

A Practical Guide to Translation Management in School Districts

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Introduction

Millions of students in U.S. public schools speak a language other than English at home, and approximately 25% of U.S. children have at least one immigrant parent.

School districts across the country experience that reality every day in IEP meetings, enrollment processes, parent notices, evaluations, and school district communications.

For these students and families, language access is the difference between being able to advocate effectively for a child during an IEP meeting and struggling to understand what services are being proposed. It's the difference between responding to a time-sensitive notice and missing an important deadline. It shapes how families participate, ask questions, and make decisions about their children's education.

When districts can't keep up with that need, students and families become less engaged. School districts care deeply about serving families in their preferred language. But when staffing is limited, translation can end up being managed reactively, even when everyone involved would prefer a different approach.

It doesn't have to be this way. You can plan, manage, and improve translation the same way you approach other core district functions. When you build the right systems and structure for translation, the work becomes much easier to sustain.

This eBook shows you how. You'll see how to set up clear intake, manage translation work across departments, maintain quality and consistency, and learn from each project. We've drawn from our years of experience serving school districts to keep our advice practical and realistic, grounded in how school districts actually operate. Our goal is to help you create a translation program that supports your staff, works within real constraints, and serves families well.

The Real Challenges of Translation in School Districts

Translation is part of how a school district meets its responsibilities to families. Because those responsibilities are spread across multiple departments, so is the translation work. Without a shared approach, each department solves the problem in its own way. And that creates challenges.

Here are the issues we see districts struggle with most often:

Translation Touchpoints in a District

Translation is required for:

- ✓ IEP meetings, evaluations, and procedural safeguards
- ✓ Enrollment and registration packets
- ✓ 504 Plans
- ✓ Threat Appraisals
- ✓ Curriculum Materials
- ✓ School Handbooks
- ✓ Title I, Title III, and other federally required program information
- ✓ District-wide announcements and family communications
- ✓ Parent-teacher conferences and school board meetings

There are legal and educational implications to all of these.

Each Office Has Its Own System

You probably already have some skilled translators and translation coordinators in your school district. After all, this work is already happening in the back offices of Special Education, Student Services, Communications, and multilingual communications departments. Staff request interpreters and translators, prepare documents for translators or translation companies, review the translated versions, and send them back to schools.

The challenge is that no single team sees the full picture. One department may have a well-defined process. Another relies on informal habits or email chains. Tools, tracking methods, and review standards vary from office to office. What works in one corner of the district may be invisible to everyone else.

This is a natural consequence of how districts are organized. But without some shared structure, inconsistencies compound — in terminology, in turnaround expectations, in the quality of what families receive.

Irregular Volumes, Fixed Timelines

Translation requests don't arrive in a steady flow. There's usually a spike in documents during enrollment periods. At the same time, IEP timelines are non-negotiable under the law and health notifications or discipline decisions may need same-day turnaround regardless of what else is in the queue.

Language mix adds another layer of complexity. You'll have frequent requests for some common languages. Others appear only a few times a year, but still require the same level of accuracy and care when they do.



Even well-organized teams feel the strain when there are so many high-priority requests.

And yet, it's challenging to build a program that can handle spikes in volume without also having unused capacity on normal days.

Language Access Is a Legal Requirement

Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, districts are required to provide meaningful access to families with limited English proficiency. In practice, that means a parent should be able to sit in an IEP meeting, follow what's being discussed, ask questions, and understand what they're agreeing to. Not just receive a translated copy of the paperwork afterward.

Federal guidance is also clear that students and untrained staff should not be used to translate sensitive information. It's a common workaround, especially in smaller districts where resources are stretched, and it usually comes from a genuine desire to help. But an older sibling reading an IEP plan for a parent isn't a reliable solution for anyone involved, including the family.

Many districts identify certain materials as vital documents, meaning those that affect a family's rights, access to services, or ability to participate in programs. These carry a

higher standard of accuracy, and getting them right matters well beyond compliance.

These are the standards the rest of this guide is built around. The chapters ahead focus on how to set up the processes, tools, and workflows that make it possible to meet them consistently, across departments and over time.



What About AI?

Many districts are exploring AI-based translation tools to manage volume and meet tight timelines, and in some situations they can help. For low-risk, time-sensitive communication, AI can be a reasonable option when used carefully and with the right safeguards in place.

For high-stakes documents like IEPs, discipline notices, health communication, and anything covered by FERPA, professional translation with human oversight is still the appropriate standard. AI also doesn't resolve the underlying coordination challenges around intake, version control, and review. Those require process, not just tools.

Getting to a more consistent, manageable process doesn't require building something from scratch. It starts with defining how requests enter the system, clarifying who is responsible at each step, and creating shared standards for quality and review. The next chapter focuses on what needs to be in place before translation begins.

Before Translation — Laying the Foundation

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The translation aspect isn't regularly part of the overall communication plan of a school district.

— Kleber Palma, Director, NYC Department of Education Translation and Interpretation Unit

This insight comes from someone who has managed translation at one of the largest school districts in the country. And in our experience working with districts across the U.S., it holds up consistently.

When translation isn't planned for, it gets handled at the last minute. A document is finished, a meeting is scheduled, a notice needs to go out — and then someone figures out the translation piece. That works until it doesn't.

This chapter focuses on what needs to be in place before translation begins. Getting this foundation right makes everything downstream more manageable for your team, your translators and the families who depend on accurate communication.

Intake and Request Management

In most districts, translation requests arrive through whatever channel is most convenient: an email to the coordinator, a phone call, a message passed through a school administrator. That works when volume is low. As requests multiply across departments, informal intake creates problems: missed deadlines, lost context, and no reliable way to track what's in the queue.

A standardized request form is the first step toward bringing that under control. It doesn't need to be complicated. A Google or Microsoft form that feeds into a shared spreadsheet is enough to get started. What matters is that every request comes in through the same channel and arrives with the same basic information.

