

# *Lost Without Translation*

**LANGUAGE BARRIERS FACED BY  
LIMITED-ENGLISH PROFICIENT PARENTS  
WITH CHILDREN  
IN THE SAN FRANCISCO  
UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

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## ABOUT CAA

Founded in 1969, CAA seeks to defend and promote the civil and political rights of Asian and Pacific Americans within the context of advancing multiracial democracy in the United States. Access to quality public education is a cornerstone of CAA's advocacy. For over thirty years, CAA has advanced policies that secure equal educational opportunities for limited-English proficient students in public schools. CAA has also committed itself to addressing language barriers that impede the active involvement of limited-English proficient parents in their children's education.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# *Lost Without Translation*

## LANGUAGE BARRIERS FACED BY LIMITED-ENGLISH PROFICIENT PARENTS WITH CHILDREN IN THE SAN FRANCISCO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

### PARTNERING WITH PARENTS TO IDENTIFY BARRIERS TO LEP PARENT PARTICIPATION

In an effort to systemically identify the most pressing language barriers to parent involvement for Chinese American parents in San Francisco, CAA and the Visitacion Valley Parents Association (VVPA) partnered with LEP parents to develop and conduct the Parent Involvement and Language Access Survey. VVPA is a project of CAA and is comprised of LEP Chinese speaking parents and neighborhood residents. VVPA works to address language and other barriers to full civic participation by residents with a focus on new Chinese immigrants and LEP individuals.

VVPA members surveyed over 125 LEP Chinese speaking parents with children attending schools within the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) over a period of 4 weeks. CAA staff and VVPA members developed seventeen questions to assess the experiences of limited-English proficient parents with children in SFUSD.<sup>1</sup> Seven VVPA members participated in trainings on conducting the survey and gathered responses from over 125 LEP parents with children in SFUSD. Cantonese is the primary language for all respondents and surveyors. Thus, each survey was conducted in Cantonese. CAA staff conducted follow-up interviews with select respondents who indicated they were interested in further sharing their experiences.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT IMPROVES THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

**M**eaningful parent involvement in education is critical to a quality education system. One research review finds, “the evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children’s achievement in school and through life. When schools, families, and community groups collaborate to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more.”<sup>2</sup> When parents are effective partners in their children’s education, students are more likely to earn high grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs; pass their classes, earn credits, and be promoted; attend school regularly; and graduate and go on to postsecondary education.<sup>3</sup>

When parents are effective partners in their children’s education, students are more likely to earn high grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs; pass their classes, earn credits, and be promoted; attend school regularly; and graduate and go on to postsecondary education.

In order to be true partners and make the best choices regarding the education of their children, parents need to be informed about important matters such as academic performance, after-school and tutoring programs, bilingual programs, and college opportunities. However, language barriers prevent many immigrant and limited-English proficient (LEP) parents from participating fully in their children’s education.

In California, one in four children – or nearly 1.6 million students – in the K-12 educational system is an English learner, and nearly all these children come from homes where English is not the primary language.<sup>4</sup> In the San Francisco Unified School District, there are over 16,600 English Learners, which is nearly 30% of the student population.<sup>5</sup> While there are laws that require language services for LEP parents, implementation and enforcement is not systemic, and parents often face barriers to obtaining even the most basic information about their child’s education.

## LEGAL OVERVIEW

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB Act) re-affirmed parent involvement as a core principle of a quality education and for the first time provided a statutory definition for “parent involvement.” Parent involvement is defined as participation of parents in regular, meaningful, two-way communication about student learning. Such communication includes ensuring parents play an integral role in assisting their child’s learning; are encouraged to be actively involved in their child’s education at school; and are full partners in their child’s education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child. The NCLB Act directs the state, among other things, to ensure that all parents have a meaningful opportunity to participate in the education of their children.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the Act specifies that LEP parents should be notified about important rights, opportunities, and programs in a language they can understand. In addition, pursuant to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI), the California Department of Education has a responsibility to ensure meaningful access to their programs and activities by persons with limited English proficiency.<sup>7</sup>

The California Legislature has also recognized that “involving parents and guardians of pupils in the education process is fundamental to a healthy system of public education.” The California Education Code requires translation of forms, notifications, and other informational materials sent to parents for public schools where 15 percent or more of the students are designated English learners and share a common primary language.<sup>8</sup> In 2006, the legislature enacted AB 680 (D-Chan), a bill that seeks to systemically monitor and enforce this language rights provision.

