

A Guide for INTERPRETERS

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www.classroominterpreting.org.



Educational interpreters' jobs are different than those of community interpreters. Schools do not just teach the content curriculum; they also foster growth in language and social-emotional development.

An educational interpreter works in complex educational environments requiring a high level of educational skills. The educational interpreter also works with children and youth at varying stages of development. Schools are accountable for student achievement and, as a member of the educational team, so are educational interpreters.

This publication is not intended to replace coursework and experience in learning how to interpret for young children. Educational interpreting requires a high level of skills and knowledge. When an educational interpreter is not qualified, the student who is deaf or hard of hearing does not have access to the education that a student who is hearing receives. Educational interpreters are obligated to obtain and maintain the skills and knowledge necessary to ensure educational access.

Recommended Minimum Requirements for Educational Interpreters

Educational interpreting requires expertise in English and sign language. It also requires training in child development, educational systems, and curriculum. The vast majority of states have skill standards that specify minimum standards required in order to work in a school setting as an educational interpreter. Most of these standards are established by state departments of education for all school districts in the state. Educational interpreters should check with state officials regarding the standards in their state.

An Educational Interpreter is a Related Service Provider

Educational interpreting is a "related service" in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which means it is a support required to assist a student with a disability in accessing education. Under federal law, the educational inter-



Essential Qualifications

Essential qualifications for an educational interpreter 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 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);
- a passing score on a state or national assessment of knowledge related to interpreting in educational settings; and
- continued professional development.

preter is a member of the educational team that develops and implements the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) and is legally responsible for supporting the IEP goals. As with all members of the educational team, the educational interpreter is responsible for ensuring that the learning and communication needs of the student who is deaf or hard of hearing are met. He or she should attend IEP meetings as a member of the team, not to interpret the meeting.

Fostering Language, Cognitive, and Social Development

In order to foster language and cognitive development, educational interpreters need to know about the development of these skills in children. The educational interpreter needs to work with the educational team to determine the type of sign language a student needs and the adjustments that may be necessary for those students who need more scaffolding in their language skills, and then any modifications should be discussed with the educational team. Some students who are deaf or hard of hearing have delays in language and vocabulary compared with many of their peers who are hearing. They often need additional support.

When an educational interpreter has less than fluent language skills, sign vocabulary, and fingerspelling skills, this means the student may receive a degraded and incomplete version of classroom communication which affects educational achievement. Research shows that many interpreters have skills that are lacking and may

interfere with a student's ability to learn new language, concepts, and vocabulary.

The educational interpreter should be honest with the classroom team when interpreting challenges may have interfered with the student receiving the entire communication.

Vocabulary learning is essential to learning academic concepts. Educational interpreters should have both a strong English and sign language vocabulary. It is not good practice to invent signs to avoid fingerspelling words that do not have a sign. Fingerspelling is essential to learning academic vocabulary, and educational interpreters should fingerspell new vocabulary throughout the lesson when there is no appropriate sign. It is also not good practice to use more general signs for technical terms. There are good Internet resources for learning signs for more technical terms, and joining an on-line community of educational interpreters can be a very useful resource. The National Technical Institute for the Deaf has on-line resources for technical vocabulary related to science and math (www.rit.edu/ntid/sciencesigns/), and RID has useful information as well (www.rid.org).

Not all students—deaf, hard of hearing, or hearing—may realize that they don't understand what someone is saying. It is a skill that develops throughout adolescence. Educational interpreters cannot expect a young student to inform them if something doesn't make sense. They need to look for the subtle signs of understanding and lack of understanding, which should be discussed with the student's educational team.

What Does an Educational Interpreter Do?

An educational interpreter:

- works to implement the student's IEP as an active member of the educational team. The educational interpreter can share information with the educational team, including the regular education teacher, relevant to the student's educational experiences. He or she should follow the same guidelines for confidentiality used by the other team members. For example, if a school requires all faculty and staff to report bullying, the educational interpreter is required to follow those rules. A full version of the *EIPA Guidelines for Professional Conduct* for educational interpreters can be found at www.classroominterpreting.org.
- uses the modality and language as determined by the educational team. The educational interpreter may provide the educational team with observations that may assist the team in knowing which modality and language are the best fit for the student. Communication plans often evolve as the student gains proficiency in sign language or in spoken language. The educational interpreter should be proficient in the language that is used by the student.
- interprets at the appropriate language level, which may mean modifying the teacher's language to better scaffold the student's learning. Any modifications should be discussed with the educational team, including the regular education classroom teacher.
- makes sure the goals of the lesson are clear. The educational interpreter needs to understand the teacher's goals for the lesson in order to interpret the information accurately.
- clarifies information for the student and may also tutor when appropriate if he or she is trained as a tutor.
- teaches the student how to use an interpreter.



Social development fosters many aspects of cognitive development. Interacting with teachers and peers is an essential component of learning and is across the domains of academic knowledge, friendship, interaction, self-concept, and self-esteem. Educational interpreters may need to teach not only the student who is deaf or hard of hearing but also the student's peers who are hearing how to interact using an interpreter. Adults who are deaf or hard of hearing can serve as an excellent resource for students to learn how to communicate with peers and teachers who are hearing using an interpreter.

Teaching students who are deaf or hard of hearing about accessible technology can foster social interaction that is more independent.

Preparing Effective Interpretation

Like effective teaching, effective interpretation requires preparation time. Educational interpreters who have access to the teacher's materials and lesson plans are able to predict and produce a better interpretation. It is more effective to interpret topics when the interpreter is prepared and familiar with the content and activities (e.g., some schools allow interpreters to specialize in math or social studies to support them in being more effective). Also, educational interpreters should have a copy of the student's textbook, and they need a place to store their resources and to access the Internet.

Additionally, educational interpreters need time to learn new technical vocabulary. Unlike

English, there is no dictionary of all the signs in American Sign Language, and educational interpreters may need to access several resources to prepare.

Finally, educational interpreters should know the teacher's style of instruction and communication and be able to give feedback to the teacher on aspects that support or detract from effective interpretation.

Professional Conduct Guidelines

All students are supported in their academic and social learning by classroom teachers and other educational staff. The essential principle is the same as for all educational professionals: maximize educational benefits for the student who is deaf or hard of hearing. As a related service provider and a member of the educational team, educational interpreters have a legal responsibility to do just that. If the student who is deaf or hard of

hearing is not learning, practices need to be adjusted by the educational team.

Working with students who are deaf or hard of hearing in a K-12 setting is different than working with adults who are deaf or hard of hearing. Many states have professional guidelines that educational interpreters are expected to follow. The *EIPA Guidelines for Professional Conduct* can be found at www.classroominterpreting.org. See also the *NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct* at www.rid.org/UserFiles/File/NAD_RID_ETHICS.pdf.

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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