A complete translation request should include:

- ✓ Date of request
- ✓ Department and contact information
- ✓ Document or content to be translated
- ✓ Target language
- ✓ Due date and time
- ✓ Urgency level
- ✓ Special instructions or context

That last field matters more than it might seem. A request for a psychological evaluation translation carries different requirements than a lunch menu. Giving requesters a place to flag context helps the translation team respond appropriately from the start.

You absolutely can build this yourself. But if you work with an external language services partner, it's worth asking whether they offer a client portal for submitting and tracking requests. A good portal handles intake, status visibility, and document delivery in one place, which reduces the coordination overhead on your end significantly.

Any external translation company should be able to provide regular statistics on translation volume, number of requests per language, turnaround, and request patterns. That data is essential for meeting accountability targets and understanding where demand is highest.

Tracking and Visibility

Once requests are coming in through a consistent channel, the next step is making sure they're visible to everyone who needs to see them. A shared tracking sheet — whether in Google Sheets or Excel — gives coordinators, translators, and department leads a single place to check status, monitor workload volume, and identify what's coming due.

At its simplest, a tracking sheet is just the request form data organized into columns. But it becomes more useful as it builds a record of volume by department, language, and document type. That record is valuable for planning, for budget conversations, and for demonstrating the scope of the work to district leadership.

FIELD	PURPOSE
Request ID and date received	Unique identifier and timestamp for every request
Requesting department	Tracks which office originated the request
Number of pages and words	Shows the volume of information distributed throughout the school year
Document type	Helps route to the appropriate workflow
Target language	Supports language planning and translation company selection
Assigned translator or translation company	Clarifies ownership and accountability
Due date	Keeps timelines visible to all stakeholders
Status	Current state: received, in progress, under review, delivered
Date delivered	Supports reporting and audit readiness

For districts that need more structured tracking, project management tools like Asana, Monday.com, Smartsheet, Wrike, or Notion can handle request intake, status visibility, and workflow routing in one place. But a well-maintained spreadsheet handles the core needs for most districts and is a reasonable place to start.

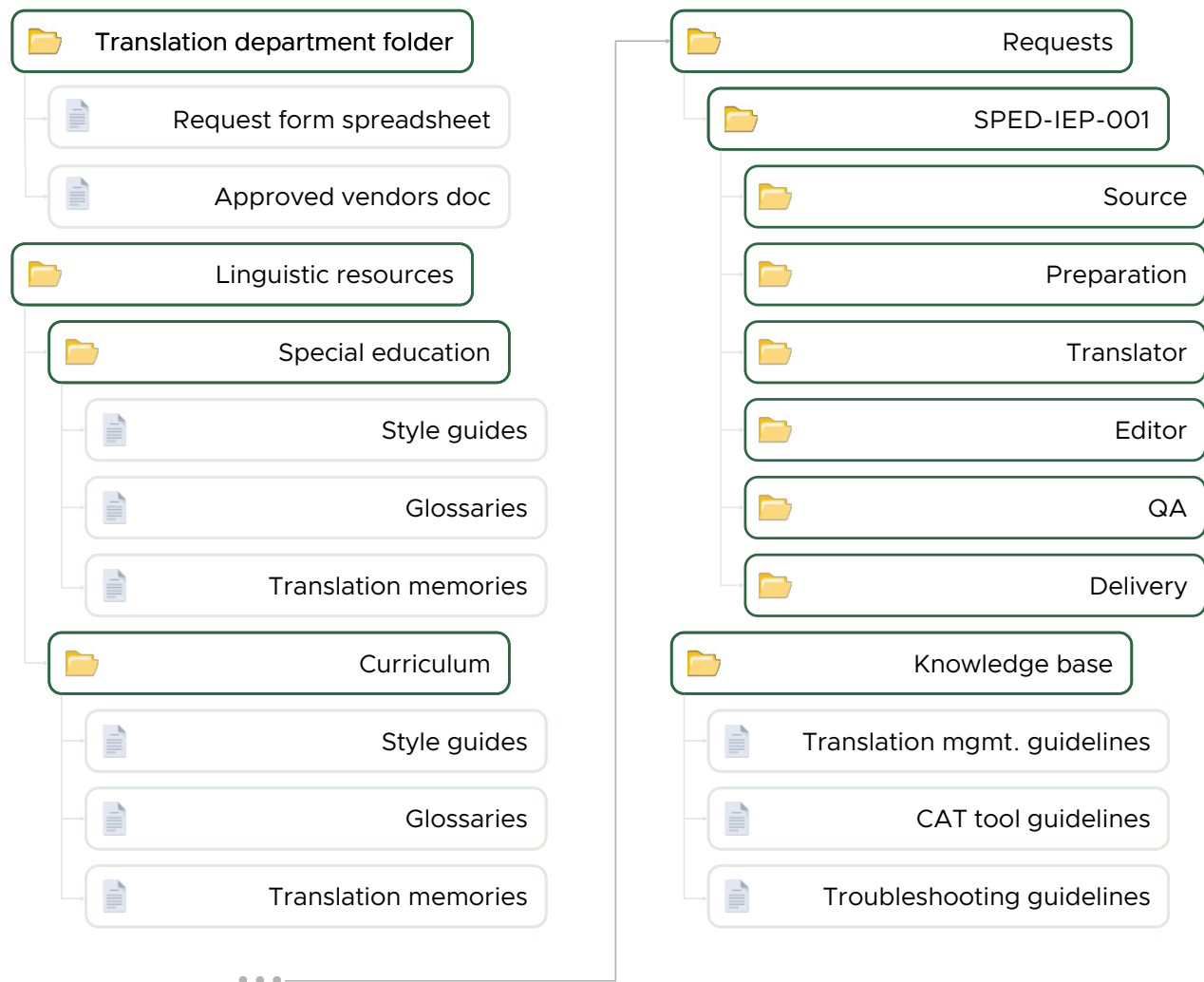
File Management and Organization

Most districts already have cloud-based storage in place — OneDrive, Google Drive, Box, or something similar. These are a good starting point for the translation department, but there needs to be a clear, consistent structure within them that everyone follows.

