

Date of Hearing: June 28, 2023

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
Al Muratsuchi, Chair  
SB 445 (Portantino) – As Amended May 18, 2023

**SENATE VOTE:** 40-0

**SUBJECT:** Special education: individualized education programs: translation services

**SUMMARY:** Requires local educational agencies (LEAs) to provide most students' parents with a translation, upon parental request, of the student's individualized education program (IEP) and other related documents in the native language of the parent within 30 days of the IEP team meeting, and requires translations to be conducted by a qualified translator. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires, during the planning process for the IEP, an LEA to communicate in the native language of the parent, as defined, or in another mode of communication used by the parent, including during an IEP team meeting, including by providing translation services or alternative communication devices for a parent.
- 2) Requires LEAs to translate the following documents in the native language of the parent, or in another mode of communication used by the parent:
  - a) The pupil's completed IEP, and any revisions to the pupil's IEP; and
  - b) Any evaluation, assessment, or progress data used to determine eligibility or to develop the IEP that is discussed at an IEP team meeting.
- 3) Requires that, for a parent whose native language is one of the eight most commonly spoken languages in an LEA, excluding English and the category "other multiple non-English languages," as determined by the California Department of Education (CDE) and reported through DataQuest, the student's completed IEP and any revisions to the pupil's IEP be translated within 30 calendar days of the IEP team meeting, or within 30 calendar days of a later request by the parent.
- 4) States that nothing in the above requirement shall be construed to abridge any right granted to a parent under state or federal law, including the right to give or withhold consent to part or all of the IEP.
- 5) Requires the documents to be translated by a qualified translator. Defines "qualified translator" to mean a translator who is proficient in and literate in English and the non-English language to be used, and has the ability to communicate terms and ideas between the English language and the non-English language to be used, considering regional language variations, and has knowledge of basic translator practices, including, but not limited to, privacy, neutrality, accuracy, completeness, and transparency.
- 6) Defines "native language" to mean the language normally used by that individual, as defined in federal law.

- 7) States that nothing in these new requirements is intended to affect any other state or federal law requirement regarding the translation of education-related documents, including the right to alternative communication services.
- 8) Requires the CDE to revise its notice of procedural safeguards, in English and in the primary languages for which the department has developed translated versions, to inform parents of their right to request the translation of documents as required by this bill.
- 9) Expands the definition of “parent” to include a conservator of a child, and clarifies that a person who holds the right to make educational decisions for a student may not necessarily be the guardian, for purposes of existing statutes related to special education.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Requires LEAs to take any action necessary to ensure that, in an IEP team meeting, the parent or guardian understands the proceeding, including arranging for an interpreter for parents or guardians with deafness or whose native language is a language other than English. (Education Code (EC) 56341.5)
- 2) Requires proposed special education assessment plans to be provided to parents in the native language of the parent or other mode of communication used by the parent, unless it is clearly not feasible to do so. (EC 56321)
- 3) Requires LEAs to give the parent or guardian a copy of the IEP, at no cost to the parent or guardian. (EC 56341.5)
- 4) Requires, through regulations, LEAs to give a parent or guardian a copy of a student’s IEP in his or her primary language at his or her request. (California Code of Regulations (CCR), 3040)
- 5) Provides that it is a due process right for parents to receive written notice of his or her rights in a language easily understood by the general public and in the native language of the parent, or other mode of communication used by the parent, unless to do so is clearly not feasible. (EC 56506)
- 6) Defines “consent” in special education proceedings to include situations in which the parent or guardian has been fully informed of all information relevant to the activity for which consent is sought, in his or her native language, or other mode of communication. (EC 56021.1)
- 7) Requires schools and school districts, if 15% or more of the students enrolled in a public school speak a single primary language other than English, to send all notices, reports, statements, or records to the parent or guardian in the primary language, in addition to English. Existing law authorizes the response from the parent or guardian to be in English or their primary language. (EC 48985)
- 8) Provides that no person in the State of California shall, on the basis of sex, race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, ethnic group identification, age, mental disability, physical disability, medical condition, genetic information, marital status, or sexual orientation, be

unlawfully denied full and equal access to the benefits of, or be unlawfully subjected to discrimination under, any program or activity that is conducted, operated, or administered by the state or by any state agency, is funded directly by the state, or receives any financial assistance from the state. (Government Code (GOV) 11135)

