



# EIPA Guidelines of Professional Conduct for Educational Interpreters

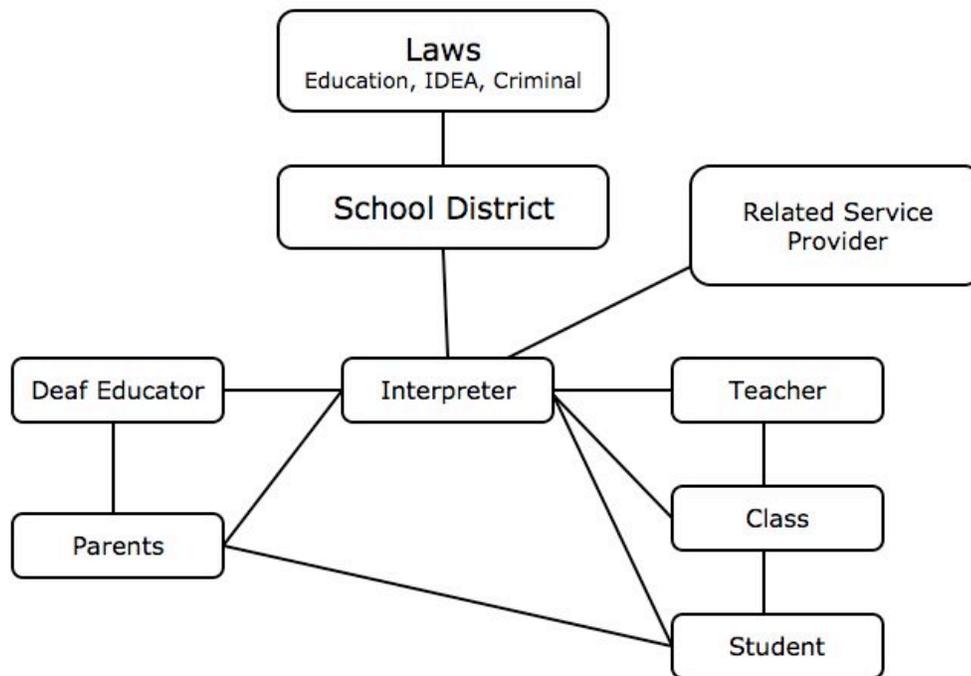
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This document describes obligations for educational interpreters employed in school settings. While the Code of Professional Conduct developed by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf ([www.rid.org](http://www.rid.org)) and the National Association of the Deaf is a very useful document for interpreters who work with adults, interpreters who work in schools are members of an educational system. Educational interpreters are working with children with developmental needs and with constraints and requirements imposed by educational practice and law. Because of this, it is appropriate to define guidelines for professional conduct for interpreters who work in educational settings. Figure 1 diagrams the relationship the educational interpreter has within the educational system, as a related service provider who is a member of the educational team. In fact, all people who work in public schools must adhere to professional standards and guidelines. In comparison, professional codes of conduct developed for adult consumers focusing on issues of

autonomy and independence. In the case of educational interpreters, many of the rules and guidelines are defined by federal and state law, or by educational practice, not by an external professional organization. The school, and ultimately in many cases, the state and federal government, defines standards of practice. The educational interpreter is obligated to follow these standards, as a member of an educational team. The consequence of violating these rules is not merely expulsion from a professional organization. The school itself has an obligation to ensure that its employees follow the laws and regulations, especially in the case of children whose education is protected under federal law, the Individuals with Disabilities Act, or IDEA '04.

For the purposes of this document, the term *interpreter* refers to both interpreters and transliterators. The following presents professional guidelines for educational interpreters.



## General Expectations

Interpreters who work in the public schools as a related service provider are members of an educational team. As an adult in a student's educational life, the interpreter cannot avoid fostering or hindering development. Because of this, adults who work with children and youth often adapt their behavior and interaction to the maturity level of the student. This is also expected of interpreters. All children, deaf and hearing, are learning to be a member of a group, what is expected of them, how to follow formal instruction, and how to interact with peers. Schools foster broad development of children and youth, not just their intellectual development. Interpreters who work in public schools are an aspect of this broad development, and because of this, they should adapt to the maturity level and expectations for students at the various developmental levels.

Unfortunately, there is little research to provide guidance about when it is appropriate to use an interpreter with a child. What little we know from testimonials and anecdotal reports is that it may require a certain cognitive sophistication to use an interpreter. For very young children, such as preschoolers, it may not be appropriate to use an interpreter but instead it may be more appropriate to have a language mentor who can communicate with the child directly. Consequently, any discussions regarding the use of an interpreter with a student should include a discussion of whether the student is developmentally ready to use an interpreter. In addition, for all children and youth, it is appropriate and necessary to help students understand and assume responsibility about how the interpreter is used. All children and youth who receive interpreting services should be taught how to use and manage their learning via an educational interpreter. In fact, learning to use an interpreter is an essential aspect of development of a student

who is deaf and hard of hearing. As children grow older, they can increasingly participate using an interpreter as well as managing their learning with an interpreter.