Without that, files get saved in different places by different people, older versions get confused with current ones, and coordinators spend time looking for documents that should be easy to find.

Not all translation content carries the same sensitivity level. IEPs, psychological evaluations, and discipline records require secure handling and access controls. General communications and public-facing documents do not. Your folder structure should reflect that distinction from the start, with sensitive content stored separately and access limited to the people who need it.

At the same time, it shouldn't be too complicated. As an example, consider this folder structure when thinking about your translation department directory.



The simplest approach is a folder template that gets duplicated for each new request. Templates are always very useful. That way, the structure is consistent across every project without anyone having to recreate it manually, and it scales as request volume grows across departments. You can also automate part of your folder strategy, either by talking with your IT department or getting help from a translation company.

Recommended top-level folder structure:

✓ Linguistic Resources

Style guides, glossaries, translation memories, and templates

✓ Requests

One subfolder per project, named with an alphanumeric identifier

✓ Knowledge Base

Documented processes, troubleshooting guides, and decisions

Within Requests, use a naming convention that captures department, document type, and sequence number — for example, SPEDIEP001. A coordinator can ask a colleague to review SPEDPR4520 without any additional explanation. The deeper the folder structure, the more time staff spend navigating it. Simpler is almost always better.

Templates, Terminology, and Technology

Having the right resources in place before translation begins saves time, reduces back-and-forth, and gives you consistency across documents and departments. This is the infrastructure that supports the work, and it's worth creating deliberately.

Templates and Reusable Documents

Many of the documents districts translate most frequently follow a standard format that doesn't change much from year to year. IEPs, enrollment packets, procedural safeguards, and discipline notices all have predictable structures. Creating translation-ready templates for these documents, or adapting existing ones, means translators aren't starting from scratch each time.

It's worth checking what your state Department of Education already has available. Some states provide translated templates for commonly requested documents, including IEP sections, which can reduce the time and cost of document preparation significantly. Your DoE website is a reasonable first place to look before creating something internally.

Style Guides, Glossaries, and Translation Memories



Consistency across translations doesn't happen automatically

Without shared resources, each translator makes their own decisions about how to handle key terms, and those decisions may not match what another translator chose last month or what a different department approved last year. Over time, families receive documents where the same program, the same role, or the same process is described differently depending on who translated it and when. That inconsistency can create confusion for

parents who are already navigating an unfamiliar system, and it can raise questions during audits about whether the school district's translations are reliable.

Shared linguistic resources give every translator the same foundation to work from, regardless of which department originated the request.



Three core resources make the biggest difference:

- A style guide that captures your district's tone, voice preferences, and guidance for sensitive topics like psychological reports, threat assessments, and other content that requires particular care.
- A glossary or termbase that standardizes how key terms are translated across documents, especially important for special education terminology where precision matters.
- Translation memories, which are databases of previously approved translations that can be reused and refined over time via computer-assisted translation tools (CAT tools). This reduces repetitive work and keeps terminology consistent.

These resources take time to assemble, but they compound in value. Every project that draws on them is faster and more consistent than the one before.

CAT Tools and Technology



Computer-assisted translation tools, or CAT tools, are apps that support human translators by integrating translation memories, glossaries, and quality checks into a single editing environment. They don't translate automatically.

They help translators work more efficiently and consistently.

CAT tools vary widely in price and sophistication. Some are enterprise platforms with advanced automation. Others are affordable and straightforward enough for a small

in-house team to learn quickly. The right choice depends on your volume, your budget, and the document types you handle most often. Talking to colleagues in other districts and to your translation company is a practical way to narrow down the options. If you're not sure where to start, we're happy to share what we've seen work well for other districts and help you think through what makes sense for your team.

At a minimum, most CAT tools provide a translation editor, a translation memory module, a glossary module, and built-in quality checks for terminology and spelling. Those core features are what matter most for district translation work.

A Note on Translator Readiness

Before translation work begins, districts should have a vetted list of qualified translators ready to call on (or a translation company, for larger volumes and complexity). We will cover how to construct that database in the next chapter. For now, the key point is simple: searching for linguists under deadline pressure increases risk. Planning ahead leads to stability.

Translators working in education settings should meet these minimum qualifications:

- Professional Standards
- Demonstrated experience translating for K–12 institutions
- A bachelor's degree or higher
- Training in translation, proofreading or editing
- Certification from a reputable body, such as the American Translators Association (preferred)

Linguistic and Subject Expertise

- Native or near-native proficiency in the target language
- Cultural competence
- Familiarity with education-specific content, including special education documents (IEPs, psychological reports, Section 504 plans) and curriculum materials
- Working knowledge of CAT tools
- Verifiable experience with school districts

These pre-requisites honor parents' and guardians' rights to receive culturally and linguistically accurate information, which can only be provided by a professional linguist with formal translation education.

Content Tiering and Workflow Routing

Not every document requires the same level of care or the same process. One of the most useful things a translation department can do, especially if you’re using machine translation or AI, is to establish a clear framework for how different types of content should be handled, before requests start coming in.

The core principle is straightforward: the higher the stakes for the family receiving the document, the more human involvement the translation requires. Routine, low-visibility content like lunch menus and event flyers can be handled by machine translation. Documents that affect a family’s rights, access to services, or ability to participate in their child’s education need professional human translation.

 *Risk is an important element to consider when looking at AI.*

FIELD	DOCUMENT EXAMPLES	RECOMMENDED PROCESS
Low	Lunch menus, event flyers, general newsletters	AI or Machine Translation (MT) only
Medium	Surveys, school forms, curriculum materials	MT or AI with post-editing
High	IEPs, 504s, discipline records, health documents, FERPA-covered content	Secure custom MT, or human translation
Very High	Legal notices, due process documents, threat response materials	Human translation only

There are two major issues to consider when you assign content types to different tiers.

