Language and Cultural Access

...with the School Finder Project

New! School Finder Phone Line: (800) 208-2242
Special Education Parent Training and Information Center: (800) 331-0688
Support for Families of Children with Special Needs (Family TIES): (800) 905-8437

Support the Federation - no amount is too small

Welcome!
School Finder Project
Call us! 1 (800) 208-2242

Improving access and helping families understand school systems and options

• We speak English, French, Haitian Creole, Mandarin, Portuguese, Spanish and Vietnamese (plus additional languages via phone interpretation line)
• Available for all families – regardless of children’s language, background, or ability
• Collaboration with schools and agencies to offer workshops and consultation

Why School Finder?
Garvy Altine
DESE Office of College, Career, Vocational and Technical Education
Equity in Career and Technical Education

Recent studies of enrollment in Career and Technical Education (CTE) schools and programs have identified gaps in access. **English Language Learners are particularly under-represented in CTE.**

This highlighted an issue of equity because:

- Career and Technical Education (CTE) has been shown to be an excellent steppingstone on the path to college
- CTE graduates earn more, on average, than graduates of other high school programs

Secondary Options Family Engagement Project

- Developed a network of individuals and organizations that are connected to communities historically under-represented in career and technical education.
- Gathered parent and caregiver perspectives on available information resources, including DESE’s new family information resource, [Massachusetts School Finder](#).
- Conducted awareness activities and developed language-accessible and parent-friendly resources to support family and student decision-making about options for high school.
2021-22: Secondary Options Family Engagement (SOFE) Project

- 16 Focus Groups & Interviews
- 257 Families Participated
- 85% First Language Other than English
- 444 Surveys Gathered
- 7 Language groups represented

Key Finding: Language-Based Awareness Gap

On a scale of 0-5, how much do you know about Career, Vocational & Technical Education?

- English Speakers
- Other Language Speakers

![Bar chart showing awareness gap between English and other language speakers](chart.png)
Lack of translated information gives the impression that students must be fluent in English to participate in a program.

Families made assumptions about the quality of schools based on their experiences in other countries and education systems.

Some cultural groups largely preferred specific communication methods, for example, written hand-outs vs. a website.

All groups (including English-speakers) valued conversations in their language with someone who could help them understand their options.

School Finder Website
https://www.doe.mass.edu/families

Find Schools Near Me
School Finder Hotline Highlights

- This phone line was created from the insights of families themselves.
- Live/real-time support to families with preferred languages other than English and other under-represented groups.
- Tied to the School Finder website.
- Offers various levels of technical support in navigating all educational options.

Strategies for Language and Cultural Access
Sources of Misunderstanding

- When families experience problems with schools or organizations, it’s usually because of a communication breakdown rooted in both language barriers and cultural differences.
- Due to bias or lack of training, it can be tempting to make assumptions about why families don’t participate in programs. Often, families just aren’t aware of them.

Translation is Just the Tip of the Iceberg

Translation is essential, but it only provides surface-level meaning.

To truly understand one another, we need to go deeper. This takes time, listening, and trust.
Cultural Brokers / Ambassadors

- Serve as a bridge to their communities.
- Offer training and information for families in support of the school or organization’s goals.
- Connect families to resources and information.
- Empower families, build partnership, and promote change.
- Increase understanding and decrease conflict.

Research:
- Building Relationships, Bridging Cultures (University of Washington)
- Cultural Brokers Help Families and Providers Bridge the Cultural Divide (Georgetown)

Create a Welcoming Environment

- Actively welcome, invite, and include newcomers. The tone you set will lay the foundation for your relationship with them.
- Draw on the insights of cultural brokers. They are experts who bring a cultural lens. Include them in analyzing challenges and developing plans for supporting students and families.

Duyen Trieu
Navigation Consultant, Translator, and Interpreter

Vietnamese: 617-399-8332
SchoolFinderVN@fcsn.org
Offer Context and Connection

- Immigrant families are adapting to new systems.
- Expressly provide information about who to come to with questions.
- Provide translation, interpretation, and cultural support without the family needing to ask.
- Remember: behind the language barrier is an insightful person with important thoughts and ideas.

