



**Department of
Education**

Translation & Interpretation Unit

Best Practices in Creating Culturally Competent Materials for School Families

1. Write in plain language at a 6th grade reading level since a large share of foreign-born adults in NYC have low levels of formal education. (*Example:* Replace “Students are *required* to pass 5 Regents *Exams* for graduation” with “Your child *needs* to pass 5 big *tests* called “Regents Exams” to get a high school diploma.”)
2. Avoid culturally specific words and expressions. (*Example:* Avoid “Have your documents handy.”)
3. Avoid culturally specific examples of activities (games, songs, books) and consider general descriptions of the type of activity instead. (*Example:* Avoid *Humpty Dumpty* or *Shoots & Ladders*.)
4. Build in time to consult with community partners for input. A list of community organizations can be found on the [Translation and Interpretation Unit’s intranet page](#).
5. Keep in mind that families may not be familiar with locations outside their neighborhood, borough, or New York City.
6. Know that immigrant families are often unfamiliar with how the American school system works. Avoid bureaucratic terminology and direct parents to whom they can ask at their school for help navigating the system. (*Example:* Replace “Ask your guidance counselor for your child’s current transcript” with “Your school has a “guidance counselor” to help you understand what your child still needs to do to get a high school diploma.”)
7. Ensure that parents have access to materials that describe processes in the covered languages. (*Example:* Guide to Special Education in Spanish.)
8. Avoid scheduling events or deadlines on religious holidays, including those not on the official school calendar. (*Example:* Avoid Diwali, Eid, and Lunar New Year.)
9. Recognize that immigrant families may need encouragement to ask for assistance. In some cultures, parents defer to schools and don’t ask questions. Families may be concerned about requests for help, questions, etc. reflecting negatively on their children. Use welcoming, positive language. (*Example:* Use “We have interpretation for our school families!” instead of “Translation and interpretation is available.”)
10. Include visually diverse photos of families in materials.

Accessibility Report

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