The first is data handling and compliance. Public AI tools like ChatGPT or Google Translate are not appropriate for content containing student personally identifiable information. They store data, may use it for training, and send it outside your approved workflows, even when you think you’ve opted out. A secure machine translation (MT) platform used by a trusted translation company, with appropriate data agreements in place, is a different situation. Those platforms are designed to protect sensitive information and can be a legitimate option for some higher-sensitivity content when managed correctly, especially when paired with anonymization of sensitive data.

The second consideration is the sensitivity level of the content. What are the consequences of an error caused by machine translation?

When you know a document is low-sensitivity, doesn’t contain anything confidential and has some tolerance for errors, you can route it to an AI or MT tool with confidence.

When you know it's high-stakes, you know a professional translator with human review is required. The tier determines the tool and the process.

Building this framework into your intake process, so that content type triggers the appropriate workflow from the start, is one of the most practical steps a district can take toward a more efficient translation program.

Where to Start

Getting these foundations in place doesn't have to happen all at once. If a standardized intake form is the most pressing need, start there. If terminology consistency is the bigger problem, start with a glossary. The goal is to move toward a system where every request enters through a clear channel, gets routed to the right process, and is handled with the right resources in place.

The next chapter focuses on what happens once translation work is underway, and how to manage it well when things don't go exactly as planned.

During Translation — Managing the Work

Picture this. Your translators are halfway through a 45,000-word bilingual curriculum. It's 4:30 on a Friday afternoon when the Curriculum and Instruction department sends over a batch of updates affecting nearly two-thirds of the work already completed. Of course, the deadline hasn't moved.

How you respond in that moment depends almost entirely on what you set up before translation began. Do you have a CAT tool that can identify exactly what changed? A vetted freelance translator or translation company that can take on overflow work? A style guide your translators can reference without coming back to you with questions? A process for renegotiating timelines when the scope of a request changes materially?

That scenario isn't unusual. It's a version of something most translation coordinators have lived through. This chapter focuses on how to manage translation work once it's underway, including the moments when things don't go as planned.

Coordinating Translators and Translation Companies

Most districts rely on a mix of in-house translators and external translation companies. In-house staff bring institutional knowledge — they understand the district's terminology, its communication style, and the specific requirements of documents like IEPs and psychological evaluations. External translation companies and independent translators extend capacity when volume spikes, complexity increases, or a requested language isn't covered internally.

Getting that combination right requires clarity about roles and expectations before the work begins. Who handles which document types? Who is the primary contact for a given vendor? What turnaround standards apply to routine requests versus urgent ones? Having those agreements in place means less time spent coordinating in the middle of a project.

This is where the vendor database we mentioned in Chapter 2 becomes useful. A well maintained list of vetted translators and vendors, organized by language, document type, and availability, gives you somewhere to turn when capacity is tight.

Here’s what we recommend to include:

COLUMN	WHAT TO INCLUDE
Name and contact	Translator or agency name, email, phone
Languages	Source and target language pairs
Specializations	Special education, curriculum, legal, health, etc.
CAT tool proficiency	Which platforms they work in
Availability and time zone	Useful for urgent or last-minute requests
Rate and turnaround	Standard rates and typical turnaround by document type
Notes	Previous work, preferences, any relevant context

It’s also worth thinking about capacity before peak periods arrive. Enrollment season, IEP cycles, and end-of-year communications are predictable. Reaching out to vendors in advance, rather than when requests are already overdue, gives you more options and better results.



A Practical Note on Communication:

External vendors need clear channels and quick response times to do their best work. Email works for routine exchanges, but for urgent requests or ongoing projects, having vendors accessible through an additional channel — whether that’s a shared project management tool, a portal, or a direct messaging app — reduces delays when time is short.

Handling Updates and Changes

Source content changes during translation more often than most requesters expect. Departments revise curriculum at the last minute. Staff update a policy notice after translation is already underway. A specialist amends an IEP before the meeting it was prepared for.

