

From: [Anne lamborn](#)
To: [Holly Young](#)
Subject: Unable to advocate for their children, Indigenous parents from Mexico call for more interpretation – EdSource
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[EXTERNAL SENDER]

From: Anne Lamborn

An Attachment

Unable to advocate for their children, Indigenous parents from Mexico call for more interpretation – EdSource

The article in this link is about non-Spanish, non-English- speaking Indigenous Mexican children in the Salinas valley who are bullied in their school. Their non-Spanish-speaking and non-English-speaking parents cannot help them in school through contacting the school administration.

These issues relate to the youth commissioners and their desire for more cultural education.

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Unable to advocate for their children, Indigenous parents from Mexico call for more interpretation



ZAIDEE STAVELY

March 2, 2026



REPUBLISH



Triqui and Mixteco-speaking parents attend a school board meeting in Greenfield with signs reading "Don't call me Oaxaquita," a derogatory term, and "Respect children and parents."

When a mother in the small city of Greenfield in the Salinas Valley received a call that her middle school daughter had been in a fight, she had a lot of questions.

But she couldn't get answers, because no one at the school could speak Triqui, an Indigenous language from southern Mexico spoken by between 5,000 and 10,000 people in the United States.

"I wanted to know why it happened and what was the solution. But I couldn't express myself in Spanish, so I wasn't able to understand or ask what happened," Ramirez said through an interpreter. She spoke on the condition that her first name not be used, fearing retaliation from the school district.

Thousands of students in California schools speak Indigenous languages from Mexico and Central America, although the exact number is unclear because not all languages are reported or tracked. Families often face communication barriers because of schools' failure to provide interpreters and a lack of understanding about Indigenous cultures.

Bullying is also commonplace, said Rafael Vasquez, co-author of the book "Culturally Responsive Schooling for Indigenous Mexican Students."

"Mexico has 68 Indigenous languages," said Vasquez, who is from a Zapotec-speaking family. "For the schools to not even know that we speak different languages, that creates a sense of frustration."

Ramirez suspected that the fight her daughter was involved in was related to ongoing bullying because of her Indigenous clothing, language and braids. After a group of kids threw eggs at the family's front door, Ramirez said she wanted to ask school staff to address the bullying, but was unable to communicate with anyone.

The superintendent and school board members of the Greenfield Union Elementary School District did not respond to multiple requests for comment regarding allegations that they failed to provide interpretation services and to count home languages correctly.

Indigenous languages undercounted

An undercount of students who speak Indigenous languages from Mexico may be contributing to the lack of interpretation.

Federal law requires schools to communicate with parents in a language they can understand, according to a [fact sheet](#) from the U.S. Department of Justice and the

Department of Education. The Office for Civil Rights has investigated schools that do not provide interpretation for violating Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin.

But some schools face challenges with finding interpreters, and California law requires schools to provide written translation of all messages and documents when a language is spoken by at least 15% of students. More than a quarter of current and former English learners speak languages that don't meet the threshold, according to the Public Policy Institute of California.

According to the California Department of Education, 7,681 students statewide spoke Mixteco at home in the 2024-25 school year, 1,600 spoke Mayan languages, 374 spoke Zapotec, 50 spoke "Central American Indian languages" and 25 spoke Nahuatl.

In some districts, the percentages are higher. In the Santa Maria-Bonita Unified School District, in Santa Barbara County, more than 15% of students spoke Mixteco at home in 2024-25. In the Oxnard School District, 3.7% spoke Mixteco. In Oakland Unified, 2.3% of students spoke Mayan languages in 2024-25, up from 1.4% in 2023-24 and .4% in 2022-23.

But most experts agree that there is a severe undercount of students who speak Indigenous languages from Mexico and Central America. The California Department of Education (CDE) does not track all languages. A spokesperson said the department uses the ISO Standard list of language codes. If a language does not appear on the list, it is added to the "Uncoded languages." category.

It is unclear how many students speak Triqui in Greenfield, because it is not on this list. According to CDE data, 67% of students in Greenfield Union Elementary School District speak Spanish at home, 1.7% speak Mixteco and 5.8% speak "Uncoded languages."

In addition, the data are based on home-language surveys that parents are required to complete when their children first enter school, which may be inaccurate. Vasquez said some parents, afraid of discrimination, are reluctant to say that their children speak an Indigenous language.

WELCOMING INDIGENOUS STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

- Call on parents to help: A group of parents in Oxnard translated children’s books and designed lessons about Indigenous stories, poems and heroes.
- Start clubs for Indigenous students
- Visit families’ communities of origin during school breaks
- Hire school staff who speak the language

Suggestions from Rafael Vasquez, co-author of the book “Culturally-Responsive Schooling for Indigenous Mexican Students”

Advocates from the nonprofit Centro Binacional para el Desarrollo Indígena Oaxaqueno said in some cases, Greenfield Union Elementary School District personnel filled out surveys for parents and wrote Spanish rather than Triqui. One mother said that school staff told her that she could only put English or Spanish on the form.

A lack of translation can have severe consequences. Vasquez said some students in other districts told him that they were referred to mental health services or special education because they were from Mexico, but did not respond when spoken to in Spanish.

Having bilingual school staff can make a big difference, Vasquez said. In addition to an interpreter on staff, Oakland Unified has a “community navigator” who speaks the Mayan language Mam and helps connect families to resources such as housing and immigration services.

“She’s a totally essential part of our operation,” said Nate Dunstan, Oakland Unified’s refugee and newcomer program manager. “There’s so much fear and misinformation that trust is more important than ever now.”

Unable to advocate

Ramirez and other parents who speak Triqui and Mixteco attended school board meetings for months last school year, calling for an in-person interpreter at all times,

sensitivity training for staff about Indigenous cultures to prevent bullying and after-school enrichment to teach children about Indigenous cultures and languages.

Several Greenfield parents told EdSource that without interpretation services available at all times, they could not advocate for their children at crucial moments. One mother said she did not understand when the school suspended her child, and was berated when she sent her child to school. Another said her children were told by teachers not to speak Mixteco at school.

But last school year, the district began piloting an Indigenous language interpretation app, [Nurbli](#), developed by a local startup. The company boasts on its website that it increased parent participation in Greenfield by 200%.

Parents reported that communication improved this school year, with interpreters available more often at school events. Still, parents said interpreters are not always available when they are needed for one-on-one communication.

“We want the school to support us so that the children know the value that the Triqui language and culture has,” Ramirez said.

Vasquez said that when teachers learn about Indigenous cultures and languages, it helps children feel welcome and learn.

“Sometimes you see, like, the Aztec pyramids in the history books, but you know, we’re still here,” he said. “We’re Indigenous; that doesn’t mean from the past.”

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