- 9) Title VI of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits recipients of federal financial assistance, including school districts, from discriminating on the basis of race, color, or national origin. Title VI's prohibition on national origin discrimination requires school districts to take "affirmative steps" to address language barriers so that English learners may participate meaningfully in schools' educational programs.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

- This bill could result in unknown reimbursable state mandated costs, potentially in the low millions in Proposition 98 General Fund, for LEAs to translate special education documents. The costs would vary depending upon a number of factors including the availability and cost of a qualified translator, how common the language is, how many pages to be translated, and the frequency of these requests.
- The California Department of Education (CDE) estimates General Fund costs of \$321,000 to comply with this measure. The workload activities include informing parents of their right to request translation, monitoring LEA compliance, processing complaints and implementing corrective actions for noncompliance.

**COMMENTS:**

*Need for the bill.* The author states, "SB 445 ensures that parents will be able to read and comprehend their children's IEP to better be involved in their child's academic life. Language barriers for parents are a hurdle that can and should be overcome. Parental engagement early in a child's academic life is critical to helping districts provide necessary services for students to reach their potential and achieve success."

*History of federal compliance issues around interpretation and translation in special education proceedings.* A 2015 joint letter from the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) and the U.S. Department of Justice (USDOJ) highlighted a number of compliance problems related to English learners and rights established under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The departments noted a history of compliance problems around "fail[ure] to provide translation or an interpreter at IEP meetings."

Research provided by the author's office confirms these concerns, pointing to cultural and institutional barriers preventing parents with limited English proficiency from understanding and participating fully in special education process (Harry, 1992; Zetlin, 1996), including barriers to receiving translated copies of IEPs (Beebe, 2016).

*Translation scope and timeline.* Current state and federal law require that school districts take any action necessary to ensure that parents understand the proceedings at an IEP meeting. Current state regulations further require LEAs to give parents a copy of a student's IEP in his or her primary language at his or her request. No timeframe is specified.

Some LEAs currently meet the 30 day timeline for IEP translation. The Los Angeles Unified School District is required to translate IEPs, but not related documents, pursuant to a modified consent decree as a result of a lawsuit.

This bill exceeds current requirements for translation as shown in this table:

Requirement	Current law: All parents whose native language is not English	SB 445: Native language <u>is</u> one of the top eight languages in the LEA	SB 445: Native language <u>is not</u> among the top eight languages in the LEA
Translation of IEP and revisions	Must be translated but no timeline specified	Must be translated within 30 days	Must be translated but no timeline specified
Translation of related documents	No requirement to translate	Must be translated but no timeline specified	Must be translated but no timeline specified
Qualifications of translator	No qualifications specified	Must meet definition of qualified translator	Must meet definition of qualified translator

***Which documents would need to be translated within 30 days?*** This bill requires that, for students whose parents speak one of the top eight languages within an LEA, certain documents be translated within 30 calendar days. These documents are contained in the student’s IEP, and include:

- A statement of the individual’s present levels of academic achievement and functional performance;
- A statement of measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals;
- A description of the manner in which progress toward meeting the annual goals will be measured;
- A statement of the special education and related services and supplementary aids and services, to be provided to the student;
- An explanation of the extent, if any, to which the student will not participate with nondisabled pupils in the regular class and activities;
- A statement of individual appropriate accommodations on assessments;
- The projected date for the beginning of, and the anticipated frequency, location, and duration of services and modifications; and
- For students 16 years and older, transition plans.

***Top eight languages spoken in each LEA will comprise a high percentage of target population.*** This bill requires that specified special education documents be translated within 30 calendar days for the eight most commonly spoken languages in the district (excluding “other non-English languages”).