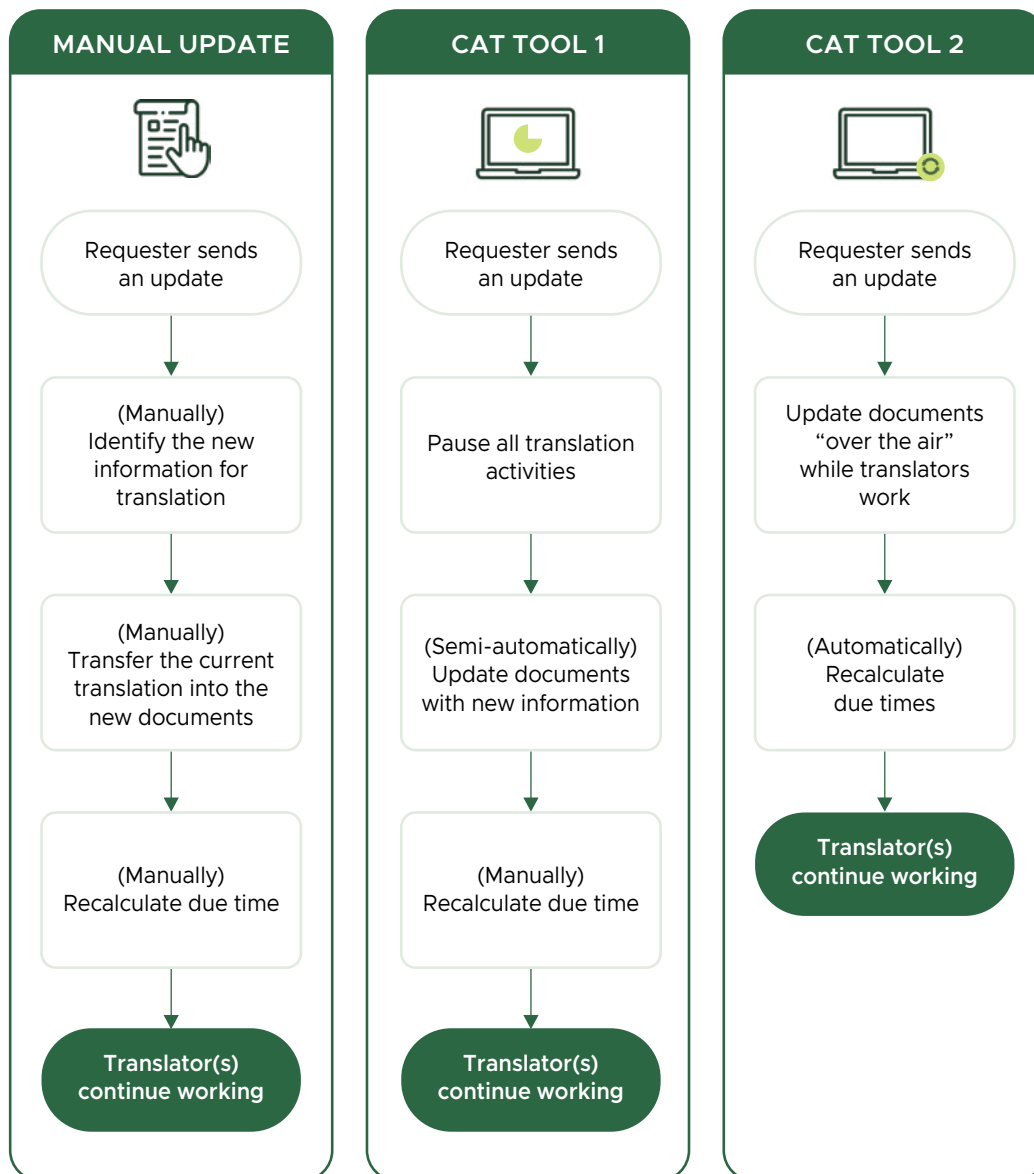


Updates don’t have to be a source of stress if you start with the right infrastructure.

Here's what we recommend:

CAT Tools and Updates

This is where CAT tools prove their value. When source content changes, a CAT tool can identify exactly what is new and what was already translated, so translators aren't combing through documents manually to find the differences. Without that capability, even small updates can create significant rework.



As you can see, each CAT tool has its own way of handling last-minute updates, so it pays to shop around and compare. If you have a translation company you trust, they may be able to help you find a good fit.

Document Format and Editability

The format of the source document affects how easily updates can be incorporated. A simple Word document is straightforward. A multi-page InDesign brochure, a PowerPoint or Canva with embedded images, or an exported PDF from a student information system like Frontline requires additional preparation before it can be translated or updated.

The simpler the format, the easier the update. For complex formats, it’s worth identifying someone in your district — a graphic designer in Communications, for example — who can help with text extraction and layout work when needed. Or you can ask your translation company to support with this task, when the volume or complexity is high.

DOCUMENT FORMAT	PREPARATION REQUIRED
Word document	Minimal — ready for translation in most CAT tools
Google Doc	Minimal — export to Word or translate directly
PowerPoint or Google Slides	Moderate — text extraction needed if images are involved
Excel or Google Sheets	Minimal to Moderate — formatting can complicate CAT tool import
InDesign or Publisher File	High — these files use complex layouts with text embedded in design elements, requiring a specialist to extract, translate and reflow it back into the original layout
PDF (text-based)	High — requires conversion and cleanup before translation
PDF (scanned or image-based)	Very High — requires OCR processing before translation
Exported files from Frontline/similar	High — format varies, often requires manual preparation

Renegotiating Timelines

When the scope of a request changes materially, the timeline should be part of that conversation. Before agreeing to absorb a significant update without a deadline adjustment, it’s worth sitting down with the requester and explaining what the change actually requires. Most requesters don’t have visibility into what goes into a translation update. A brief, direct conversation about the trade-offs between quality and turnaround usually produces a more workable outcome than saying yes and scrambling. Many states also have legislation supporting adequate timelines for linguistically accurate translation, which can be useful context in those conversations.

Capacity and Coverage

If an in-house translator can’t absorb the additional work, you need backup. Having a regionally balanced list of vetted linguists or translation companies across time zones gives you more options and better results than searching for help at the moment you need it most.

Resources worth having in place:

- ✓ A glossary or termbase with standardized translations for key terms, especially terminology for technical fields like special education.
- ✓ A style guide that captures tone, voice preferences, and guidance for sensitive document types.
- ✓ A designated reviewer for high-stakes content, whether in-house or through your translation company.
- ✓ If your district uses Google Workspace, consider creating a NotebookLM space connected to these resources. This gives translators and bilingual liaisons grounded answers without searching across files.
- ✓ If your district uses Microsoft 365, ask your IT team about setting up a Copilot agent connected to SharePoint or OneDrive to serve the same purpose.

In either case, limit access to staff doing translation work to manage consistency and version control.

Quality Under Pressure

Tight deadlines don't change what families need from a translated document. They have the same expectations for an IEP whether it was translated overnight or over weeks. The standard doesn't change just because your schedule does.

Maintaining quality when time is short comes down to having the right resources in place before the pressure arrives. This is where the linguistic infrastructure you built in Chapter 2 comes into play.

Translation research has shown that translators regularly pause during their work to research terminology, resolve ambiguities, or verify how a concept should be expressed in the target language. In technical fields like special education, those pauses can be frequent. An organized and comprehensive knowledge base with answers to the most common questions and linguistic challenges reduces those interruptions significantly, keeping translators focused on the work rather than the research.

For high-stakes documents, technical accuracy isn't enough. A procedural safeguard notice needs to be understood by a parent who may have limited formal education. A discipline letter arrives at a difficult moment for a family, with real implications for their child. The measure of a good translation isn't just whether or not it's correct. It's whether the family can act on it.

Reviewer involvement matters here too. For sensitive or high-stakes content, having a second set of eyes on the translation before it goes out is a reasonable standard to build into your workflow.