## OVERVIEW OF PARENTAL LANGUAGE ACCESS IN SAN FRANCISCO

With over 16,600 English learners (ELs) enrolled, the San Francisco Unified School District is comprised of nearly thirty-percent (30%) of the entire student population.<sup>9</sup> During the 2005–2006 school year, there were 6,502 ELs whose primary language was Spanish and 6,285 ELs whose primary language is Cantonese.<sup>10</sup> Together these two language groups comprise of 78.8 percent of the ELs enrolled at SFUSD.<sup>11</sup> Currently, the district has a translation department with two Spanish and two Chinese translators for the entire district. However, unless there is a substantial increase in staffing levels, the Translation Department simply cannot meet the language needs of these students and families.

As discussed above, the NCLB Act and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 require the California Department of Education to address language barriers that prevent LEP parents from participating in the education of their children. In addition, there are 85 SFUSD schools that trigger the state law threshold requiring translation of forms, notifications and other informational materials sent to parents.<sup>12</sup> Given these legal obligations and the high demand for language services, the district has taken steps toward making translated documents more accessible to parents and school site administrators.

**Nearly one-third of all students enrolled in the San Francisco Unified School District are classified as English Learners. During the 2005–2006 school year, over 16,600 enrolled students were classified as ELs. There were 6,502 ELs whose primary language was Spanish and 6,285 ELs whose primary language was Cantonese.**

Translated documents are now available on the school district website. The framework for an internal website has also been created to allow school site administrators to easily adopt existing translated templates to their parents' needs.

In addition to written translation, the department also provides limited oral interpretation services for evening school board meetings and for school site meetings during regular business hours. Since many school sites hold meetings in the evening, they must use their own available resources to provide oral interpretation for their LEP parents.

While these are positive steps toward addressing the language barriers LEP parents face, they do not comprise a coordinated and adequately resourced LEP parent involvement policy. The survey findings reveal systemic problems that can be readily addressed through a robust parent involvement initiative developed and implemented in partnership with the district, parents, and community stakeholders.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The survey reveals significant ongoing barriers to LEP parent involvement in their children's education.

- 1) **Limited-English proficient parents lack critical information about their children's education and often have no effective means of communicating with teachers and school site administrators.**
  - 96% of respondents indicated that they did not know whether there was anyone at the school who could speak their primary language.
- 2) **Many parents do not receive documents that SFUSD currently translates into Chinese.**
  - A majority of parents (54%) indicated they had not received the District Parent Handbook in their primary language.
- 3) **Parents want more oral interpreters and other opportunities to communicate in-language with teachers and administrators.**
  - More than 50% of LEP parents say that they need better language assistance to participate fully in parent-teacher conferences and other in-person meetings related to their child's education.
- 4) **Parents are largely unaware of existing parent involvement opportunities.**
  - 56% of respondents were unaware of the Parent Advisory Council that advises the SFUSD School Board on parent involvement issues and student concerns.

# SURVEY FINDINGS

## 1. LIMITED-ENGLISH PROFICIENT PARENTS LACK CRITICAL INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION AND OFTEN HAVE NO EFFECTIVE MEANS OF COMMUNICATING WITH TEACHERS AND SCHOOL SITE ADMINISTRATORS.