According to the CDE, 2.7 million students speak a language other than English in their homes. This may mean that up to 43% of the parents of public school students speak a language other than English as their primary language. The CDE collects data on 60 languages spoken by the state's public school students who are classified as English learners, but 94% speak one of the top ten languages in the state. Spanish is by far the most common primary language, spoken by 84% of all English learners.

While the top eight languages will vary by district, the following example, using DataQuest data for the San Diego Unified School District in the 2017-18 school year, shows that the top eight languages are likely to represent a high percentage of total enrollment of pupils whose parents speak a language other than English:

Eight most commonly spoken languages in San Diego Unified School District, 2018-19	Enrollment	Percentage of English learner enrollment
Spanish	19,094	72.79%
Vietnamese	1,309	4.99%
Filipino	819	3.12%
Somali	725	2.76%
Arabic	497	1.89%
Mandarin	291	1.11%
Japanese	285	1.09%
Farsi	214	0.82%
Total for top eight languages	23,234	88.57%
Total for all (58+) languages spoken in the district	26,233	100%

*Source: CDE Dataquest*

**English learners significantly overrepresented in special education.** Also according to the CDE, about 14.4% of California's ELs qualify for special education, compared to 9.1% of non-ELs. According to data provided by the CDE for the 2014-15 academic year, students with disabilities who are ELs are significantly overrepresented in the higher grades, as shown in the table below:

Grade	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
ELs in Special Education	6.3%	7.7%	8.6%	10.3%	14.3%	17.4%	21.5%	23.0%	23.9%	21.1%	22.4%	22.7%	26.2%
Non-ELs in Special Education	6.4%	7.9%	9.0%	9.9%	10.3%	10.3%	9.5%	9.1%	9.1%	8.4%	8.7%	8.5%	9.9%

California also has an above average percentage of ELs in special education compared to other states. Data reported by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) indicate that in 2011-12 California identified 13.3% of ELs, compared to a national average rate of 11.9%. OCR data also show that California enrolls 35% of all ELs in special education in the country.

Pursuant to AB 2785 (O'Donnell) Chapter 579, Statutes of 2016, the CDE published a manual to provide guidance to LEAs on the identification, assessment, services, and reclassification for ELs with disabilities, with the goal of reducing the over and under representation of ELs with disabilities.

***Other states with far fewer ELs make translated forms to LEAs; California does not.***

Translating special education documents would be easier for LEAs if they had access to standard forms already translated into commonly spoken languages.

Other state departments of education (including a number with a far smaller population of non-native English speakers) share such translated forms in various languages through their websites. As of 2015, these included:

- Massachusetts: all forms available in 16 languages
- Minnesota: several forms available in 10 languages
- Oregon: standard IEP form available in 4 languages
- Washington: all forms available 7 languages
- Iowa: standard IEP form in 6 languages
- New York: all forms available in 5 languages
- Colorado, Rhode Island, Illinois, Utah, Texas: forms available in 1-3 languages

California, which has the largest population of ELs in the country, does not maintain such translated forms (apart from the notice of procedural safeguards, which is translated into five languages). Such a resource would make it easier for LEAs to meet the requirements of both this bill and of other provisions of state and federal law, and ensure that translations are of sufficient quality.

The CDE does not maintain these forms because the state does not publish standard special education forms. Many LEAs use forms that they either obtain from the Special Education Information System operated by the San Joaquin County Office of Education, or produce their own. Without standard forms, it is unlikely that there will be state-translated forms of those documents, as are provided in other states.

The CDE maintains a Clearinghouse for Multilingual Documents, an online resource that helps LEAs find pre-existing, locally-created translations of parental notification documents. This database of multilingual documents contains some documents that would inform IEP

development, but according to the CDE, since this project is a Title III service (federal English learner statute) and the IEP is not a Title III obligation, it does not include special education forms.

***State standardized IEP template workgroup recommends translation of IEP template and other resources.*** SB 74 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 51, Statutes of 2019, required the CDE to convene a workgroup to design a state standardized IEP template. The workgroup was comprised of representatives of the CDE, the Department of Rehabilitation (DOR), the Department of Developmental Services (DDS), LEAs, special education local plan areas (SELPAs), legislative staff, and relevant state and national policy experts.

