



# Louisiana Language Access Coalition

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LLAC Co-Chair

Catholic Charities  
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LLAC - Health Committee

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REACH NOLA

July 22, 2011

Superintendent John White  
RSD Central Office  
1641 Poland Avenue  
New Orleans, LA 70117

Dear Mr. John White:

On behalf of the Louisiana Language Access Coalition (LLAC), we would like to welcome you to our city and thank you for your infusion of new energy and ideas. LLAC is a coalition of community leaders formed in 2007 to advocate for the city's Limited English Proficient (LEP) populations in the areas of health, criminal justice and education. The mission of the Louisiana Language Access Coalition is to promote full and meaningful participation in public life, without barriers based on language, for all people. The LLAC Education Committee is tied to the Vietnamese community through the work of VAYLANO (Vietnamese American Youth Leadership Association of New Orleans), and to the Latino community through the commitments of Puentes New Orleans and the Hispanic Apostolate, a program of Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans. Accordingly, the LLAC Education Committee would like to offer itself as a resource to the RSD as you confront issues affecting LEP families. In particular, we are interested in meeting with you to explore the question of language access at the four new parent centers established by the RSD.

As you are no doubt aware, the LEP residents of our city confront a number of unique barriers that restrict their access to school choice and quality education. Lacking reliable information about the city's convoluted educational landscape, families struggle to identify the most appropriate educational opportunities, decipher programmatic differences between schools, or make informed decisions. After the arduous process of finding a school, LEP parents often feel disenfranchised and voiceless. Most schools fail to translate critical documents into other languages and neglect to provide interpretation services during meetings, despite laws and LDOE policy mandating both.

On Wednesday, July 20th, a number of LEP families, including individuals with children at Abramson Charter School, visited the various parent centers seeking information on schooling options. Though the staff at the centers was friendly, the families encountered a number of barriers. Across the board, there was no personnel who spoke these families' native languages, Spanish and Vietnamese.

The centers dealt with this deficiency in varying ways, from simply turning the individual/family away, to recruiting a bilingual teacher to translate, to calling other Hispanic and Asian individuals who themselves had recently visited the center seeking information. The many problems associated with relying on arbitrary and unqualified individuals became obvious when the individuals they phoned were not available to translate because they were in meetings or were driving.

When the centers were unable to answer questions or provide information on schools, they suggested families visit other schools in the neighborhood for help. There were no assurances that any of these other sites would have information on school options, let alone culturally competent services. In every case, the families were sent off with materials in English and were told that there were no resources available in any language other than English. Except in one case, families were not asked for their contact information, nor were they given any future appointments.

Beyond concerns with the centers' English-only practices, we have also received complaints about the accessibility of the centers. The centers' limited hours of operation exclude working parents who desperately need more information on school options for their children but who do not have the luxury of leaving their jobs to visit between 9am and 3pm. What's more, those who managed to get away from their jobs to seek information found that the centers were closed for a full hour during lunchtime, the only time they could conceivably visit.

As suggested above, we would greatly appreciate the opportunity to sit down with you and share some ideas about how to address our communities' needs. Rather than sites that compound existing barriers, we envision the four parent centers connecting LEP residents to materials in their native tongue and to bilingual professionals who can facilitate conversation with parents, teachers, principals and other education providers throughout the city. We look forward to working with you to make the parent centers and educational information accessible to all.

Sincerely,

The Louisiana Language Access Coalition

  
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CC: Sabrina Marsh-Sanders