, family resource centers, military bases, hospitals, county Special Child Health Services Case Management Units, and other sites where diverse families are typically found.

Parent Center collaborates with a multitude of government and community-based agencies in communities housing high concentrations of traditionally underrepresented families. Our diverse staff, which is representative of [State]'s population, has the capacity to reach and engage families from all communities throughout [State]. Parents are encouraged and supported to participate regardless of race, color, national origin, gender, age, disability, religion, or language. Trainings and materials are provided in multiple languages, including simultaneous translation to ensure equal participation in multiple languages, including sign language. All project activities are located in accessible buildings and in areas that can be reached by public transportation. Focus groups of mothers and fathers from diverse backgrounds are conducted periodically to identify effective strategies to encourage the participation of men, women, and people from diverse racial, socio-economic, immigrant, and language backgrounds.

In particular, Parent Center ensures access by conducting the following activities:

- Identifying and using materials that are user-friendly for families with low-literacy; translating them 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;
- Conducting workshops in multiple languages including sign language as needed, including monolingual workshops in Spanish and workshops using simultaneous translation, and advertising availability of interpretation services on all outreach materials;

¹ Parent Center translates most materials into Spanish and selected materials into other languages as appropriate.

- Conducting activities in locations accessible by public transportation and 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 (consistent with our current hiring and staffing patterns, which reflect [State]’s diversity), including staff who are bilingual or trilingual, fluent in sign language, and/or who have disabilities;
- Conducting cultural competence workshops for staff, parent volunteers, and professionals participating in activities to ensure they are able to work with diverse families, and informing them at least annually of Parent Center’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 such as the Immigration Policy Network, Hispanic Directors Association, El Club de Padres Multilingual Center, and organizations that have expertise in working with individuals with disabilities, such as the Centers for Independent Living and county Offices on Disability, and others;
- Facilitating focus groups with diverse families, including men and women, to obtain input and recommendations on strategies to ensure that Parent Center activities meet the needs of the full range of [State] families, 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 male and female professionals, and using recommendations to improve services;
- Continually monitoring the impact of services, including the diversity of participants, to ensure that families and professionals who participate in Parent Center activities reflect the full diversity of NJ, as well as the extent to which various categories of participants indicate that project services are of high quality, are useful, and meet their needs, and using information from surveys, focus groups, evaluations, and interviews to 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/NCLB 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” tele-seminars 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 subcontractors have language, culture, and disability access policies.

Responsible Parties:

Parent Center's Director, under the direction of the Parent Center Board of Trustees, are responsible for implementation and monitoring of Parent Center's language, culture, and disability access policies, including ensuring that Parent Center staff are aware of and compliant with these policies. Parent Center's Director of Culturally Appropriate Outreach and Support oversees activities with diverse families to identify effectiveness of approaches, activities and materials, as well as Parent Center's use and dissemination of the Traducelo Ahora web-based Spanish language website and email translation program. Parent Center's Legal and TA Director ensures language access to Parent Center's technical assistance activities, including ensuring that staff are aware of how to use the Language Line when needed. Parent Center's Director of Parent and Professional Development ensures that workshop and support materials are translated into needed languages and that workshops are available in multiple languages as needed. Parent Center's Office Systems Manager maintains the contract with the Language Line. Parent Center's webmaster maintains the website connections to web-based language translation programs to ensure that the website is accessible in multiple languages. 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.

LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN OBJECTIVES & ACTIVITIES

OBJECTIVE 1:

To assess family language access needs and Parent Center capacities on an ongoing basis.

Activity 1.1: Parent Center collects unduplicated data by "language spoken" each year by October 30. Collected data is reviewed by Parent Center's Director and Management team for planning, budgeting, and development and implementation of annual Language Access plans.

Activity 1.2: Parent Center 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 every three years, involving the entire staff, to assess the knowledge base of staff around cultural and linguistic competence and the effectiveness of the language access plan.

Activity 1.3: Parent Center 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:

To translate vital documents into the LEP languages largely served by Parent Center within 2 months of their development. A "vital document" is defined as outreach and educational materials published by Parent Center that inform families about their rights or available training, technical assistance, and support services. This provision also applies to all contractors/vendors that Parent Center funds to carry out services to our constituency.

Activity 2.1: Parent Center 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 because they convey critical information. Parent Center's Project Directors discuss the highest priority documents and timelines for translation.