The workgroup report, published in October, 2021, made 25 recommendations to improve the IEP process in California and ensure that IEPs are designed to improve student outcomes, capture student needs, and inform learning strategies that support instruction that is aligned to state standards and provided in the general education setting whenever possible. The report noted:

In addition to addressing the power dynamics within the education system and between the education system and families, IEP teams must also navigate cultural differences. While many students with IEPs in California are culturally and linguistically diverse learners, very few special education teachers and administrators are from diverse cultures (Reiman, Beck, Coppola, & Englies, 2010). This imbalance often leads to a language and cultural barrier between culturally and linguistically diverse parents/guardians and school personnel (Lo, 2009; Reiman, Beck, Coppola, & Englies, 2010; Salas, 2004). Research on the role of Mexican American families (Salas, 2004), Chinese American families (Lo, 2008), and families from a range of other racial/ethnic groups (Fish, 2008; Garriott et al., 2000; Zeitlin & Curcic, 2013) all indicated that while parents/guardians frequently attend IEP meetings, they are often not provided the opportunity to make significant contributions to the content of their children's IEPs.

While difficult, overcoming the barriers to increased parent engagement is also manageable. Proven strategies for increasing parent engagement include making the meetings more democratic and not completing the IEP in advance so that parents feel they are equal contributors; being open to parental input regarding placement, discipline, and instruction; valuing and listening to parental input; and educating parents about the IEP process including by providing IEP forms in advance (Christle & Yell, 2010; Fish, 2006; Fish, 2008; Goldman & Burke, 2017; Platt, 2008; Simon, 2006).

With respect to translation of documents, the workgroup recommended that the state:

- Provide state-developed or state-funded resources and supports for families/guardians in at least the five most common languages spoken by California students, in as many languages as needed when possible, written in plain language, and using images to support comprehension; and
- Make the proposed IEP template available in the top five languages spoken by California families/guardians, including in the most needed languages for pilot sites.

The Budget Act of 2022 appropriated \$200,000 for the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE) to convene a panel, comprised of members selected in consultation with and subject to the approval of the Executive Director of the State Board of Education (SBE), to continue refining the workgroup's draft IEP template for usability. On or before June 30, 2024, the CCEE is required to provide the Legislature and other parties an update on the development of a state standardized IEP template.

***Bill appears to eliminate automated translations of IEPs.*** By requiring that special education documents be translated by a qualified translator who has met the testing or certification standards for outside or contract translators, it appears that this bill would effectively prohibit the use of web-based translation of documents using services such as Google Translate. Proponents of this measure have noted problems with the accuracy of translation of special education documents using such services.

Concerns have also been raised about the privacy of student information using these translation services. In a joint letter from the USDOE and the USDOJ dated January 7, 2015, the departments raised several issues with regard to the use of web-based translation of special education documents:

“Some school districts have used web-based automated translation to translate documents. Utilization of such services is appropriate only if the translated document accurately conveys the meaning of the source document, including accurately translating technical vocabulary. The Departments caution against the use of web-based automated translations; translations that are inaccurate are inconsistent with the school district's obligation to communicate effectively with [limited English proficient] parents. Thus, to ensure that essential information has been accurately translated and conveys the meaning of the source document, the school district would need to have a machine translation reviewed, and edited as needed, by an individual qualified to do so. Additionally, the confidentiality of documents may be lost when documents are uploaded without sufficient controls to a web-based translation service and stored in their databases. School districts using any web-based automated translation services for documents containing personally identifiable information from a student's education record must ensure that disclosure to the web-based service complies with the requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.”

***How are parents informed of their rights to interpretation and translation?*** This bill requires that CDE revise its Notice of Procedural Safeguards, which is required to be provided by current law, to include the translation rights established by the bill.

The Notice of Procedural Safeguards explains all of the rights afforded to students and parents under IDEA and state law. The CDE provides a model Notice of Procedural Safeguards on their website, translated into four languages.