AI and MT in the Translation Workflow

When AI or machine translation is part of your workflow, the quality considerations are somewhat different from human translation. MT tools can translate accurately at the surface level but miss tone, cultural nuance, and specialized terminology. In educational settings, these areas are extremely important.

MT review checklist:

- ✓ **Terminology:** MT tools don't always handle special education terms consistently. A glossary integrated into your MT platform helps, but reviewers should still check key terms against your approved termbase.
- ✓ **Tone:** Machine-translated content can sound formal or clinical in ways that could seem cold or confusing to families. A post-editor should read for how the document will come across, not just whether the words are technically correct.
- ✓ **Cultural context:** Direct translation doesn't always produce culturally appropriate communication. Phrases, idioms, and references that work in English may not carry the same meaning or register in the target language.
- ✓ **Consistency:** If multiple documents in a package are being translated, check that terminology and phrasing are consistent across all of them. Machine translation and AI tools don't maintain consistency on their own. Most CAT tools allow you to run QA checks against your glossary, which is a practical way to catch inconsistencies. These checks can generate false positives, especially with longer documents, but for shorter materials they're worth the extra few minutes.

Post-editing is the step where a human reviewer goes through machine-translated output to correct errors, adjust tone, and make sure the translation reads naturally in the target language. It's most effective when reviewers understand what they're looking for. Briefing your post-editors on the most common MT errors in your specific document types and keeping a running log of corrections captures institutional knowledge that improves quality over time.

**Before assigning
any document to
a workflow, ask:**

What would the consequences of an error be for the family receiving this?

That answer, combined with your content tier, should determine the process.

Communication and Queries

When translators are working through a complex project — a bilingual curriculum, a large special education evaluation, a multi-document IEP package — questions come up. How should translators render a specific assessment term? Does this phrase have the right tone for a parent audience? How has the district handled this type of content before?

Without a structured way to manage those questions, they tend to land in email. Answers and context get lost in long, tangled email threads and don't carry over to the next project. So, the same question gets asked again. And again.

A shared query spreadsheet is an accessible way to solve this problem. One document, accessible to everyone involved, where translators log questions and coordinators or subject matter experts provide answers. The format keeps communication organized and creates a record that feeds directly into your knowledge base when the project closes.

Here's a template you can customize:



Don't change the filename of the document. This way, all the linguists and stakeholders can quickly identify it.



You could set up custom notification rules to alert relevant stakeholders about specific questions.



Create an example question to guide your linguists on how to correctly formulate a query.

N.º	Document	Question	Context	Department	Screenshot	Answer	Status
							Pending
							Approved



Keep your questions numbered so it's easier for everyone to identify them during internal conversations.

Regularly update the status of all queries and follow up with the relevant stakeholders if needed.



A few practical notes on making this work:

- Make the spreadsheet available in the cloud.
- Share the spreadsheet with all stakeholders.
- Instruct your translators to complete their designated fields.
- Leave an example of a properly formulated and answered question.
- Activate custom email alerts whenever someone posts a new query.
- Use this sheet as a source of knowledge for large language models (LLMs) to improve the answers they provide.

The answered queries from each project are worth keeping. As your program matures, they become a searchable record of how your district handles specific terminology and content decisions — exactly the kind of institutional knowledge that makes onboarding new translators faster and keeps quality consistent across projects.

Putting It All Together

The work that happens during translation is where your preparation gets tested. A clear intake process, shared linguistic resources, and a vetted vendor list don't eliminate the unexpected, but they do give your team something solid to work from when things get complicated.

The next chapter focuses on what happens after translation is complete, and how to turn the experience of each project into something your team can iterate on as you grow.

After Translation — Knowledge, Quality, and Continuous Improvement

Every translation project leaves something behind beyond the finished document. Along the way, your team made decisions — about terminology, tone, how to handle a particular type of content, what worked and what didn't. Most of the time those decisions live in someone's head or get buried in an email thread, and the next project starts from scratch.



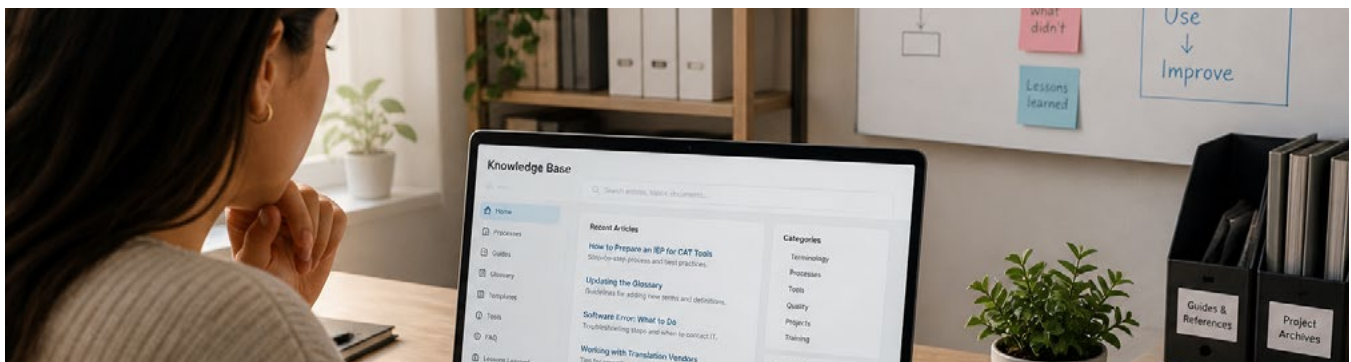
Districts that have made a habit of capturing that knowledge find that it pays off quickly.

They keep what they learn, organize it somewhere accessible, and use it to make the next project a little easier than the last. Over time, that turns into something genuinely valuable: a foundation that keeps terminology and quality consistent across documents, helps onboard new staff, and reduces the time spent solving the same problems twice.

This chapter focuses on how to capture that knowledge and put it to work to improve your program.

