

COMPLAINTS AGAINST TUCSON UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT RESULT IN AGREEMENTS ENSURING LANGUAGE SERVICES FOR LIMITED ENGLISH STUDENTS AND PARENTS.

(Portland, ME □ July 25, 2002) COMPLAINTS FILED BY ADVOCATES AND MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY (LEP) ADVOCACY TASK FORCE RESULT IN TUCSON UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT SIGNING AGREEMENTS WITH U.S. HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AND EDUCATION OFFICES FOR CIVIL RIGHTS TO ENSURE QUALIFIED INTERPRETATION AND TRANSLATION SERVICES FOR LIMITED ENGLISH STUDENTS AND PARENTS.

The Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) has signed formal agreements with the Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in San Francisco and Department of Education Office for Civil Rights in Denver that will ensure all TUSD services and programs, including all of the Family Resource and Wellness Centers (FRWC), are accessible to persons with limited English skills.

The agreements close a Title VI complaint filed on June 14, 2001 by advocates and members of the National Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Advocacy Task Force, a civil rights organization that supports the laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of national origin because of language and cultural differences. The complaint alleged that the TUSD discriminated against LEP students and parents by not providing qualified interpretation (spoken language) or translation (written language) services.

According to the HHS Agreement, approximately 17% of TUSD's student body are LEP. For purposes of this Agreement, "LEP Persons" are individuals whose primary language is not English and who cannot speak, read, write, or understand the English language at a level that permits them to interact effectively with TUSD and its FRWCs. The District has identified nearly 50 languages spoken by its LEP students including Spanish, Vietnamese, Russian, Cantonese, Mandarin, Arabic, and Farsi.

Policies and practices resulting in LEP persons not having an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs receiving federal funds violate Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. OCR enforces Title VI, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national

origin.

According to Kathy Poulos-Minott, coordinator of the National LEP Advocacy Task Force, "We are very encouraged because these are the first OCR Agreements with a school district that include detailed provisions for qualified interpretation and translation services. With the signing of these Agreements, TUSD reinforces its long-term commitment to providing excellent services for students and families with limited English."

About The National LEP Advocacy Task Force.

The National LEP Advocacy Task Force is a group of over 300 stakeholders who actively support the laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of national origin because of language and cultural differences. The National LEP Advocacy Task Force's mission is to encourage recipients of federal funds, public accommodations providing essential services, and employers to comply with the legal obligations to bridge language and cultural differences.