

New Bedford Public Schools Resolves Matter Concerning K'iché Services

New Bedford Public Schools has commenced a 3-year plan to improve its translation and interpretation services for K'iché speaking students and their families. The plan is based on an agreement that resolves a review by the U.S. Department of Justice into the District's current services for K'iché speakers.

K'iché is a Mayan language of Guatemala, where it is spoken by approximately 7% of the population. New Bedford Public Schools has 161 enrolled students who speak primarily K'iché.

District students and families represent 45 countries and 40 different languages. Moreover, the District has 5,059 students learning English. Forty-two percent of the District's more than 13,000 students' primary language is not English. Families whose primary language is not English receive translated documents and have access to interpreters for a variety of meetings and events. The District continues to meet requirements for students and families set by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Superintendent Thomas Anderson stated, "Like all public school districts, it is our responsibility to support students to overcome language barriers and ensure equal participation by students in all instructional programs. This plan memorializes strategies and monitoring systems that we previously had in place. We had already been working to increase staff to support students, including curriculum revisions to ensure students are academically prepared. The District also developed more efficient educational translation and

interpretation services to more effectively communicate with our families who speak K'iché. This is an opportunity for us to continue to be even more effective and grow for the benefit of all our students.”

After receiving a complaint related to K'iché speaking students and parents, the Justice Department conducted a thorough review of district programs for English Learner (EL) students, primarily relating to K'iché speakers, and “identified certain aspects of the District’s EL programs and practices that were not fully compliant with Section 1703(f) the Equal Educational Opportunities Act.”

The District’s plan outlines several expectations including timelines and professional growth objectives. It also recognizes many areas that have already been strengthened as part of NBPS internal accountability systems. The plan focuses on K'iché speakers receiving the instruction and support they need to become proficient in English and to participate fully in school. These include:

- Targeted professional development and support for all staff
- Disaggregated data for K'iché speaking EL students and former EL students

Dr. Sonia Walmsley, NBPS Executive Director of Educational Access & Pathways, stated, “Although we have been engaged in this work over the past several years, we will expedite our implementation of the measures highlighted in this agreement to more quickly resolve the areas of improvement for our EL programs generally and especially our services for students and families who speak K'iché.”