The Knowledge Base

A knowledge base is exactly what it sounds like: a central document — or set of documents — where your team records the processes, decisions, and lessons that accumulate as you complete more projects. Think of it as a second brain for the translation department. When someone needs to know how to prepare an IEP for a CAT tool, how to update a glossary, or what to do when a particular software error appears, the answer is there rather than in someone's memory.



Our Knowledge Base

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-  How to translate using our CAT Tool
-  How to use our request tracking sheet
-  How to create a query sheet
-  TM and glossary maintenance

Translation memory maintenance

Glossary maintenance

-  Terminology operations
-  Cybersecurity best practices

How to translate using our CAT Tool

- ☐ Step 1: Prepare the documents for translation using the preparation handbook
- ☐ Step 2: Create a new project with the prepped files (use a pre-built template)
- ☐ Step 3: Review the document in the translation editor. Send to translators if OK

The scope of what belongs in a knowledge base will grow as your program matures, but we recommend starting with a few core areas:

Core knowledge base sections:

- Processes and workflows — step-by-step documentation of how requests are handled from intake to delivery
- CAT tool guidance — how to perform common tasks, troubleshoot errors, and maintain translation memories
- Terminology decisions — how specific terms have been handled and why
- Linguistic resources — where to find style guides, glossaries, and templates
- Troubleshooting — solutions to common problems your team has already solved

The goal isn't a perfect, comprehensive document from day one. A simple outline in Google Docs or Word, with a table of contents and clear headings, is enough to start. Write in plain language so that anyone on the team — including someone new — can follow it without additional explanation.

Getting Started

Use this quick start guide to create your own knowledge base today:

01

Start with a simple outline on paper or in a notes doc. Sketch out the main topics you want to cover. Don't worry about getting it perfect.

02

Open a new document in Google Docs or Word and give it a clear heading, for example: "Riverside USD Translation Department Knowledge Base."

03

Apply heading styles (Heading 1, Heading 2, etc.) to your topics so the document stays organized and easy to navigate.

04

Insert a table of contents at the top so anyone can find what they need quickly. Update it as you add content.

05

Start writing. Focus on the sections your team uses most often and work outward from there.

06

Add screenshots where they help, for CAT tool steps, folder structures, or anything that's easier to show than describe.

Maintaining Your Knowledge Base

Building a knowledge base is the easy part. Keeping it current is where most teams struggle, not because they don't see the value, but because documentation is the kind of task that gets pushed aside when there's other work to do. And there's always other work to do, isn't there?

The most practical solution is to make maintenance a scheduled habit rather than an as-needed task. Block time on a shared calendar each week, even just thirty minutes, for someone to record what was learned, update a process that changed, or add a solution to a problem that came up. Small, regular contributions are more sustainable than periodic overhauls.

If there are two or more people on your team, it helps to assign ownership based on individual strengths.

TEAM MEMBER PROFILE	KNOWLEDGE BASE RESPONSIBILITY
Strong in Word or Google Docs	Document structure, formatting, and table of contents
CAT tool expert	CAT tool guidance, troubleshooting, and translation memory documentation
Translator/partner liaison	Translator database, communication protocols, and onboarding notes
Terminology specialist	Glossary updates, termbase maintenance, and terminology decisions
Solo coordinator	All of the above, prioritized by what gets used most often

The knowledge base doesn’t have to be one person’s responsibility. In fact, it works better when it isn’t.

A shared calendar with recurring maintenance tasks is a small investment that pays off when someone new joins the team, when a coordinator is out, or when a process needs to be revisited months after it was first established.



Review and Evaluation

A translation program that never gets reviewed doesn't stay current for long. The district's needs change, staff move on, and the tools available to support the work improve. Setting aside regular time to step back and assess how things are working is what keeps the program functional rather than just familiar.

Review doesn't have to be complicated. A short meeting once or twice a year with the right people in the room — translation coordinators, IT, Special Education leads, and whoever manages relationships with translators and translation companies — is enough to surface what's working and what needs attention.

The point of this review is simply to catch small problems before they become larger ones, and to recognize where the team has made genuine progress.

What you learn in these reviews should feed back into the knowledge base. A process that changed, a tool that was replaced, a terminology decision that was revisited — those belong in the documentation so the next review starts from an accurate picture of how things work.

Annual review checklist:

- ✓ Has translation volume increased, decreased, or shifted across departments or languages?
- ✓ Do our tracking tools tell us all we need to know?
- ✓ Are staff following the intake process consistently, or have informal habits crept back in?
- ✓ Are the tools you're using still meeting your needs, or is it worth looking at alternatives?
- ✓ Do your glossaries and style guides reflect how the district is actually communicating?
- ✓ Are families getting accurate, timely translations? Is there feedback — formal or informal — that points to areas for improvement?
- ✓ Have there been errors or near misses that reveal a process problem worth addressing?

Connecting This Work to Your Language Access Plan

Many districts maintain a formal language access plan. This is a document that describes how the district identifies language needs, communicates with families with limited English proficiency, and provides meaningful access across programs and services.

The processes you define around translation intake, workflow routing, quality review, and continuous improvement are what turn this policy commitment into real support for multilingual learners and their families.

When it's time to update or document your language access plan, the translation program infrastructure you've built gives you something concrete to describe. Consider capturing at a high level:

- How translation requests are received and routed
- How languages are prioritized and supported
- How tools, including AI and MT, are used responsibly
- How quality and consistency are maintained across departments
- How the program is reviewed and updated over time

A language access plan documented this way reflects practice rather than aspiration. It's easier to defend, easier to update, and more useful to the staff and families who depend on it.

Building a continuously improving translation program takes time. Most districts start with one or two pieces — a tracking sheet, a shared glossary, a simple folder structure — and add from there. The goal isn't a perfect system. It's a functional one that your team can maintain, improve, and hand off when needed.

Start small, but definitely start.