The vast majority (76%) of survey respondents indicated that they were not comfortable speaking English when making decisions related to their children's education. Jenny Mai, a VVPA parent leader stated,

*"All of the materials were only in English and the meetings were in English. Because I don't speak English, I don't feel brave enough to attend these meetings. I feel that this also affected the communication between my children and myself. I am not really able to understand how they are doing in school, what areas they need help in and what I can do to help them. And because it is all in English, I feel that it would be very difficult for me to ask."*

Parents often do not have enough information to make time-sensitive decisions about essential steps in education such as school enrollment, school assignment, and bilingual education. Cindy Li, VVPA parent leader shared this experience,

*"I received a letter in English from SFUSD asking for my permission to transfer my daughter to a GATE program. I opened up the letter and it required a signature, and because I did not understand the letter, I didn't pay attention to it. Sometime later my daughter's teacher asked me if I had received a letter inviting my daughter to become a part of the GATE program. I told her that I could not read the letter and I had no idea what the letter was about, so I didn't pay any attention to it. I didn't know that it was a great opportunity to help my daughter excel."*

Eventually, with the assistance of a teacher who advocated for her daughter, Ms. Li was able to enroll her daughter in the GATE program.

Only 33% of respondents felt they were informed about their children's education.

- 96% indicated they did not know if there was someone at the school site who spoke Chinese.
- 69% of respondents did not know who to contact at the school to inquire about their children's education.
- 63% of respondents indicated they "fully participated in parent teacher conferences and other in-person meetings" related to their children's education.
- 50% of respondents indicated they would like to see "better language assistance" for such meetings.
- Less than half (41%) were able to "communicate effectively with teachers" about their children's performance.

In order to feel they are making informed decisions about key educational opportunities, approximately half of the respondents indicated they need more information about after-school programs, school assignments, and enrollment. Over a third of surveyed parents indicated they need more information on bilingual education and college opportunities.

## **2. MANY PARENTS DO NOT RECEIVE DOCUMENTS THAT THE SFUSD CURRENTLY TRANSLATES INTO CHINESE.**

Throughout the course of the survey, many parents shared their experiences of receiving letters or time-sensitive documents in English and their frustration at being unable to respond adequately due to language barriers. Lack of access to translated documents can hinder parents' ability to assess their children's academic performance and can prevent LEP parents from participating fully in their children's education. At times it can hinder the most basic procedures, such as school enrollment and registration. A number of parents shared their struggles to understand their children's report card, the most basic tool evaluating a student's performance. VVPA parent leader Jenny Mai said,

*"There is always an area in the report card that lists things that can be improved, and of course I'd like to know what that is, but I don't know how to ask about that and usually end up not asking about what he could improve in."*

SFUSD already translates a number of important parent resources; however, the survey reveals that many parents are not receiving these resources. The documents currently selected for translation include notices and parent resources critical for making informed choices about student performance, academic programs, and other important educational matters.

- 71% of respondents had asked a family member or friend to translate a school-related document for them.
- Over 70% of parents replied that they would like SFUSD to translate more documents.
- 54% indicated they had not received the District Parent Handbook in their primary language.
- 47% responded that they had not received the School Site Handbook in their primary language.
- 39% indicated they had not received the District Calendar in their primary language.
- 35% of respondents did not receive school enrollment information in their primary language.
- 35% had not received Back to School Flyers in their primary language.
- 33% had not received the School Newspaper in their primary language.
- 26% had not received School Site Council election information in their primary language.
- 29% had not received information about the English Learner Advisory Councils in their primary language.

### 3. PARENTS WANT MORE ORAL INTERPRETERS AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES TO COMMUNICATE IN-LANGUAGE WITH TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS.

While translated documents provide important information about a child's education, meetings and in-person contact with teachers and administrators are necessary to obtain a complete and individualized understanding of educational matters. Ms. Mai shared her frustrations this way,

*“Many times the school did not provide translation for immigrant parents like me; all we did was sit there. Once in a while, one of the teachers who also speaks Chinese would attend and translate for us, but most of the time that teacher did not attend the meetings. Sometimes, we would sit for a whole meeting, and not understand a single thing that was said during the meeting.”*

The lack of oral interpreters often results in parents seeking language assistance from other parents or relying on their own children to interpret conversations between parents and teachers. Having one's own child interpret in meetings related to their academic performance or disciplinary issues is fraught with problems. Placing the child at issue in the discussion in the role of an interpreter creates a problematic dynamic where the child is asked to relay important and in some instances negative information about themselves between power figures—the teacher or administrator and their parents.