Parents may also learn about their rights by consulting with one of the Family Empowerment Centers on Disability (FECs) established by state law to help parents navigate the special education process through peer support. Additionally, there are two types of federally-funded parent resources: Parent Training Information Centers and California Community Parent Resource Centers.



**Arguments in support.** The Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) writes, “PIQE primarily works with nonnative English-speaking families across the state, working to bridge the gap between those families and their local schools. We have seen firsthand how English learner families can be left behind in their school communities and, conversely, how a simple change like translating important documents can foster a stronger school community and bolster student outcomes.

California is home to 10 million immigrants and, according to the Public Policy Institute of California, 20 percent of California immigrants report that they do not speak English very well and 10 percent report speaking no English. In order to ensure that every parent, guardian, and educational right holder is able to fully understand their child’s IEP, LEAs should be required to provide a translation of the document.

The IEP process has many steps and can be overwhelming and intimidating for any family who is not familiar with the process or terminology, especially if their native language is not English. SB 445 will assist those families toward fully understanding the IEP process.”

**Related legislation.** SB 695 (Portantino) of the 2019-20 Session was substantially similar to this bill. It was vetoed by the Governor, who stated:

Current law already requires that non-English speaking parents and guardians understand their child's IEP, and LEAs must take any action needed to ensure that pupil's non-English speaking parent understands the IEP process and LEAs must also provide any materials used to assess or place a student with exceptional needs in the parent's native language.

By establishing more prescriptive requirements, particularly specifying a 30-day timeline within which those documents must be translated, the bill would exceed the requirements of federal law (the Individuals with Disabilities Act), thereby creating a costly reimbursable state mandate that will reduce funding available to support broader educational programs for these students.

If a California school district's practices of providing translation services are inadequate, avenues already exist to remedy these problems.

SB 354 (Portantino) of the 2017-18 Session was substantially similar to this bill. It was vetoed by the Governor, who stated:

I cannot support this bill. Current law requires that non-English speaking parents understand their child's IEP, and in fact gives parents the right to have an interpreter present at their child's IEP meetings. To the extent that this is not sufficient, I think the remedy is best handled at the local school district.

AB 2091 (Lopez) of the 2015-16 Session was also substantially similar to this bill. The bill would have required LEAs to provide parents with a translated copy of an IEP and other specified documents within 60 days, upon request, and required that the IEP and related documents be translated by a qualified translator. This bill was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 1264 (Eduardo Garcia) of the 2017-18 Session would have required that parents be offered copies of any available completed school records related to the pupil's current levels of performance, and any assessment reports, prior to a meeting regarding a student's IEP. This bill was vetoed by the Governor, who stated:

This bill is unnecessary. The Notice of Procedural Safeguards, which is required under the Individuals with Disabilities Act, highlights parents' rights to request copies of relevant school records and reports and receive them within five business days of the request.

This document is provided to parents the first time their child is referred for a special education assessment, when they ask for a copy, each time they are given an assessment plan to evaluate their child, upon receipt of their first state or due process complaint in a school year, and when the decision is made to make a removal that constitutes a change of placement.

As a result, parents who wish to review these records and reports before an Individualized Education Program meeting can already do so.

AB 2785 (O'Donnell), Chapter 579, Statutes of 2016 requires the CDE to develop a manual providing guidance to LEAs on identifying and supporting ELs with disabilities.

#### **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

##### **Support**

California Alliance of Child and Family Services  
California Association for Parent-child Advocacy  
California Charter Schools Association  
California Health Coalition Advocacy  
California Parents Union  
City of South Gate  
Decoding Dyslexia California  
Disability Rights California  
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund  
Educate. Advocate.  
Edvoice  
Go Public Schools  
Inland Regional Center  
Integrated Community Collaborative  
Learning Rights Law Center  
National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter  
Parent Institute for Quality Education  
Parents Helping Parents  
Pathpoint  
San Francisco Unified School District  
Special Needs Network, INC.  
United Parents and Students  
Vision Y Compromiso  
77 individuals

**Opposition**

None on file

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