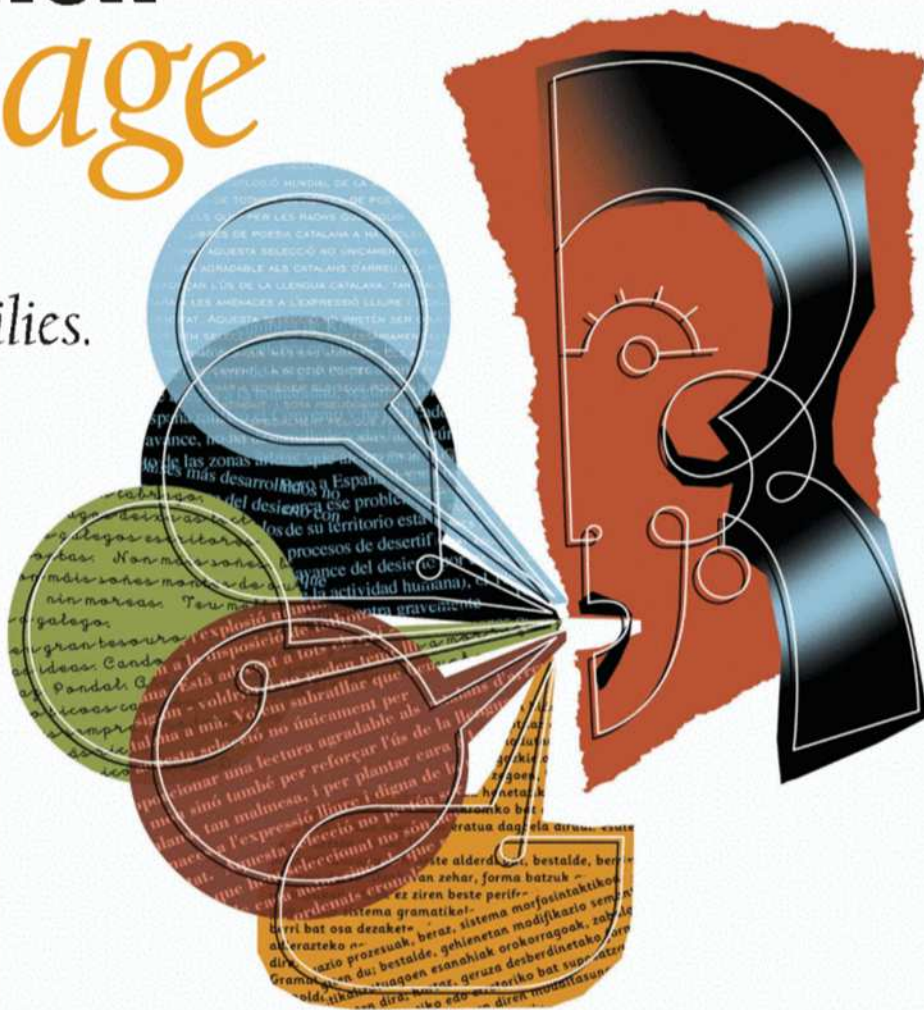


Speak Their Language

How to break down barriers for ELL families.



Whittier Union

High School District

What they have: An automated messaging service that translates messages into different languages

What it does: Improves communication between faculty and parents whose native language is not English



<http://www.wuhd.k12.ca.us>
<http://www.teleparent.net>

Research shows that an involved parent makes for a better student. But language barriers can stunt a relationship between English-language learners (ELLs), their parents, and educators before it even gets started.

About 40 percent of the 14,000 students at Whittier Union High School District, in suburban Los Angeles, attend as ELLs, so communication with parents in another language is paramount. Carlye Marousek Olsen, EdD, director of accountability, staff development, and educational technology for the district, says a recent

parent survey confirmed that parents would like more contact with the school staff.

In response, the district decided to install TeleParent, an automatic phone service that translates school messages into a second language and sends individual messages using each child's name. Now, teachers can hop onto the web and go into a drop-down roster of messages that can be sent out to the homes of students in any of their courses. For instance, a teacher might select a message that tells all parents about a test the following day. Or, he could send a specific message

to one child's parents, praising work or noting absences or behavior issues.

Teachers get the stats on how many of the calls went through and to which numbers, so they can place a personal call if they feel the messages aren't getting through to mom and dad. Marousek Olsen thinks the service has been a hit, and, she says, it's had an unexpected benefit. "Teachers say the recorded messages are leading to much more personal contact with parents," she notes. "They're becoming stronger partners in the educational process."

—Pamela Wheaton Shorr

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