Danie Pelissier
School Navigation Specialist
Haitian Creole & French: 617.399.8331
dpelissier@fcsn.org

Connect Families with Support

- Even bilingual families often benefit from the chance to ask questions and process information in their own language.
- Translation and interpretation is especially important for formal meetings and procedures.
- Outside organizations can collaborate with you to ensure that families will get the information they need.

Juan Li
School Navigation Specialist
Chinese: 617-399-8329
juanli@fcsn.org
Value All Families As Part of Your Community

- Each student and family has unique needs, preferences, resources and values.
- All students benefit when families understand systems and opportunities.
- Partnerships between providers and families help ensure that no students miss out.
- When diverse families are consulted and included, the environment becomes more welcoming of diverse students, as well.

Themes & Take-Aways
Invest in Systems that Promote Access

• Equitable access to information is legally required in schools, hospitals and many other publicly-funded settings.

• Strengthening language access supports requires time and resources. If you know families are being left out, make it a priority to include them.

• Identify language access champions and empower them to implement systems and provide training across your organization. Make language access everyone’s responsibility.

• Your language access team should include bilingual staff members who bring a cultural lens.

Translation & Interpretation

• Families must have equal access to information – which means providing it in their own language.

• Licensed, impartial, professional, human translation and interpretation is essential for legal or formal documents and meetings. This can be provided in-person, virtually, or by phone.

• Electronic translation that relies on artificial intelligence will often result in inaccurate translations that can cause confusion and frustration. Use these technologies only in informal situations, with language-speakers providing quality control.
Working with Interpreters

• Speak to the family member, not the interpreter.
• Slow down and leave space for the interpretation process.
• Avoid talking down to the family or leaving information out based on your perception of their ability to understand.
• Volunteers (including high school students) can provide a friendly face and informal language assistance for informal events. This should complement – not replace – interpretation services.
• Children should never be used as interpreters.

Work with us

• Share our flyers with your families so we can offer them information.
• Host one of our family workshops on school navigation, school options, and Career and Technical Education.
• Introduce us at an upcoming event.
• Meet with us to collaborate on language access self-assessment and improvement planning.
• Invite us to present to your faculty or staff.
Spread the word!

Educational Options from Start to Finish

- Options for early childhood, K-8, high school and beyond.
- Role and responsibilities of families, including the vital role that families play as partners in their children’s education.

In Spanish: Monday, December 5 from 6-8pm
In Chinese: Tuesday, December 6 from 6-8pm
In Haitian Creole: Thursday, December 8 from 6-8pm
In Vietnamese: Tuesday, December 13 from 6-8pm
In Portuguese: Wednesday, December 14 from 6-8pm
In English: Thursday, December 15 from 6-8pm

Federation for Children with Special Needs
The Schrafft Building
529 Main Street, Suite 1M3
Boston, MA 02129

Main Number: (617) 236-7210
Website: www.fcsn.org
Contact Us: fcsn.org/fcsn-intake-form

Special Education Information: (800) 331-0688

Families of Children with Special Needs:
Family TIES - (800) 905-8437

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Questions?

Spread the Word – Call Us!

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SchoolFinder@fcsn.org
www.fscn.org/SchoolFinder
DESE Resources for Families

- DESE Career & Technical Educating Information for Families
- Massachusetts School Finder Tool
- DESE Family Portal
- FCSN: School Finder Hotline, Toolkit & Other Resources

Further Reading


MASFEC: Cultural Broker Overview

Ohio Statewide Family Engagement Center: Building relationships, bridging cultures: Cultural Brokering in Family Engagement

Pacer Center: Getting Off to a Good Start: Positive interactions with diverse families

US Department of Education
- Schools' Civil Rights Obligations to English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents
- English Learner Family Toolkit

USA Hello: Education Information
Visions of Community Conference

Save the Date: March 4, 2023

• Attended by hundreds of families and professionals statewide.
• Workshops in in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Chinese, Haitian Creole, Arabic, and Somali.
• Exhibits from organizations serving all aspects of families’ needs.
• Unparalleled networking opportunities.

Learn more on our website!

Help us Improve!

Please use our last few minutes together to complete the workshop evaluation.