

AN OVERVIEW OF K-12 EDUCATIONAL INTERPRETING

Qualified educational interpreters are a critical part of the educational day for children who are deaf or hard of hearing. This paper addresses the legal requirements, roles and duties of the educational interpreter, including qualifications, and guidelines for districts when hiring an educational interpreter.

In 1975, Public Law 94-142 established the Education for all Handicapped Children Act followed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). As a result, the continuum of educational placement options expanded and requirements were established for an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) team to determine the educational needs of the child, and for the school to provide a free, appropriate public education (FAPE). Because many students attend school in general education classrooms, the need for qualified educational interpreters is critical to the students' opportunity to be fully participating members. Educational interpreters are identified as related service providers and are valued participants of the IEP team.

For students who do not require specialized instruction, but do require access to education through the use of an educational interpreter, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act is the law that ensures this service is provided. Section 504 of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) are the legal resources supporting interpreter service for school-related, non-academic programs such as summer programs, optional class trips and other activities.

Qualifications

K-12 educational interpreters, whose job it is to help make education accessible for deaf or hard-of-hearing students, are part of a complex system. Simply knowing American Sign Language (ASL) or other forms of sign language does not qualify an individual to be an interpreter. If interpreters are not highly qualified, they cannot provide students with access to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE). Professional sign language interpreters develop their specialization through extensive education, training and practice over a long period of time. There are various certifications that interpreters may obtain in these specialty areas.

Educational interpreting is a specialty requiring additional knowledge and skills beyond what interpreters for adults typically have. In the classroom, the instructional content varies significantly according to grade level. In the primary grades, the interpreter needs a broad basic knowledge of the subject areas such as mathematics, social studies and language arts, and should have an understanding of child development. At the secondary level, the interpreter needs sufficient knowledge and understanding of the content areas to be able to interpret highly technical concepts and terminology accurately, as well as, be prepared to support the educational team in educational transitioning. When hiring or assigning an interpreter to a student, the individual skills and knowledge of an interpreter should be considered in order to meet the unique needs of the student.

Throughout their careers, interpreters advance their knowledge, skills and professionalism through continuing education and training, as well as, through participation in the profession's national organization, the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). Appropriate credentials are an essential indicator of competence. RID, along with an increasing number of states, recognizes the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) as a certification necessary for all interpreters working in the educational setting. Although the required score on the EIPA for state standards may vary, RID recognizes interpreters as certified members who successfully pass the EIPA at a 4.0 or above (Ed:K12 certification). Both the RID exams and the

EIPA tests are standardized, psychometrically sound and evaluate measurable knowledge and skill sets, including judgment on issues of ethics, culture and professionalism. Educational interpreters should be certified using RID exams or the EIPA.

RID currently requires members to have a two year degree to sit for an RID certification test. Effective June 30, 2012, a four year degree will be required.

In addition to recommended credentialing, educational interpreter should also be able to demonstrate:

- Fluency in written and spoken English
- Fluency in various forms of communication including ASL or the sign mode determined by the educational team
- Ability to both produce accessible language and understand child and adolescent signers
- An understanding of the stages of child development particularly as these relate to language development
- Knowledge specific to language development of deaf and hard of hearing children
- Knowledge of grade specific academic content
- Ability to communicate and adapt, as a member of the educational team, on matters regarding interpreting and communication

The Role of the Educational Interpreter

The fundamental role of an interpreter, regardless of specialty or place of employment, is to effectively and impartially facilitate communication between persons who are deaf or hard of hearing and hearing persons; including, but not limited to administrators, staff, teachers, service providers, parents and peers within the educational environment.

The educational environment not only includes settings within the classroom but also:

- Speech therapy and other related services
- Field trips
- Club meetings
- Athletic practices and competitions
- Extracurricular activities

Along with the educational team, educational interpreters will help create and maintain an inclusive environment. To achieve this goal, interpreters will:

- Interpret or transliterate in a mode that reflects the student's language use
- Position themselves appropriately to assure visual access to educational content
- Work with the classroom teacher to adapt classroom/school activities to promote participation of deaf or hard of hearing individuals
- Model social strategies to encourage interaction between individuals who use sign language and those who do not
- Ensure incidental information is interpreted
- Provide plans for a substitute interpreter, as needed

Professional Codes of Conduct

Interpreters, like many other professionals, adhere to a professional code of conduct. Additionally, K-12 interpreters are to comply with the professional practices outlined by individual school districts.

