



**New York City Administration for Children's Services
Language Access Plan
July 2015**

I. Agency Mission and Background

The Administration for Children's Services (ACS) protects and promotes the safety and well-being of New York City's children, young people, families, and communities by providing **child welfare, juvenile justice, and early care and education services.**

- **Child welfare.** The continuum of child welfare services ranges from preventive services – free, confidential services such as family counseling, support groups, crisis interventions, help accessing public benefits, domestic violence programs, job skills development, and more – to child protective and foster care services.
- **Juvenile justice.** ACS offers a spectrum of services for youth at every stage of the juvenile justice process and their families, including community-based supportive services, therapeutic interventions, detention services for youth in juvenile delinquency and offender proceedings or awaiting post-adjudication placement, and residential placement and aftercare services for youth who have been found by the Family Court to have committed a delinquent act.
- **Early care and education.** ACS administers the largest publicly-funded early care and education program in the United States, serving approximately 100,000 children ages 6 weeks to 13 years old each year in center-based and family child care settings. Services are provided via contracts with community-based organizations and through child care vouchers.

II. Agency Language Access Goals

The goal of this Plan is to enable youth and families in New York City who are **limited English proficient (LEP)** to have meaningful access to all of the child welfare, juvenile justice, and early care and education programs and services provided by ACS and our community-based contracted providers, and to increase inclusion of LEP communities in policy and planning related to ACS programs and service delivery.

A. History of Language Access Services at ACS

ACS has long recognized that language access services are vital to positive outcomes for the youth and families we serve. Since 1999, ACS' child protective staff members have had

access to interpretation services 24 hours a day, seven days a week – initially in more than 140 languages, and today in 200 languages. In the early 2000s, through the former ACS Immigrant Advisory Subcommittee, ACS began engaging immigrant advocacy organizations to better understand the needs of immigrant and LEP communities, and since that time has continued to expand language assistance services agency-wide. Over the past decade, the quantity of interpretation services provided by ACS each year increased more than 725 percent – from approximately 6,600 instances in 2005, to 54,507 in 2014.

In order to provide access to ACS services for LEP youth and families and avoid the possibility of discrimination based on LEP status, ACS follows a number of federal and local laws on language access, including Title VI of the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964, the New York City Equal Access to Services Act of 2003 (Local Law 73), and New York City Mayoral Executive Order 120 of 2008.

B. Continuing Commitment to Language Access Services

ACS recognizes that because our agency’s programs and services continue to grow and improve, and the City’s population continually changes, we must consistently endeavor to provide a language access program that accurately reflects current needs and resources. In December 2014, ACS Commissioner Gladys Carrión, Esq., created an agency-wide Language Access Work Group to assess the ACS language access program and identify areas for improvement. The work group, comprising staff from all areas of ACS, has met regularly since January 2015. By convening the new Language Access Work Group, Commissioner Carrión joins Mayor Bill de Blasio in reinforcing New York City’s commitment to equal access to city services for all New Yorkers, regardless of the language they speak.

C. Language Access Goals for 2015-2016

The ACS Language Access Work Group has identified three key areas for improvement on which we plan to focus over the next 12 months: **supporting public-facing staff who work with LEP clients; collecting, measuring and evaluating key data; and enhancing community awareness and engagement.** This subsection presents a summary of ACS’ goals for each of these three priority areas. Specific outcomes ACS plans to achieve over the next 12 months are outlined in Section V below.

i. Supporting Public-Facing Staff

Goal One: Support staff with the tools, resources, and education they need to effectively bridge language and cultural barriers.

Meaningful and accurate communication between our staff and the children, young people, and families we serve is a cornerstone of successful outcomes across every aspect of our work. We strive to prevent having differences in language or culture result in interventions that do not best address a client’s needs. To this end, our goal is for staff to have access to high-quality interpretation services, knowledge of the available tools and resources for making use of these services – such as the Language Identification Card and ACS’ “How to

Work with an Interpreter” video series – and a strong understanding of how to use these supports.

Goal Two: Provide staff with more opportunities to utilize special language skills in their work.

ACS is proud to have a committed staff that reflects much of the diversity of New York City. Though staff are generally not required to use their language skills in the workplace, many who volunteer to do so can attest that the ability to communicate in a client’s preferred language is an asset in casework. Our staff members’ language skills can help ACS engage and build trust with families and communities, particularly newcomers who are unfamiliar with our system. In collaboration with the ACS Commissioner’s Diversity Work Group and ACS’ Office of Personnel Services, the Language Access Work Group will explore options for strengthening the connection between staff with special language skills and LEP clients, such as using Selective Certification for language skills in the civil service hiring process.

ii. Collecting, Measuring, and Evaluating Key Data

Goal Three: Gather information from key stakeholders about the quality and effectiveness of the ACS language access program.

