Ballot Language Expansion Project

Exploring Offering Seven Additional Ballot Languages

The Office of Elections provides pre-printed and ExpressVote (ADA compliant) ballots in three languages beyond English:

- Spanish
- Vietnamese
- Korean (not a covered language)

In response to a request from the Fairfax County Electoral Board, this project evaluates the feasibility of adding up to **7 additional languages** to the ExpressVote voting system.

Languages spoken in Fairfax County – Data Sources

1. **Fairfax County Public Schools (language prevalence data)**
   - Data shows the number of students rather than families
   - Data includes both citizens and non-citizens
   - https://tinyurl.com/2kb4xxad
2. **2021 U.S. Census & American Community Survey - Community Profiles**
   - The most recent ACS report was issued December 2021
   - The next ACS report is due in December of this year
   - State (§ 24.2-128) and federal laws determine covered minority languages using voting-age citizens data drawn from the ACS
3. **2024 U.S. Census Data 2024 American Community Survey**
   - 5-year estimates -- public use microdata sample
   - Data includes citizens and non-citizens
   - Housing unit weight
   - https://data.census.gov/app/mdat/ACSPUMS1Y2024

Languages Spoken in Fairfax County - Express Vote Support (School Ranking)

	2026 Elementary School rank	2021 ACS Voting Age Rank	2024 ACS Rank		*2026 Elementary Students - spoken at home	***2021 ACS Voting Age Citizens	**2024 ACS Data No one in home speaks English well	ExpressVote Audio/Text	ExpressVote Text Only
1	1	1	1	Spanish	20,263	18,310	26,225	✓	
2	2		5	Arabic	2,397		1,794		✓
3	4	3	2	Korean	1,606	9,934	7,802	✓	
4	5		17	Mandarin	1,340		565	✓	
5	6	2	3	Vietnamese	1,246	10,700	6,374		✓
6	7	6	10	Urdu	1,196	1,892	775		✓
7	9			Farsi	792		1,417		✓
8	11		19	Telugu	676		342		✓
9	12	12	6	Nepali	638	338	1,253		✓
10	13		12	Russian	561		518	✓	
11	14	11	9	Bengali	480	556	1,140	✓	
12	15		11	Hindi	476		687	✓	
13		4	4	Chinese		6,305	4,423	✓	
14		5		Asian Indian		3,352			
15		7		Filipino		1,471			✓
16		8	14	Other Asia languages		1,229	559		
17		9		Thai	109	842	2,243		✓
18		10		Cambodian		687			✓
19		13		Japanese		305	367		✓
21			8	Laotian		355			✓
22				Mongolian			470		✓
23	3		4	Amharic	1,608		2,289		
24	8		7	Dari	1,028		438		
25	10		15	Pashtu	759		340		
26			16	Turkish			608		

* Data based on information collected through the Home Language Survey which is included in the FCPS enrollment forms.

**Individuals: no one aged 14 and over in the household speaks English only or speaks English 'very well'

Source: US Census Bureau Data 2024 ACS 5-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample. Housing Unit Weight

***Total citizen voting age population who do not "speak or understand English adequately enough to participate in the electoral process".

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EV Machine Solution - Operational Considerations

Ballot Creation

1. Hundreds of commands must be translated in audio and text and installed that direct the voter through the voting process. This is a one-time set-up, until software is updated.
2. The time between a ballot, including EV ballots, being approved by ELECT and the deployment of voting equipment to early voting locations may only be 7-10 days.
3. ExpressVote/Electionware text and audio
    - Must be programmed individually
    - AI software is used to synthesize the audio for languages not supported by ExpressVote/Electionware. (Now in use for Vietnamese).
    - The time involved is dependent on the number of contests and particularly on the number of referenda on the ballot.
    - Audio and text translations must be checked by professional translators
        - Code of VA. § 24.2-128 (effective July 1): *Materials that are translated solely by an automated translation service are presumed to be insufficient to completely convey intent and essential meaning*
        - General accuracy
        - Sometimes the AI language morphs into another dialect
        - AI translations can produce artifacts/hallucinations
4. The time to create and check EV text and audio for each non-English ballot is a minimum two days.

Logic and Accuracy (L&A) Testing

1. ExpressVote (EV) cards are manually marked (candidates/responses selected on the screen as a voter would) and printed for each language to create the test deck.
    - A complete set of EV cards for each language is incorporated into the L&A process
    - Testing non-English languages on the EV ensures that all on-screen text and audio cues are present for every screen combination that may appear during the voting process.
2. The total number of additional EV cards required will increase the time needed to create then process (vote) the test deck.
3. **Based on the November 2025 L&A process, programming and testing 10 EV languages in a comparable election would extend the L&A timeframe for EVs from 4 to 10 days.**
    - This may exceed the days available to complete an L&A prior to early voting
    - A modification/reduction of L&A processes would be required to meet the required deadlines

Proposed Solution

1. Create sample hard-copy ballots in each selected language
   - Ballots reviewed by professional translators
2. Assemble in spiral bound booklets, two per precinct and early voting locations
   - Booklets contain a ballot in each selected language
3. Voters may review and even take booklet to voting booth and return upon exit
4. Signs at polling places indicating available ballot languages

Languages Spoken in Fairfax County - (School Ranking for sample ballots)

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Virginia Code Requirements

Effective July 1, 2026, Virginia Code § 24.2-128 (Minority language accessibility) will lower the threshold for minority languages from the current levels and from those required by federal law, based on the American Community Survey data in 5-year increments.

- Current Virginia and federal laws designate a covered locality when, in the locality, (a) more than five percent of the voting age population or (b) more than 10,000 of the voting age population are members of a single language minority and are unable to speak or understand English adequately enough to participate in the electoral process.
- Legislation reduces those thresholds from five to three percent and from 10,000 to 5,000 beginning July 1.
- ELECT is in touch with the U.S. Census Bureau to determine impending language requirements.