The EIPA Code of Professional Guidelines is another recommended resource for the K-12 setting. In addition, K-12 interpreters should read and be familiar with the National Association of the Deaf (NAD)-RID Code of Professional Conduct. Fundamental professional practices for the K-12 interpreter are:

- Maintain confidentiality – information is only shared within the educational team
- Maintain professional boundaries, respect privacy of students and foster independent student learning
- Provide an interpretation that meets the linguistic needs of the student
- Conduct oneself appropriate to the academic setting
- Demonstrate respect for students and colleagues
- Engage in professional development activities
- Follow the student's IEP or Section 504 Plan
- Prepare for classroom academic content, including previewing text books, teacher's lesson plans or electronic presentation slides
- Research technical educational vocabulary, as necessary
- Preview educational films, as necessary
- Provide information to teachers on how to access and utilize captioned media

Non-Interpreting Duties

As a related service provider, educational interpreters share their professional expertise while supporting the educational needs of deaf or hard of hearing students. When not interpreting or preparing for interpreting, other duties may be part of the educational interpreter's assignment, such as:

- Presenting in-service training about deafness and/or interpreting
- Working with teachers/staff toward the goal of increasing interaction between deaf or hard of hearing students and their peers
- Providing academic support, such as tutoring the deaf or hard of hearing student, as outlined in the IEP and under the guidance of a certified teacher
- Providing sign instruction to classmates of the student who is deaf or hard of hearing
- Providing information or referral regarding Deaf community resources

Time for non-interpreting duties will vary from one work setting to another and may be influenced by a number of factors including:

- The number of students who are deaf or hard of hearing in the school or district and distribution across grade levels and school buildings
- The possibility of physical injury due to stress or overuse
- The nature of the employment (full-time or part-time)
- The interpreter's education, experience, knowledge, skill and personal attributes
- The qualifications and availability of the interpreting staff
- The amount of interpreter preparation time needed due to academic content

Supervision

It is the responsibility of the school or district administration to evaluate, supervise and support all staff. The complexities of the role and responsibilities of the educational interpreter on staff are not always understood by the administrative team or the general education staff. When possible, it is beneficial for the supervisor to have knowledge of the role and specialized interpreting skills needed, along with general language development patterns for children of all ages who are deaf or hard of hearing. If the supervisor does not know how to assess interpreting skills, an outside expert may be consulted. Following are some general professional skills that can be assessed and supported by the administration:

- Effectiveness as a team member including interpersonal communication skills
- Professionalism including being prepared for class and providing academic support (tutoring) in keeping with the goals of the teacher
- Attire that complies with school policy and is appropriate for the visual communication needs of the student
- Respect for all students including maintaining confidentiality of information about all students and staff
- Ability to advocate for the needs of the student and the interpreter in all school settings
- Consistent attendance and dependability
- Participation in ongoing professional development that enhances interpreting skills and increases academic knowledge

Ideally, interpreters within a school or district are given time to meet on a regular basis for professional growth and peer support. When possible, a lead interpreter or someone with the skills to assess interpreting competency as it relates to communication with children in the academic setting, is available to provide ongoing support. Mentors, possibly from the at-large community of interpreters, may also be valuable players in supporting the professional growth needed to increase the effectiveness of the interpreter's work with the student. If these resources are not available within your district or community, appropriate in-service and skill training is often available in most states and via distance classes.

Additional Resources

Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf Web site: www.rid.org (then use the search feature by entering the key words: *educational interpreter*)

A toolkit to support educational interpreters can also be accessed through the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf Web site at: <http://www.rid.org/content/index.cfm/AID/131>

More information on the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment and the EIPA Code of Professional Guidelines can be found at: <http://www.classroominterpreting.com>