Understanding the perspectives of those who have first-hand experience with ACS’ language access program – including public-facing staff, contracted providers, language services vendors, and ACS clients and their advocates – is a crucial piece of our overall evaluation of the program. Feedback from these key stakeholders will be sought and utilized to deepen our understanding of how well the language access program meets the needs of those who depend on it. In addition, we will continue to expand coordination of our mechanisms for responding to individual, case-specific language access concerns.

Goal Four: Enhance capacity for gathering and evaluating key quantitative data about language access needs and services.

Decisions about language access policies and program resources must also be informed by the best available quantitative data on community language needs and usage of language services. With the support of the New York City Department of City Planning and in collaboration with our program area leadership, language services vendors, and other city agencies, ACS seeks to expand our assessment and use of key quantitative data from an agency-wide level to the program and neighborhood levels.

iii. Enhancing Community Awareness and Engagement

Goal Five: Ensure that the youth, families, and communities ACS serves are aware of the right to free language services.

Through a variety of outreach initiatives – such as our recent multifaceted, citywide media campaign, and community-based “Demystifying ACS” workshops – we continually

endeavor to ensure that community members are aware of the broad spectrum of services available through ACS and our provider agencies, and feel comfortable seeking the services that best meet their needs without fear of discrimination based on language or immigration status. As part of our effort to reach LEP communities, we look to increase our engagement with ethnic media and partnership with community-based organizations working with LEP youth and families.

Goal Six: Develop meaningful opportunities for community stakeholders to participate in policy and planning of the ACS language access program.

Under the leadership of Commissioner Carrión, ACS is working harder to ensure that community voices are part of the conversation about ACS policy and how we deliver services. To that end, Commissioner Carrión has created the ACS Office of Family Engagement and Youth Advocacy, which will work with young people and families so that their personal experiences with ACS, concerns, and ideas for change are heard. Similarly, the ACS Language Access Work Group will assist the agency in increasing inclusion of LEP communities in policy and planning processes related to language access.

III. Population Assessment

As required by Executive Order 120, ACS utilizes the U.S. Department of Justice “Four-Factor Analysis” to determine which LEP populations our agency serves, and how.¹

Based on the analysis outlined below, ACS will continue seeking to provide free in-person or telephonic interpretation services in all child welfare matters. We are actively exploring how to coordinate resources in order to further expand interpretation services throughout our juvenile justice and early care and education programs as well, building on the foundation we have established in our child welfare programs.

Furthermore, ACS will continue to translate essential public documents (defined below in Section V.A.iii) into the nine languages that we understand to be most commonly used by the youth and families we serve: **Spanish, Chinese, Bengali, Russian, Arabic, Urdu, Haitian Creole, Korean, and French.** For ACS clients who speak other languages, oral interpretation of essential public documents will be provided.

Importantly, many of ACS’ services are provided through community-based agencies with which ACS contracts. As recipients of federal funding, these agencies are also subject to the provisions of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, and must take reasonable steps to provide LEP individuals with meaningful access. We will continue to work collaboratively with all of our contracted providers so that language is not a barrier for youth and families to meaningfully engage in these programs and services.

¹ U.S. Dept. of Justice, Guidance to Federal Financial Assistance Recipients Regarding Title VI Prohibition Against National Origin Discrimination Affecting Limited English Proficient Persons, 67 Fed. Reg. 41,455, 41,457 (June 18, 2002).

Factor One: Demographic Analysis

ACS' child welfare, juvenile justice, and early care and education programs and services are available to New York City's children, young people, and families regardless of the language they speak. To determine the languages spoken by our service population, ACS utilizes the following data sources:

- U.S. Census – American Community Survey (data provided by NYC Department of City Planning);² and
- NYC Department of Education data on languages spoken by parents at home.

Factor Two: Internal ACS Data

Two internal sources of ACS data used in this analysis are:

- data on clients' primary language from ACS child welfare programs and early care and education programs; and
- language services vendor data on instances of interpretation services provided (in-person and telephonic).