The survey reveals that many parents want to see more bilingual staff and teachers, regular in-language meetings with teachers and administrators, and interpreters at school-related meetings such as parent-teacher conferences.

- 65% indicated they would like to see a more bilingual staff at the SFUSD or at school sites.
- 63% indicated they think SFUSD should hire more bilingual staff and teachers.
- 54% indicated they would like interpreters available at school related meetings.
- 52% indicated they would like regular meetings with teachers and principals in Chinese.
- 32% indicated they would like information sessions in Chinese or Spanish.

Cindy Choy attested to the important role bilingual staff and teachers can play,

*“I met a teacher and teaching assistant who spoke Chinese. They translated school documents and interpreted at meetings and helped me to understand and resolve any problems my daughter faced in school. Those two teachers were so important to me and my daughter's education.”*

#### 4. PARENTS ARE LARGELY UNAWARE OF EXISTING PARENT INVOLVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES.

SFUSD has a number of advisory councils that provide parents with a formal and structured means to engage in their children's education and impact school district policies. These advisory councils include the PTA (Parent Teacher Association), PAC (Parent Advisory Council), ELAC (English Learners Advisory Council), the SSC (School Site Council), and other forms of parent participation committees. The success of these advisory councils hinges on meaningful parent involvement from a representative cross section of parents. Limited access to translated notices and oral interpretation naturally results in limited access to involvement opportunities for LEP parents.

- Only 32% of the surveyed parents were aware that ELAC should be involving parents in EL issues.
- 61% of respondents said they want to learn more about participating in ELAC.
- 49% of surveyed parents were aware that the School Site Council should be involving parents in school budget issues.
- 39% of respondents were aware of the Parent Advisory Council.
- Only 19% of parents were aware that the Office of Parents Relations provides trainings to Parent Liasons and serves as a resource for parents.
- 74% were interested in learning more about the Office of Parent Relations.

While the survey indicates that many LEP parents are unaware of these advisory councils and other parent participation opportunities, once respondents were informed of the existence of these opportunities, the overwhelming majority indicated an interest in learning more and to participate in improving LEP parent involvement. Ms. Choy shares,

*“Once I realized that many immigrant parents were really “losing out” in their ability and right to understand how their children were doing in schools, I decided to participate in parent involvement meetings and joined the English Learners Advisory Council, ELAC. I requested that the school provide a translator for me at the ELAC meetings. I believe that this also helped the school to understand that there was such a need. If I had not attended these meetings, perhaps the school would not realize that there is such a need.”*

## CONCLUSION

VVPA Parent Involvement and Language Access Survey provides invaluable insight into LEP parent experiences. Our findings reveal not only the significant ongoing barriers to LEP parental involvement, but also the deep commitment parents have to participating actively in their children's education. In partnering with us to illustrate the extraordinary efforts LEP parents must make to communicate with teachers, learn about their children's performance, and make important educational decisions, VVPA parents showed us time and again that parents are singularly dedicated partners in the education of their children. CAA believes that honoring this commitment and fostering partnerships between parents and the school district will yield concrete improvements in the quality of education.

In order to draw on the language skills of VVPA members, the surveys focused on Chinese speaking parents; however, in working toward solutions to language barriers, CAA will actively engage parents and stakeholders who speak languages that represent the linguistic diversity of the City. CAA will continue working with parent leaders to not only identify barriers to parent involvement, but to propose real solutions to overcoming language barriers to meaningful parent participation in the education of their children. At minimum, a successful parent involvement initiative must focus on:

- Expanding funds for language services, such as translation of documents and oral interpreters.
- Designating full-time staff within SFUSD to partner with LEP parents in developing and implementing a parent involvement plan.
- Systemically monitoring ongoing translation and distribution of in-language documents to LEP parents.