Activity 2.2: Parent Center contracts with bilingual staff with expertise in written translation to translate materials. For language for which Parent Center does not have bilingual staff with the qualifications or capacity to translate written materials, Parent Center contracts with community-based organizations with expertise in written translation to translate materials. Parent Center 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: Parent Center makes translated materials available to the public through multiple agency points of contact, including our website (where on-line translation resources such as Traducelo Ahora-Spanish, and multiple other languages, are featured on the website just below the website masthead); main, satellite, and county offices, staffed by Parent Center staff speaking 9 language; and telephone technical assistance through our 800 toll-free number. A series of recorded teleconferences on education and health rights and resources in Spanish, with accompanying powerpoint presentations and resource materials, are archived on the Parent Center website.

Activity 2.4: Parent Center responds to correspondence written in a non-English language by soliciting the assistance of our staff, who speak 9 languages, and through collaboration with community-based organizations for languages other than those spoken by Parent Center staff. Parent Center responds to email correspondence from Spanish-speaking families using Spanish-speaking staff, and/or the Traducelo Ahora web-based Spanish language translation program, that allows parents and professionals to communicate with each other bi-directionally (family sends email in Spanish, professional receives it in English and Spanish; professional sends email to family in English, family receives it in English and Spanish).

OBJECTIVE 3:

To provide oral language services through a diverse bilingual workforce, partnerships with immigrant and community-based agencies, and the language line, on an ongoing basis. "Oral language services" means the provision of oral information necessary to enable limited or no-English proficiency families to access or participate in programs or services offered by Parent Center.

Activity 3.1: Parent Center services include placement of bilingual staff in public contact positions; the provision of experienced and trained staff interpreters; 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: Parent Center will include this provision in contracts/subcontracts with all contractors/vendors that Parent Center funds to carry out services to its public.

Activity 3.3: Parent Center 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: Parent Center has a bilingual (Spanish) Administrative Assistant who is available to answer phone calls from Spanish-speaking families. Parent Center also has bilingual family information and support staff speaking 9 languages available to speak to non-English speaking families, and prioritizes hiring of bilingual staff and placing them in communities with high numbers of LEP families. Parent Center also contracts with the Language Line for families who speak languages other than the languages spoken by Parent Center staff. Parent Center works with community-based and immigrant-serving organizations to assist in communicating with non-English speaking families. Parent Center pays bilingual staff for utilization of their oral and written language translation skills.

Activity 3.5: Parent Center 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: Parent Center 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 that Parent Center has purchased.

OBJECTIVE 4:

To enhance the capacity of Parent Center staff to effectively provide language access to and serve LEP families.

Activity 4.1: Parent Center conducts one linguistic or cultural competence professional development to Parent Center staff each year. This professional development includes its policies and procedures for language assistance activities/resources, including how to use Parent Center's telephonic interpretation services and how to request translation of Parent Center written materials and access such written materials to share with families.

Activity 4.2: Parent Center has an on-going Cultural Competence and Language Access Taskforce that oversees implementation and assessment of the Action Plan. The Taskforce is chaired by a bilingual Parent Center staff person who directs Parent Center's Culturally Competent Outreach and Support Project.

OBJECTIVE 5:

To conduct outreach activities that target LEP populations served or encountered by Parent Center on services and programs offered by Parent Center on an ongoing basis. These activities include providing LEP communities with information about Parent Center's benefits and services and language access plans.

Activity 5.1: Parent Center organizes events in LEP communities including fairs, community meetings, educational workshops, etc., in collaboration with community-based organizations, including at least one parent leadership development training series in Spanish each year.

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

Activity 5.3: Parent Center routinely distributes flyers, brochures, and other printed material, including DOE/EI documents, in non-English languages, particularly Spanish, including by having materials available at community-based organizations serving LEP families such as immigrant organizations and Family Success Centers.

Activity 5.4: Parent Center partners with immigrant and community-based organizations on key projects including having them host parent workshops focused on the rights of families across child- and family-serving systems as well as the rights of LEP families to language access for services offered by government and other non-profit agencies. Parent Center also contracts with El Club de Padres/Multilingual Center to provide information and training to non-English speaking families.

Activity 5.5: Parent Center disseminates information through its own and partner websites.

Activity 5.6: Parent Center sponsors/co-sponsors and participates in educational, informational, cultural and social events in LEP communities on an ongoing basis, including collaborating with the state immigrant advocacy organization in providing workshops to LEP families on their language access rights and advocacy strategies to secure language access.

Certification of Language Access Plan Approval for Parent Center

Parent Center'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 State residents with limited or no-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 Parent Center's Board, Director, and the Cultural and Linguistic Competence Outreach and Support Director 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 Director: _____ Date: _____

Cultural/Linguistic Competence Director: _____ Date: _____