Factor Three: Nature and Importance of Programs Requiring Language Assistance

Across all ACS programs and services, clear, accurate communication between staff and clients is critical. Historically, ACS has focused on providing language access services in the spectrum of child welfare programs, particularly in the context of child protective investigations. We now seek to transfer the best practices and lessons learned through that work to other divisions of ACS, for a coordinated system of language services across the agency.

Factor Four: Resources Designated for Language Assistance Services

In order to provide language assistance services, ACS has contracted with vendors for in-person, telephonic, sign language, and document translation through city-wide language services contracts. In addition, to meet the need for Spanish language at our borough office sites, ACS has contracted for in-person Spanish interpreters to provide on-site interpretation at 15 sites, 4 hour per day, 5 days per week.

IV. Implementation Logistics

This Plan represents ACS' language access goals and outcomes planned for the next 12 months (August 2015-July 2016). The ACS Commissioner's Language Access Work Group, under the leadership of ACS' Language Access Coordinator, will monitor the efficacy of the Plan and issue an updated Plan in February 2016. Through further evaluation and collaboration with a broader group of internal and external stakeholders – including the Mayor's Offices of Immigrant Affairs and Operations, other city agencies, ACS program area leadership, public-facing staff, our contracted providers, community groups working with LEP New Yorkers, and ACS clients and their advocates – we will continue to identify longer-term opportunities to improve coordination and delivery of language access services.

² See, e.g., ARUN PETER LOBO & JOSEPH J. SALVO, NYC DEPT. OF CITY PLANNING, THE NEWEST NEW YORKERS: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CITY'S FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION (2013).

V. Outcomes Planned for August 2015 – July 2016

A. Service Provision Outcomes

i. General

- **By January 1, 2016, the ACS Language Access Policy will be updated to reflect the obligations of all ACS program areas and contracted providers.**
(Responsibility: ACS Division of Policy, Planning, and Measurement; ACS Language Access Work Group)
- **By July 1, 2016, options will be evaluated for recruiting, hiring, and assigning ACS staff in the Division of Child Protection in relation to language ability.**
(Responsibility: ACS Division of Child Protection; ACS Office of the General Counsel; ACS Equal Employment Opportunity Officer; ACS Division of Administration; in collaboration with ACS Commissioner’s Diversity Work Group and Language Access Work Group)

SPOTLIGHT: Pilot Project to Expand Language Access Services in Foster Care Family Team Conferences

When a child enters foster care, the foster care agency must work with the child’s parents and/or caretakers to develop a service plan. Part of the planning process is the **Family Team Conference** – a type of meeting that brings together the child’s parents, caretakers, and foster parents, foster care agency staff, supportive community members, and other members of the parents’ support system, with the goal being that the best possible decisions about the child’s future are made. Many Family Team Conferences are led by specially trained ACS facilitators.

- **By June 1, 2016, a Pilot Project to hold Family Team Conferences entirely in Spanish for Spanish-speaking families will be planned.**
(Responsibility: ACS Division of Family Permanency Services)

ii. Interpretation Services

For youth and families interacting with ACS staff, in-person (including sign language) and telephonic interpretation services will continue to be available through language services vendors with which ACS maintains contracts. Bilingual ACS staff may also provide interpretation services, or serve clients in the clients’ primary languages, if the staff choose to do so.

Interpretation services are available 24 hours per day, seven days per week in over 200 languages, and should be provided in all interactions between ACS staff and clients who are

limited English proficient, deaf, or hearing impaired. This includes, but is not limited to:

- in-person interactions at ACS office sites, home and other site visits, and community events; and
- over-the-phone interactions, including ACS help lines and hotlines.

For clients' interactions with ACS' contracted providers, in-person and telephonic interpretation services may be available through ACS' language services vendors. In other cases, the contracted provider is responsible for providing language services, through bilingual staff or their own language services vendor.

In order to identify a client's need for language services, upon initial contact, ACS and provider agency staff must inform clients of their legal right to free language services and ask what their primary language is. A Language Identification Card – a paper card that explains the right to an interpreter in nearly 100 languages – is used to facilitate this process. If it is not possible to determine a client's primary language using the Language Identification Card, telephonic interpretation services should be used.

iii. Document Translation Services

ACS clients who are limited English proficient are entitled to receive “essential public documents” (defined below) in their preferred language, if available.