In the coming months, CAA aims to bring together parents, teachers, students, SFUSD, and school board members to secure resources for a comprehensive and robust initiative that removes language barriers and guarantees meaningful involvement of all parents of children in the district.

## PARENT TESTIMONIALS

Over the course of CAA's work with the Visitacion Valley Parents Association (VVPA), we have been inspired by the commitment of immigrant and LEP parents to securing quality education for their children. Some of the parent leaders have offered to share their stories as a way to illustrate the experiences captured in this survey and to inform new initiatives to increase parent involvement at SFUSD.

# Cindy Choy

VVPA PARENT LEADER

I immigrated to San Francisco over four years ago. Currently, I work at Parents for Public Schools, a non-profit organization dedicated to working with parents to improve public schools in San Francisco. I serve on SFUSD's Parents Advisory Council, and work with the Visitacion Valley Parents Association. I also volunteer at my daughter's school. Through the support and assistance of CAA, I learned about the issues LEP parents face in the school district.

When I first immigrated to the US, I didn't understand English and did not understand my rights. I did not know how to help my daughter adapt to her new environment. Specifically, I did not know how to help my daughter in her education. I didn't even understand how to read her report card.

My biggest problem was language, I didn't understand all the documents and notices that my daughter brought home. In terms of my daughter's education, I felt totally helpless. I didn't know what areas she needed to have strengthened and what areas she was already doing well in, and so we wasted a lot time and effort. Fortunately, I met a teacher and teaching assistant who spoke Chinese. They translated school documents and interpreted at meetings and helped me to understand and resolve any problems my daughter faced in school. Those two teachers were so important to me and my daughter's education.

I devoted a lot of time trying to understand which area my daughter needed additional support in. I didn't understand the education system in the US. I also wanted to understand how they were teaching my child. I wanted to know what schools in the US were like. I learned that they welcomed parents as volunteers and so I volunteered in my daughter's field trip and began to understand the culture that she is learning in. After the field trip, I became a volunteer in my daughter's classroom. I began to learn English simultaneously with my daughter. I learned how to educate and guide my daughter in her development. I began to understand how the educational system in the US works. I also realized that the school really lacks a good translation service for immigrant parents, limiting the ability of immigrant parents to really understand what their rights really are.

Once I realized that many immigrant parents were really "losing out" in their ability and right to understand how their children were doing in schools, I decided to participate in parent involvement meetings and joined the English Learners Advisory Council, ELAC. I requested that the school provide a translator for me at the ELAC meetings. I believe that this also helped the school to understand that there was such a need. If I had not attended these meetings, perhaps the school would not realize that there is such a need.

Then the school suggested that I join the District English Learners Advisory Council, DELAC. After joining DELAC, I realized even more so that parent participation is really needed in order for our language barriers to be understood. After that I also joined the School Site Council, SSC and began working with Parents for Public Schools. In the process of working through PPS and attending the parent involvement meetings, I really began to understand the importance of language access for immigrant parents and how it can not only help the quality of a child's education but it will also improve the communication between a LEP parent and their child.

**I wanted to know what schools in the US were like. I learned that they welcomed parents as volunteers and so I volunteered in on my daughter's field trip and began to understand the culture that she is learning in. After the field trip, I became a volunteer in my daughter's classroom.**

# *Ai Zhu Huang* **VVPA PARENT LEADER**

My name is Ai Zhu Huang, my son's name is Quantum and he is 5 years old. After becoming a VVPA member, I met other parents with similar experiences and have had the opportunity to learn a lot of school-related information that I didn't know about in the past.

**If there is better language access, then I'd be able to better understand the progress that my son is making in school. And I could probably work more collaboratively with the teacher to help my son grow.**

Language access is very important to me. My son goes to school at Robert Luis Stevenson. Last year, there was one day when my son got sick while he was at school. The school called me and all I could understand was the word "sick". I couldn't understand any of the rest of the call. At that moment, I felt very scared, anxious, and helpless. I didn't know how serious he was or if it was an emergency. I was thinking that if someone could translate for me, I would not have to be so worried and could better understand whether my son's situation was serious.