Bringing It All Together



Every district that takes translation seriously is navigating the same set of tensions. Speed versus quality. Consistency versus flexibility. Legal obligations versus limited resources

There's no version of this work where all four are perfectly balanced at all times. What a well-structured translation program gives you is a way to manage those tensions deliberately rather than reactively.

The chapters in this guide have covered the full lifecycle of translation management, from how requests enter the system to how your team learns from each project. If you've been reading and recognizing your own district in these pages, you're probably already thinking about where to start.

The matrix below is a practical way to assess where your program stands today and what to work on next. Most districts will find themselves at different levels across different areas. That's normal. The goal isn't to reach "established" in everything at once. It's to know where you are and move forward from there.

AREA	BEGINNING	DEVELOPING	ESTABLISHED
Intake and Request Management	Requests arrive informally through email or phone. No standard form or tracking system in place.	A request form exists, but isn't used consistently. Some tracking in place, but not shared across departments.	All requests come through a standardized form. A shared tracking sheet gives full visibility into volume, status, and turnaround times.
Tools and Resources	No shared glossary, style guide, or translation memory. Translators work independently without shared references.	Some linguistic resources exist, but aren't maintained consistently or shared across the team.	A maintained glossary, style guide, and translation memory are available to all translators and updated regularly. CAT tools are in use.
Quality and Review	No formal review process. Translations go out without a second set of eyes. Content type doesn't determine workflow.	Review happens for some document types, but not consistently. Content tiering is informal or partially implemented.	A clear content tiering framework determines the workflow for every document. High-stakes content always receives human review before delivery, or is human-translated from the start.
Knowledge and Continuous Improvement	No documentation of processes or decisions. Institutional knowledge lives with individuals.	Some processes are documented, but the knowledge base isn't maintained consistently or used as a reference.	A maintained knowledge base captures processes, terminology decisions, and troubleshooting. Regular reviews keep it current and feed improvements back into the program.

Wherever you land on this matrix, the next step is the same: pick the area where the gap between where you are and where you want to be is causing the most friction, and start there. A functional intake process makes everything downstream more manageable. A maintained glossary reduces revision cycles. A content tiering framework protects your highest stakes documents and makes AI and MT decisions easier to defend.

The investment will be worth it. Providing these students and their families access to the same materials as their English-dominant peers, and as though these were originally produced in their mother languages, creates a transformative learning experience.

You don't have to build this alone, and you don't have to build it all at once. At **The Translation Team**, we work with school districts at every stage of this process — from setting up translation portals and glossaries to handling translation work directly when your team is stretched thin. Since 2014, we've worked with districts to support Special Education departments, multilingual learner programs, communications teams, and district operations leaders, and we bring the same translators and project managers back to each engagement so the knowledge we build together stays with your program as you grow.

How we work with districts:

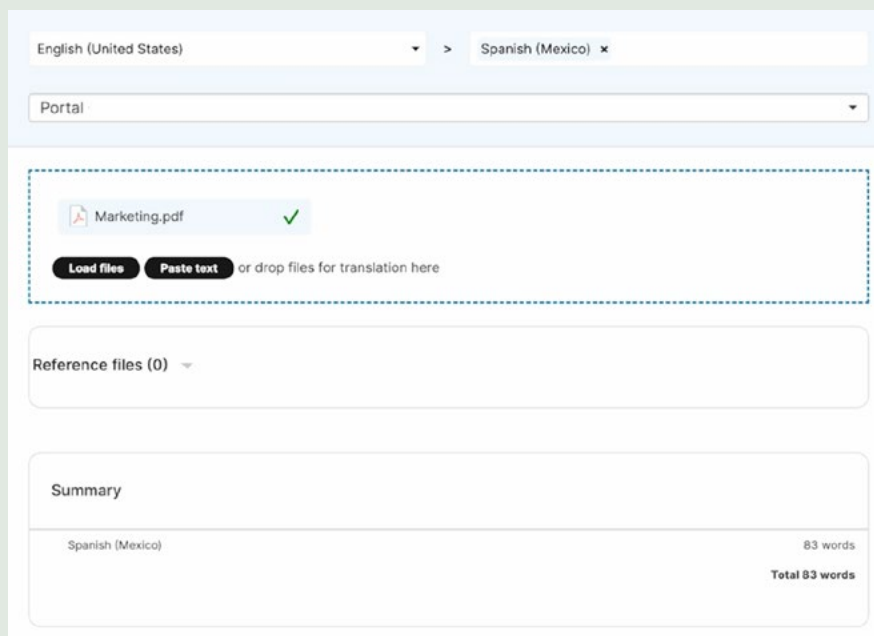
- ✓ Translation of IEPs, 504 programs, evaluations, procedural safeguards, and other Special Education documents
- ✓ Curriculum translation, including bilingual and dual-language materials
- ✓ Enrollment packets, handbooks, discipline notices, health communications, and family-facing materials
- ✓ Translation workflow consulting and CAT tool training for in-house teams
- ✓ Overflow support when your team is at capacity
- ✓ Termbase and translation memory development and maintenance

The Translation Team Client Portal

Our client portal gives district staff a single place to submit translation requests, track status in real time, and access completed translations. Every request comes in with the information needed to route it correctly from the start, and coordinators always have visibility into what's in the queue and what's been delivered.

For districts managing requests across multiple departments and languages, that kind of transparency makes a real difference in day-to-day operations.

If you're ready to talk through where your district is and what would be most useful, we'd be glad to help.



The screenshot shows the Translation Team Client Portal interface. At the top, there are two dropdown menus for language selection: 'English (United States)' and 'Spanish (Mexico)'. Below these is a 'Portal' dropdown menu. A dashed blue box highlights the file upload area, which includes a file icon and the name 'Marketing.pdf' with a green checkmark. Below this are buttons for 'Load files' and 'Paste text', followed by the text 'or drop files for translation here'. Underneath is a 'Reference files (0)' dropdown menu. At the bottom, there is a 'Summary' section with a table showing the translation status for 'Spanish (Mexico)' with '83 words' and a 'Total 83 words' summary.

Get In Touch



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