“Essential public documents” are ACS documents most commonly distributed to the public that contain or elicit important and necessary information regarding the provision of services by ACS. ACS essential public documents include: consent forms; letters or notices containing information regarding participation in a program; notices pertaining to the reduction, denial, or termination of services or benefits, and the right to appeal such actions; notices advising limited English proficient clients of free language assistance; and other outreach materials.

Under ACS policy, essential public documents that are “form” letters or notices shall be translated into each of ACS' nine priority languages: Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, French, Haitian Creole, Korean, Russian, Spanish, and Urdu.

If a client's preferred language is not one of ACS' nine priority languages, ACS shall offer oral interpretation of the document so that the client is able to understand it.

- **By September 1, 2015, the ACS Language Access Work Group will identify a team to oversee the process of:**
 - **regularly identifying the agency's essential public documents;**
 - **screening these documents for plain language principles;**
 - **obtaining quality translations into ACS' priority languages;**
 - **coordinating a secondary review of translations; and**
 - **verifying that the documents are available to staff and clients.**

Recognizing the value of feedback from target audiences for agency documents, this team will seek to collaborate with LEP stakeholders in the community. (Responsibility: ACS Language Access Work Group)

- **By July 1, 2016, an updated list of ACS’ “essential public documents” will be identified, translated, reviewed, and made available to staff and clients.** (Responsibility: ACS Language Access Work Group - Documents Team; in collaboration with external stakeholders)
- **By July 1, 2016, an evaluation will be conducted to review ACS’ provision of notice of right to language services with written materials.** (Responsibility: ACS Language Access Work Group – Documents Team)

B. Signage Outcomes

ACS uses two signs, created by the Mayor’s Offices of Immigrant Affairs and Operations, to provide notice to the public of the right to language access and the right to contact 311 with language access complaints.

- **By January 1, 2016, larger and more visible versions of the two language access signs will be printed internally by ACS and posted in 130 locations across ACS sites citywide.** (Responsibility: ACS Division of Administration; ACS Language Access Work Group)

C. Outreach and Public Awareness Outcomes

Through the outcomes outlined below, we will continue to build on recent and ongoing outreach initiatives – such as our multifaceted, citywide media campaign, which ran advertisements in English, Spanish, and Chinese, and our “Demystifying ACS” workshops, which may be tailored to meet the content and language needs of community audiences – to enhance awareness of the right to free language services and provide equal access to information about ACS’ broad spectrum of programs and services to all of the communities we serve.

- **By August 1, 2015, routine outreach to ethnic media will be incorporated into ongoing promotion of ACS events, initiatives, programs, and services.** (Responsibility: ACS Division of Communications and Community Affairs)
- **By September 1, 2015, a redesigned ACS website will be launched. The site will be made available in languages other than English.** (Responsibility: ACS Division of Communications and Community Affairs; ACS Office of Information Technology)

SPOTLIGHT: Expanding Outreach and Awareness of Language Access in Preventive Services

ACS' community-based preventive services programs offer a spectrum of free, confidential services, designed to keep children safe in the home and to prevent children from entering foster care. Preventive services include family counseling, support groups, crisis interventions, help accessing public benefits, domestic violence programs, job skills development, special services for older youth and sexually exploited youth, and more. It is not necessary for a family to have an open ACS case to receive preventive services.

ACS' preventive services providers employ staff members who reflect the language and cultural backgrounds of the communities they serve, in order to make it as easy as possible for families to connect with programs that meet their needs. To further the inclusion and integration of LEP families in preventive services, ACS will pursue the following outcomes:

- **By August 1, 2015, information about ACS' language access policy and services will be included in the ACS Division of Preventive Services' presentations to external stakeholder groups, such as other city agencies with which this Division collaborates.** (Responsibility: Division of Preventive Services)
- **Beginning August 1, 2015, information about ACS' language access policy and services will be included in the ACS Division of Preventive Services' publications on an ongoing basis.** (Responsibility: ACS Division of Preventive Services)
- **By September 1, 2015, an email tagline about language access will be created and used by all staff in the ACS Division of Preventive Services, to support other efforts to raise awareness about language access among ACS' contracted providers for preventive services.** (Responsibility: ACS Division of Preventive Services)

D. Training and Staff Support Outcomes

Currently, ACS provides training on language access to new Child Protective Specialist hires in the Division of Child Protection. These staff members engage with the public on a daily basis, investigating approximately 60,000 annual reports of child abuse and maltreatment that New York City receives from the New York State Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment. Language access training is provided to these new hires through ACS' internal training department, the James Satterwhite Academy, as part of a 41-day pre-service training. Once staff members complete training and are assigned to an ACS office site, language access training is supplemented by instruction and guidance from supervisors as needed.