I immediately went to the school but all of the administrators and the Principal speak English. When I arrived I tried to get my details about my son's situation, but we couldn't communicate so all I could do was take my son home. Thankfully, it was a stomach flu but if it was a more serious situation I would still not have been able to communicate with the school.

After I joined VVPA, I know that this situation and other problems in language access could be helped. I've also learned that I can bring this news and information about language access to other parents who are in similar situations. If there is better language access, then I'd be able to better understand the progress that my son is making in school. And I could probably work more collaboratively with the teacher to help my son grow.

## *Susan Huang* VVPA PARENT LEADER

I am an immigrant parent, and even though I have already lived in America for many years, my English level is still very low. I often struggle with every-day basic communication in English and often feel very helpless. Because I cannot communicate with my children's teachers, I am unable to express my needs or hopes for my children. I actually can speak some very English but it is difficult to express my opinion and I think I can only communicate about one-third of what I'd really like to express.

I remember once my daughter had an accident in school when she was in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. My daughter had been repeatedly bullied by other students and had an injury due to the bullying. When I arrived at to her school, I went to the classroom to look for my daughter and the teacher began to tell me about the incident. Her teacher tried to tell me what happened, but sadly, because of my limited English skills. I didn't fully understand what actually happened. My daughter also tried to help me to translate during the conversation, but because she was only nine years old she could not really translate what I really wanted to say. I wanted to ask how the school was going to resolve this incident and whether the "bully" would be punished. But I was never able to ask the question and I later found out that the child that was bullying my daughter never received any repercussions for her actions. In fact, the bullying became worse and intensified after the incident.

After this incident I began to realize that the help of a translator is critical to the success of a parent-teacher relationship. I feel that my child's well being was affected by my inability to communicate with the teacher. In fact, I believe that the bullying has affected her on a psychological level and I believe that had I been able to intervene at an earlier point, the situation would not have become as bad as it did.

**I feel that my child's well being was affected by my inability to communicate with the teacher.**

## *Cindy Li* VVPA PARENT LEADER

I have been in the United States for 18 years; however, due to language barriers, I feel as if I am not achieving my full potential as a parent. When there are language barriers, many problems may come up.

I believe that difficulty in communicating with my children's teachers is my biggest problem. When I see my children's teachers, I want to talk with them and find out how my children are doing in school, but because of my limited English skills, I do not know how to express myself and I feel helpless.

**I really believe that we must work together to increase language access for parents so we can be more informed about our children's performance in school.**

I'd like to better understand how my son is performing, but I don't really know how to ask and don't really understand what the teacher is saying. Often times, I just end up not asking the questions that I'd really like to ask. For example, there is always an area in the report card that lists things that can be improved, and of course I'd like to know what that is but I don't know how to ask about that and usually end up not asking about what he could improve in.

I really believe that we must work together to increase language access for parents so we can be more informed about our children's performance in school.

I offer this example of a missed educational opportunity for my child due to the lack of translated materials. Many years ago, when my daughter was still in elementary school, I received a letter in English from SFUSD asking for my permission to transfer my daughter to a GATE program. I opened up the letter and it required a signature and because I did not understand the letter, I didn't pay attention to it. Sometime, later my daughter's teacher asked me if I had received a letter inviting my daughter to become a part of the GATE program. I told her that I could not read the letter and I had no idea what the letter was about, so I didn't pay any attention to it. I didn't know that it was a great opportunity to help my daughter excel. Thankfully, after the teacher learned about our circumstance and she was able to help my daughter join the program even though we had already passed the deadline.

# Jenny Mai

VVPA PARENT LEADER

My name is Jenny. I am a VVPA and a PAC (Parent Advisory Council) Member. I have three children. My daughter attends Lowell High School, my son attends Lincoln High School and my youngest son is in preschool. I immigrated to the US 16 years ago. When my older children began preschool, I didn't understand or speak any English.

