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Quick Guide to Language- Access Laws in Education *(and How to Use Them)*



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Key *Federal* Foundations

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act (1964)

No person shall...be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.

→ Denial of language services = national origin discrimination.

Lau v. Nichols (1974)

Supreme Court: identical resources **do not** equal access if language barriers block participation.

→ Schools must take affirmative steps to address language barriers.

Equal Educational Opportunities Act (1974)

Requires schools to take “**appropriate action**” to overcome language barriers.

→ Still shapes state policies, court precedent, and local practice.

Executive Order 13166 (2000) Revoked by EO 14224 in (2025)

Required federal agencies & recipients to provide “**meaningful access**” to LEP individuals.

→ Still shapes state policies, court precedent, and local practice.

State Examples

- California Education Code §48985:
Notices in home language if **≥15%** of students share it.
- Other states have parallel laws—check your district/state policy.



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How To Use This Guide



When denied time to prepare:

“Under Title VI and the EEOA, I must be able to ensure meaningful access. Preparation time is essential for accuracy and equity.”



When asked to use family/EL as interpreters:

“The school is responsible for providing language access, not the family” (Lau v. Nichols requires **affirmative steps** by the school, not by students of families.)



Provider: Why do I need an interpreter?

“Language services are **not optional**. They are a civil rights requirement under federal law and state code.”