In January 2016, ACS will launch a new Workforce Institute, designed to improve and expand upon staff development and learning opportunities for frontline employees and supervisors across all ACS Divisions. The Workforce Institute, in collaboration with the James Satterwhite Academy, will draw upon expertise at universities and other partners in the field of child welfare, strengthening frontline coaching and supervision practices, and accessing the most effective learning strategies, methods, and technologies to maximize participant learning.

- **By September 1, 2015, ACS Commissioner Gladys Carrión, Esq., will issue a message to all ACS staff via email, announcing a new online Employee Toolkit containing language access resources for public-facing ACS staff.** (Responsibility: Office of the Commissioner of ACS; ACS Division of Communications and Community Affairs)
- **By September 1, 2015, a list of ACS Language Access Point People, who will receive and respond to staff inquiries and concerns about ACS language access policies, protocols, and services, will be identified and circulated to all ACS staff.** (Responsibility: ACS Language Access Work Group; ACS Division of Communications and Community Affairs)
- **By July 1, 2016, all new hire staff at ACS and contracted providers will be educated on language access obligations and how to access the tools and resources they will need to comply with those obligations.** (Responsibility: ACS Division of Policy, Planning, and Measurement; ACS Language Access Work Group; in collaboration with contracted providers)
- **By July 1, 2016, and on an annual basis going forward, all public-facing staff at ACS and contracted providers will be educated once per year on language access obligations and how to access the tools and resources they will need to comply with those obligations.** (Responsibility: ACS Division of Policy, Planning, and Measurement; ACS Language Access Work Group; in collaboration with contracted providers)

E. Recordkeeping and Evaluation Outcomes

Since the passage of Local Law 73, ACS has engaged in efforts at both the state and city levels to improve in the areas of language access-related recordkeeping and program evaluation. For example, in 2005, ACS began working with the New York State Office of Children and Family Services to implement changes to CONNECTIONS – the statewide child welfare database – in order to support better collection of primary language data. More recently, following the expansion in spring 2015 of 311’s capacity to take language access complaints, ACS created a process to respond to these complaints within a 14-day timeframe. Given the critical importance of capturing qualitative and quantitative data accurately and evaluating it rigorously, we will continue to significantly expand these efforts, as outlined below.

- **By January 1, 2016, a plan will be developed for conducting methodologically sound surveys and/or interviews of key language services stakeholders - - including public-facing staff, contracted providers, language services vendors, and ACS clients and their advocates - in order to assess the current quality and effectiveness of the ACS language access program.** (Responsibility: ACS Language Access Work Group; ACS Division of Policy, Planning, and Measurement)
- **By January 1, 2016, an improved agency-wide process for collecting, responding to, and regularly assessing trends in language access inquiries and complaints will be coordinated.** (Responsibility: ACS Language Access Work Group; ACS Division of Policy, Planning, and Measurement; ACS Office of Advocacy)
- **By January 1, 2016, options will be evaluated for tracking quantitative data on ACS' usage of contracted interpreters at the neighborhood and program level.** (Responsibility: ACS Language Access Work Group; ACS Division of Policy, Planning, and Measurement)
- **By February 1, 2016, a Language Access question will be added to the new ACS Collaborative Quality Improvement Organizational Review Tool, part of ACS' annual evaluation cycle of contracted providers.** (ACS Division of Policy, Planning, and Measurement - Office of Agency Program Assistance; ACS Language Access Work Group)
- **By January 1, 2016, a plan will be developed for tracking and issuing quarterly reports regarding the scope of staff language capacity in the Preventive Services System.** (ACS Division of Preventive Services)

F. Resource Analysis and Planning Outcomes

- **By July 2015, ACS language services vendor contracts and task orders for fiscal year 2016 will be finalized, with amendments reflecting anticipated increase in demand.** (Responsibility: ACS Division of Administration; ACS Division of Financial Services)
- **By July 1, 2016, an updated "Four-Factor Analysis" will be conducted to assess which LEP populations the agency serves, and how.** (Responsibility: ACS Language Access Work Group; ACS Division of Policy, Planning, and Measurement)
- **By July 1, 2016, electronic systems will explored for accessing language services through ACS' vendor contracts, and reconciling payments to vendors.** (Responsibility: ACS Language Access Work Group; in consultation with ACS Office of Information Technology)