Students with language skills that are delayed need a skilled interpreter, contrary to educational practice in some schools. Interpreters who are not skilled are deleting and distorting aspects of language and classroom concepts essential for children to continue developing language. For students who are either delayed in language and still acquiring language, schools should consider allowing the student time with a fluent

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language role model, so that the interpreter is not the sole language model for the student.

These guidelines assume that an interpreter has met the minimum qualifications to effectively provide an interpretation of the educational program. This means that the interpreter should achieve at least a minimum level 3.5 on the EIPA, as well as having post-secondary training. A Bachelor's degree in educational interpreting or a related field is recommended. An individual with an EIPA below 2.5 should not be interpreting because the classroom content will not be even adequately communicated and the student will miss and misunderstand a large amount of the classroom information. The minimum level of 3.5 is truly a minimum level. Most professionals who are knowledgeable about interpreting for a developing child would acknowledge that interpreters must have skills above a minimum level of an EIPA 3.5. But they recognize that requiring a higher standard (e.g., 4.0 or greater) may not be realistic at this time. Therefore requiring that an interpreter demonstrate skills at an EIPA

level of 3.5 or greater is not a "Cadillac of services". It is a minimum level of competency.

Schools and school districts typically have guidelines and policies for professional behavior and conduct. First and foremost, an educational interpreter is a member of the educational team and school community. As a related service provider in a school, the educational interpreter should be familiar with policies, procedures, and ethics for professional conduct within the school setting. In these policies, there are specific guidelines for understanding confidentiality among educational team members, reporting child abuse, and exercising professional judgment. Some of these policies are dictated by state and federal law regarding all students, and are required of all individuals working in a school. Others are dictated by laws protecting the educational rights of students who are deaf and hard of hearing. Educational interpreters should request a copy of the policies and procedures handbook from their supervisor. In addition, they should discuss any situation where they are not certain how to handle an issue, or how they handled an issue in the past, with a supervisor. Any evaluation should consider the interpreter as a member of the educational community as well as their ability to interpret.

### **Legal Requirements for All Individuals Working in Public Schools**

All individuals who work in a public school must report any suspicions of child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities. Always know and follow your school policy regarding this or you may be held legally responsible. Interpreters should inform students that they must report any conversations where the student admits to unlawful activity, such as drug and alcohol abuse, bringing weapons to school, etc. Typically, this is required of all school personnel. The student should understand

that communications with the interpreter outside of class are no different than communications with teachers and other school personnel. Any communication that occurs outside of the interpreted classroom activity is not confidential.

Interpreters should always act to protect the safety of all students in the classroom, not just the student who is deaf or hard of hearing. This means that the interpreter may need to stop interpreting if intervention is needed because there is a reason to believe that someone will be injured. The interpreter can explain the situation after the danger is passed. Except for emergency situations, the interpreter should not be put in charge of the mainstream class.

### **Working with a Student Whose Education is protected under Federal IDEA, Which is any Student who has an IEP**

Following federal law (IDEA), all decisions regarding the student's educational program are made within the context of the educational team, as identified in the student's IEP. Generally, for a student who is deaf or hard of hearing, members of the educational team may include: a teacher of the deaf, a regular classroom educator, a speech pathologist, or an audiologist. In addition, parents or legal guardians are also obligatory members of the IEP team. The educational interpreter should be a member of this team and should understand the educational goals for the student.

### **The educational Interpreter is a member of the educational team**

Interpreters should participate in all IEP meetings concerning students they work with. The educational interpreter shall either interpret or participate in meetings such as staff meetings, IEP meetings, and staffings, but should not do both. Interpreters can provide valuable contributions about how the

student is functioning with an interpreter and can answer questions and address concerns related to a student's communication needs. However, educational interpreters typically have no specialized training in language or communication assessment, so they should work with other professionals who are qualified to conduct assessments. Despite this, the educational interpreter can often share useful observations. In general, as a member of the educational team, the interpreter can provide information regarding interpreting, classroom interaction, and tutoring.

Communication with the student's family should be in the context of the educational team. In general, interpreters should direct most parent questions to the appropriate professional, which may include questions regarding a student's progress in class, homework assignments, tardiness, and absenteeism.

