

A Guide for ADMINISTRATORS

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This guide provides information for administrators about overseeing an interpreted educational setting.



The classroom is a complex communication environment with a variety of speakers. For a student who is deaf or hard of hearing, a typical classroom environment can be quite challenging. He or she may need a sign language interpreter in order to access classroom communication and peer interaction.

A Student's Need for an Educational Interpreter

Students who are deaf or hard of hearing may need a sign language interpreter in order to access classroom communication and peer interaction. You cannot determine the need for an interpreter by looking at an audiogram, which shows only the student's level of hearing.

The U.S. Department of Education's document on policy guidance directs the educational team to consider social, emotional, and cultural needs as well as linguistic and academic needs when considering whether a student needs an educational interpreter. The student who is deaf or hard of hearing must be able to access all aspects of the classroom curriculum, not just the teacher's lecture. This includes peer interaction, which is important for learning and social development.

Even students who can communicate easily using speech may need an interpreter. Often stu-

dents who are hard of hearing can interact independently in quiet environments with a few speakers. However, it may be more difficult for them to interact in classroom settings with multiple speakers and during lessons containing new concepts and vocabulary. Students who are hard of hearing may understand some teachers without an interpreter, but it may be more difficult to understand other teachers due to their speech, language, and/or teaching styles. The need for an educational interpreter should be determined by the student's ability to access classroom communication, not by his or her ability to speak.

Some students who are deaf or hard of hearing may have language and vocabulary skills that are delayed compared to their peers who are hearing. Although an educational interpreter can help support language and learning goals, the interpreter is not a skilled teacher or a teacher of the deaf and should only work on students' skills under the direct supervision of a qualified professional.



Legal Rights Related to Educational Interpreters

The legal right to an educational interpreter is well established by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. IDEA recognizes the educational interpreter as a “related service provider.” Typically, the right to an educational interpreter is specified on the student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan. For many students who are deaf or hard of hearing, an interpreter is essential to providing a free and appropriate public education.

All educational interpreters should be highly qualified. To ensure that educational interpreters are competent, the majority of states require interpreters to meet minimum performance standards, typically set by the state’s department of education, in order to work in the K-12 setting. Currently, 76 percent of states have some type of minimum requirement. However, research shows that many working educational interpreters do not have skills that are sufficient to convey classroom content.

In addition to being highly qualified, the educational interpreter must be able to adapt to the language needs of the student receiving interpreting services. There are various forms of sign language, and the student’s specific language needs must be considered. The educational interpreter needs to be able to assist in determining those language needs in collaboration with the educational team.

Qualifications of Educational Interpreters

Interpreters require a great deal of training in order to meet minimum standards. Educational interpreters should have a formal assessment of their interpreting skills using a nationally recognized assessment, such as those offered by the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) or the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). Additional requirements include a formal assessment of content knowledge related to educational interpreting (i.e., a passing score on the EIPA Written Test) and the ability to perform as a professional member of the educational team. Interpreting requires strong English skills, especially vocabulary skills.

Essential qualifications include:

- an associate’s degree in educational interpreting or interpreting (a bachelor’s degree in a related area is preferred);
- a passing score on a formal assessment of an interpreter’s interpreting skills using a nationally recognized assessment, such as those offered by the EIPA or the RID;
- a passing score on a state or national assessment of knowledge related to interpreting in educational settings; and
- continued professional development.

Research shows that interpreters who fall below minimum standards omit and distort a significant amount of teacher and peer communication. When an interpreter is not highly qualified, a student who is deaf or hard of hearing misses vital classroom communication and does not receive adequate access to the general education curriculum. Highly qualified interpreters require years of training, and their pay scale should reflect their level of education and expertise.

Hiring an Educational Interpreter

The school’s interview committee should include individuals who are highly qualified educational interpreters. If your school district does not have a highly qualified individual, your state’s department of education or the state school for the deaf may be able to recommend someone. Potential applicants should have evidence of their qualifications, such as state licensure. If the interpreter has not taken a national test of interpreting skills, school districts can use the EIPA Pre-Hire Screening to determine if the interpreter has sufficient skills to be able to meet state standards (see www.classroominterpreting.org/EIPA/index.asp).

The Educational Team and the Interpreter

The educational interpreter has an important role in implementing the student’s IEP. As a related service provider, the educational interpreter should understand the IEP goals for the student and the curricular goals for specific classes. The educational interpreter should participate in all IEP meetings. He or she should work with all other members of the team, including the deaf

educator, the speech-language pathologist, and the student's parents, to help provide the student with access.

When an educational interpreter is participating in a team meeting about a student, he or she cannot also interpret the meeting. The educational interpreter who is participating should focus on his or her educational interpreting role, and a second interpreter should be provided to interpret the meeting.