When my son was in preschool there was one instance he was hurt in the head and bleeding but because I didn't speak English and didn't know how to take him to the hospital, I could not give him the adequate care he needed and just brought him home. The teachers did not tell me anything or help me with his care, all they did was try to tell me that he got hurt and they covered it with a bandage.

Because of my limited English capacities, I requested dual-immersion programs for both my son and daughter. They were both enrolled in dual-immersion programs throughout their years in elementary school, and that helped me to better understanding their development within school. I volunteered in many in-class activities and field trips. I also participated in school site meetings.

Many times the school did not provide translation for immigrant parents like me; all we did was sit there. Once in a while, one of the teachers who also speaks Chinese would attend and translate for us, but most of the time that teacher did not attend the meetings.

Sometimes, we would sit for a whole meeting, and not understand a single thing that was said during the meeting. After a few years, of attending these meetings without translation for the most part, I felt that it was not meaningful or particularly helpful for me to be there.

Later as my children got older, I continued to choose dual-immersion so that I could be more involved in my children's education. But I later realized that neither of my children wanted to attend the dual-immersion program. My daughter didn't tell me, but my son began to complain that he didn't like the dual-immersion program and felt that that was affecting his English skills. After that he began to choose the English only program and he would provide translation for me during the parent-teacher conferences.

After both of my children continued in English only programs, I began to no longer be as involved in my children's education. All of the materials were only in English and the meetings were in English. Because I don't speak English, I don't feel brave enough to attend these meetings. I feel that this also affected the communication between my children and myself. I am not really able to understand how they are doing in school, what areas they need help in and what I can do to help them. And because it is all in English, I feel that it would be very difficult for me to ask. The report cards and other notices are all in English as well, so it is hard for me to know about activities in school.

Because I am an immigrant parent and my English skills are limited, I cannot really understand how my children are doing in school. I often feel very helpless and very bad that I cannot participate fully in a part of my children's lives.

**Because of my limited English capacities, I requested dual immersion programs for both my son and daughter. They were both enrolled in dual-immersion programs through-out their years in elementary school, and that helped me to better understand their development within school. I volunteered in many in-class activities and field trips. I also participated in school site meetings.**



# CAA PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND LANGUAGE ACCESS SURVEY

## HOW ARE YOU INVOLVED IN YOUR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION?

### WE WANT TO KNOW!

We want to increase the ways immigrant parents and limited-English proficient parents can be involved in their children's education. We are interested in learning about your experiences as immigrant parents of children in public schools. **Please take a few minutes to answer the questions below and help us increase parental involvement in public education. We will keep your identity confidential.**

**1. What schools are your children enrolled in?**

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**2. Do you or another adult in the household feel comfortable speaking English when making decisions related to your child's education?**

YES       NO

**3. Has your child's school informed you about the availability of language services and translated documents?**

YES       NO

**4. Do you feel that your child's school does a good job of providing you with information about your child's education?**

YES       NO

**5. Which of the following describe your experiences as a parent?  
Check all that apply.**

- You feel fully informed about your child's education
- I am able to communicate effectively with my child's teachers about her performance in school
- Due to language barriers, it is difficult to understand how to make the best choices about my child's education

- I do not know who to call at the school if I have questions about my child's education
- The schools could do a better job of providing translated documents
- I can fully participate in parent teacher conferences and other in-person meetings related to my child's education
- I need better language assistance to participate fully in parent teacher conferences and other in-person meetings related to my child's education
- I am frustrated that language barriers may be preventing me from advocating for my child

**6. Do you feel you have enough information about your children's educational options to make decisions about or participate meaningfully in the following areas? Place a check next to areas where you need more information.**

- School enrollment
- School assignment
- Bilingual education
- Parent teacher conferences
- After school activities
- College opportunities
- Career training opportunities
- OTHERS...

