

## BOARD BRIEF

Date: June 25, 2021

BOARD INFORMATION:

MEETING PREPARATION: \_\_\_\_\_

**FROM:** Terri H. Mazingo, Ed.D., Chief, Teaching, Learning, and Leadership  
Bethany Nickerson, Ed.D., Executive Director, Office of English Learner Services  
Victor Espinosa Sanchez, Bilingual Language Access Manager  
Taneika Taylor Tukan, Manager, School Engagement and Public Outreach

**THROUGH:** Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr., Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

**TO:** The Honorable Megan Alderton, Chair, and  
Members of the Alexandria City School Board

**TOPIC:** Update on Language Line Services for ACPS Families

### ACPS 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL

Goal 5: Family and Community Engagement

### SY 2020-2021 FOCUS AREA

Focus Area 3: Strategic Plan Implementation

### FY 2021 BUDGET PRIORITY

Communications and Customer Service for Internal Stakeholders  
Outreach to Hispanic Families to Improve Attendance and Graduation  
Outreach to Underserved Communities to Increase Engagement

### BACKGROUND

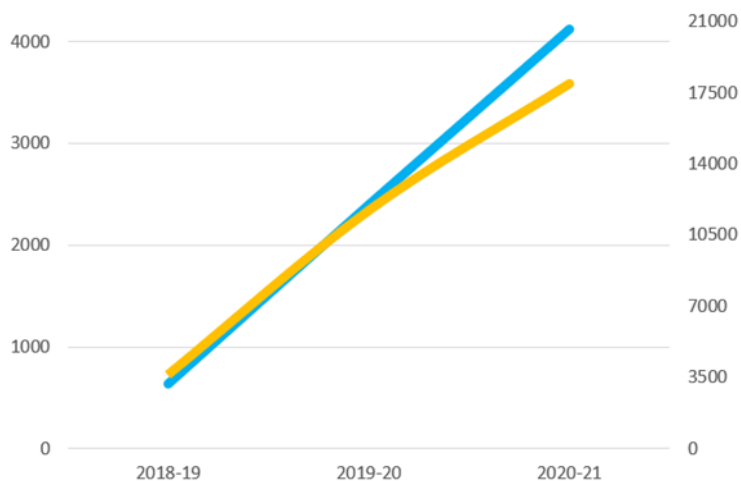
Among its findings, the 2019-2020 division-wide Family Engagement Evaluation showed that only 13% of “secret shoppers” who called ACPS school buildings -- and who spoke a language other than English or Spanish -- were successfully connected to interpretation services during the phone call. The remaining callers were either disconnected or referred to the Central Office and could not get answers to their questions. Given the implications for family-school relationships in a school division where 120 languages are spoken, the evaluation included a prioritized recommendation to increase the effective utilization of existing family communication tools like Language Line, a telephone interpretation service that ACPS has been using for many years. This service allows ACPS staff to connect with an interpreter via phone while conversing with a non-English speaking family via phone, Zoom, or in person.

### Update and Expansion of Current Supports

Staff use of the Language Line interpretation services to facilitate family-school communication with limited-English speaking families has increased every year. This is due to the wide dissemination of instructional guides and increased professional learning and the extraordinary shift in how teachers had to communicate with families in the absence of in-person interaction and printed materials during the pandemic. Indeed, from July 1, 2020, to May 30, 2021, alone, 17,922 calls were completed using the Language Line. This represents a 390% increase in calls since 2018-2019.

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Language Line Calls have increased by 390% in number of calls and increased by 544% in number of hours in three years



In preparation for a more traditional school year in which families resume calling their zoned schools more than the multilingual HelpLine – and in alignment with the *2025 Strategic Plan Family and Community Engagement Goal* – ACPS will continue to ensure and increase reliable access to interpretation services for families by expanding the Language Line tool to include a Direct Response system that will be available in Spanish, Amharic, Arabic, Pashto, and Farsi. (ACPS has also asked Language Line to explore adding Dari, the fifth most common home language among ACPS families.) The Direct Response system will allow ACPS families to initiate the interpretation service and contact their school with an interpreter already on the line, eliminating language barriers they may have encountered in the past. To use the Direct Response system, families will call a dedicated ACPS toll-free number and then enter their school’s language code. An interpreter will automatically connect from the beginning of the call to the end (see attachment). The system is expected to be ready for testing over the summer and launch before the start of the school year.

The Office of English Learner Services is working with the Department of School and Community Relations to make sure all staff and families are aware of this new resource. ACPS will be the first school system in Virginia and the third in the United States to implement this Language Line system.

### RECOMMENDATION

The Superintendent recommends the School Board review this information to understand the new Direct Response system available through Language Line.

### IMPACT

Ensure equity by helping reduce language barriers so families, regardless of home language, understand where to go for assistance, expectations for student learning and how to support their students’ success.

### ATTACHMENT

1. [Language Line Direct Response PowerPoint](#)

### CONTACT

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