Supervision of Interpreters

Ideally, a supervisor is a highly qualified interpreter who is very knowledgeable about the K-12 environment. Many larger school districts have established lead interpreter positions, and smaller districts contract with an individual qualified to provide oversight. In some school districts, another member of the educational team who is highly knowledgeable about interpreting, such as the deaf educator or the speech-language pathologist, oversees the educational interpreter. The supervisor should be a fluent communicator in sign language; however, that is not the only skill the individual needs.

Since evaluating interpreting skills is not a simple task, it is best to rely on external confirmation obtained from national test results regardless of the interpreter's level of training.

Interpreting for long periods of time is cognitively and physically demanding. The supervisor should ensure that the educational interpreter has sufficient preparation time and breaks from interpreting. In addition, the supervisor should ensure that a student does not have a specific educational interpreter for multiple years of his or her education. It is better to rotate interpreters.

Legal Interpreting Considerations

There are occasions when law enforcement or interactions of a legal nature will occur in educational settings. All members of the educational team should be aware that whenever a situation arises that is of a legal nature, interpreters with specialized legal interpreting training must be hired to provide interpreting. Many states have rules and regulations requiring the use of a certified legal interpreter. The majority of educational interpreters do not have specialized legal training.



Students' Rights Regarding Educational Interpreters

Students who are deaf or hard of hearing have the right to:

- communicate in their own language and have the interpreter communicate in their language;
- utilize educational interpreters who are highly qualified;
- utilize educational interpreters in the classroom, during school meetings and assemblies, and during after-school groups, sports activities, and events;
- be treated with respect and encouraged to become independent like their classmates who can hear;
- opportunities to learn how to work with and schedule interpreters;
- opportunities to learn how to use Internet interpreters;
- be included in discussions concerning interpreting and their interpreters, such as in their Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings or teacher meetings (if they are 14 years old or older); and
- have their family know about their interpreters and how the accommodation is working.

Such situations include:

- law enforcement interactions with a student or the parents and/or a potential victim, witness, or possible suspect;
- any circumstance in which a statement is being taken for use in future legal proceedings;
- juvenile delinquency matters; and
- any court proceedings.

Interpreting Social and Extracurricular Events

School is more than a place to learn academics. Participation in social events and extracurricular activities is necessary in order for students to develop social skills.

It is the responsibility of the educational system to provide students who are deaf or hard of hearing with the opportunity to participate in all aspects of school life, not just in academics.

Often students who are deaf or hard of hearing have social needs that may be difficult to meet. An educational interpreter's support will promote effective social interactions between the student and his or her peers who are hearing.

Use of CART Services and Relay Interpreters via the Internet

CART, or Communication Access Realtime Translation, is the instant translation of the spoken word into English text using a stenotype machine, notebook computer, and realtime software. A person who is hearing listens and transcribes

classroom communication. In general, CART is not recommended for most students who are deaf or hard of hearing. It requires a student to read all classroom instruction and interaction, which is equivalent to reading a textbook all day long. Any student would be challenged to learn in that manner. Also, students who are deaf or hard of hearing vary in their reading skills, and some may not be able to comprehend classroom lectures through reading. Finally, CART does not allow a student who is deaf or hard of hearing to talk and participate in the classroom or interact with peers, an essential part of learning. It can be extremely isolating to be in a classroom with only CART. However, for a student who is deaf or hard of hearing who has age-appropriate language and reading skills, CART may be a good option for advanced classes with complex technical vocabulary.

There are interpreting services that are available through the Internet. These services are best for one-to-one communication, not for interpreting classroom instruction. They are not acceptable for supporting and encouraging peer interaction during the school day but may be an excellent means of communication for students to talk with peers who are hearing after school.

You can find more information about classroom interpreting at www.classroominterpreting.org. For more information and resources about the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing, visit www.clerccenter.gallaudet.edu. You will also find all the guides in our Classroom Interpreting series on our website.

About the Author: Brenda Schick, PhD, a professor at the University of Colorado-Boulder, studies the development of spoken and sign language and its relationship to cognition in children who are deaf or hard of hearing. She has had three National Institutes of Health grants investigating language and/or cognitive development in children who are deaf or hard of hearing, including Theory of Mind. Each grant required data collection across the nation and the development of language assessment tools for American Sign Language (ASL). Schick is currently a member of a research center that focuses on literacy and young deaf and hard of hearing children. She has also served as the school board president for an ASL/English school for children who are deaf or hard of hearing and is a former teacher of the deaf. She developed a videotaped curriculum for hearing parents learning sign language and translated a series of classic children's storybooks into sign language. Schick grew up in a culturally deaf family, is fluent in ASL, and is a former certified interpreter of the deaf.

This guide was developed in collaboration with staff in the Center for Childhood Deafness at Boys Town National Research Hospital.



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