**7. Where do you learn the most useful information about your children's educational options?**

- Official translated documents from the San Francisco Unified School District
- From other parents
- From teachers and other school staff
- Chinese newspapers
- Chinese radio
- Community based organizations

**8. Is there someone at your child's school that can you can speak to in your primary language?**

If yes, who is that person and what language do they speak?

Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Language: \_\_\_\_\_

Are they regularly available to address your concerns as a parent?

- YES       NO

**9. Have you used any of the following strategies to help you be more involved in your child's education?**

- Asked a family member or friend to translate a document
- Asked your child or another child to translate or interpret
- Asked a stranger to translate or interpret
- Paid a translator or interpreter

**10. Which of the following would you like to see the schools do to communicate better with you? Please check all that apply.**

- Provide more translated documents
- Hire more bilingual staff and teachers
- Bilingual staff at the school site or SFUSD
- Regular meetings with principals and teachers in Chinese
- Interpreter available by phone
- Interpreter available in person at school-related meetings
- Translated informational phone message
- Receiving translated written documents
- Convene informational sessions in Chinese or Spanish
- OTHER: \_\_\_\_\_

**11. Have you ever experienced the following? (Check all that apply.)**

- Difficulty understanding how to enroll your child in school
- Been confused about medical requirements for your child
- Wanted to learn more about bilingual education, but could not due to language barriers
- Been uncertain about how your child's academic performance
- Did not understand school-related documents due to language barriers about after school programs?

**12. Are you aware that there is an English Learner Advisory Committee (ELAC) at each school site that should be involving parents in issues affecting English Learners?**

- YES       NO

a. Are you interested in learning more or participating in an ELAC?

- YES  NO

**13. Are you aware that there is School Site Council at each school site that should be involving parents in school budget issues?**

- YES       NO

**14. Are you aware that there is a Parent Advisory Council that advises the San Francisco Board of Education on concerns related to parent involvement and parent concerns regarding student concerns?**

a. Are you interested in learning more or participating in the Parent Advisory Council?

YES       NO

**15. Are you aware that the Office of Parent Relations provides trainings to Parent Liaisons and other resources for parents?**

YES       NO

a. Are you interested in learning more about the Office of Parent Relations?

YES       NO

**16. Is there a parent liaison at your child's school?**

YES       NO       I don't know

If yes, have you ever met him or her?       YES       NO

Are you able to communicate with him or her?       YES       NO

**17. The following is a list of some critical documents that each parent should have received in their primary language. Check off the ones that you **have not** received in your primary language:**

- District Parent Handbook
- District Calendar
- Student Enrollment Information
- School Site Handbook
- Back to School Flyer
- School Site Council Election Information
- ELAC Information
- School Newsletter

**In the future, if we need to ask any additional questions or notify you of the survey results, can we contact you?**

YES       NO

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NAME

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TELEPHONE

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ADDRESS

*Thank you for your participation.*

# NOTES

1. See Appendix A for complete survey questions.
2. Henderson, Anne. T. and Mapp, Karen L., *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, 2002, p.7
3. Ibid.
4. California Department of Education, Educational Demographics Unit available at [www.dq.cde.gov](http://www.dq.cde.gov)
5. San Francisco Unified School District, District Profile 2005–2006, available at, <http://orb.sfusd.edu/profile/prfl-100.htm>.
6. See, e.g., *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, Sections 1112(g)(2), 1112(g)(4), 1118(a)(2)(E), 1118(b)(1).
7. See also, Department of Justice’s Guidance on Title VI and E.O. 13166, which provides clarification on how to determine an appropriate mix of language services, may be found in the Federal Register, 67 Fed. Reg. 41455-41472 (June 18, 2002), or online at <http://www.lep.gov>.
8. CA. Ed.Code § 48985
9. San Francisco Unified School District, District Profile 2005–2006, available at, <http://orb.sfusd.edu/profile/prfl-100.htm>.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid
12. California Department of Education, Educational Demographics Unit available at [www.dq.cde.gov](http://www.dq.cde.gov)