If the educational interpreter is also functioning with a particular student as a tutor, this person may discuss the student's performance in the tutoring session. This may include tutoring strategies. (e.g., interpreters, teachers, or supervisors) who are directly responsible for the educational program of the deaf or hard of hearing students. Other

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information that may be important for the educational team to know include anything that may impact a student's performance or learning, such as tardiness, effects of medication, fights with peers, or inattentiveness in class. Some examples of questions that are appropriate for an interpreter may include:

- How does the Deaf or hard of hearing student communicate with the teacher, other school personnel and his peers?
- What are the interpreter's observations concerning the student's language and preference for communication mode?
- How well does the Deaf or hard of hearing student attend to the educational interpreter?
- What interferes with being able to interpret the classroom? Are there aspects of classroom management and interactions that mediate or moderate learning?
- What modifications to the teacher's message does the interpreter routinely make? Is the interpreter making decisions to simplify the teacher's language and concepts, and for what reasons? Is the interpreter fingerspelling as is appropriate or using general signs due to a belief that the student would not comprehend fingerspelling?

The interpreter should understand the educational goals for a student he or she works with. Even though the interpreter is not the teacher, understanding the annual goals and the daily objectives will help the interpreter do a better job. The interpreter should be prepared to assist with support and implementation of educational goals in the classroom.

The educational interpreter may be asked to use American Sign Language or a particular system of Manually Coded English. If the interpreter has concerns about his or her skills with regard to this assignment, these concerns should be discussed with the supervisor. If the educational interpreter disagrees with the decisions of the educational team in terms of the use of a particular system of sign communication (e.g., SEE II, PSE, ASL) for a student, the

interpreter should discuss this with the educational team.

An interpreter can produce a better interpretation when prepared or when knowledgeable about the topic area.

Standardized testing is a critical aspect of assessing the student's achievement. Because of this, the interpreter should have preparation time to discuss test administration with a professional knowledgeable about students who are deaf or hard of hearing and about the specific test. There are some interpreting practices that may invalidate test results or may overly assist the student. On occasion, the educational team may decide that a student who is deaf or hard of hearing should have an alternate method of testing. The educational interpreter should be familiar with, and competent to make the language used on a test as accessible as possible to the deaf or hard of hearing student.

Tests, projects, and evaluations produced by the classroom teacher should be discussed with that teacher to help determine what can or cannot be explained. For example, the student may be required to know some vocabulary, while other terms may be secondary to the concept. The classroom teacher should decide this. If the teacher's main interest is whether the student understands the concepts, without interference from reading skills, the teacher may choose to have the interpreter provide an interpretation of the test questions.

It should be noted that interpreters vary widely in their understanding of issues surrounding the education of students who have a hearing loss. Because there is typically no degree requirement for educational interpreters, and because many interpreter training programs have little coursework in educational issues, the educational team cannot assume that the

interpreter is qualified to serve as a consultant or a resource. However, when an interpreter is knowledgeable, she can provide inservice training to both staff and peer students in their role in the classroom.

### **Guidelines for Interpreters Who Work with Students**

All adults in an educational setting have the responsibility of fostering social development, in addition to more formal academic learning. While the interpreter must maintain an impartial role when interpreting, like the classroom teacher, she is also an adult role model for a developing student. Because of this, it is important for the interpreter to maintain a relationship with the student that is appropriate to the student's age and the academic setting. This includes maintaining rapport with students while also preserving professional boundaries. It is not appropriate to consider the student your friend or confidant. Inappropriate relations with a student may be grounds for dismissal.

It is important to recognize that the interpreter works for the educational program, not for the deaf or hard of hearing student or the family. The interpreter's goal is to facilitate communication between deaf and hearing people and to communicate clearly what each individual says. Because of this, it is important to maintain a healthy relationship with all adults and students in the interpreted classroom. Hearing students often need help negotiating an interpreted conversation, and that communication is equally important in a student's educational life. All students and staff should be helped to understand the roles and boundaries of the interpreter. All people should be encouraged to speak directly to the student and not to the interpreter. Decisions regarding whether a student needs an interpreter to communicate with teachers and peers should be made with input from the entire community, not just the student who is deaf or hard of hearing.

Educational interpreters should have preparation time to review lesson goals and vocabulary or to consult with educational

team members. An interpreter can produce a better interpretation when prepared or when knowledgeable about the topic area. For

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technical classes, such as biology, geometry, and computer science, it often takes time for an interpreter to develop the specialized vocabulary necessary to understand the content.

It is not appropriate for the interpreter to share attitudes and opinions with the student about other adults in the school environment. Regardless of whether the interpreter views the message as being incorrect, incomplete, morally inappropriate, or lacking in direction, the interpreter is not at liberty to communicate her opinions to the students.

There are many factors that impact the accuracy of an interpretation, such as visual distractions, the interpreter's skills and knowledge, as well as the teacher's style of instruction. Ultimately, it is the interpreter's responsibility to inform the teacher and/or student when concerned about the completeness of an interpreted message. The interpreter should inform the student and the teacher if he or she feels that the teacher's message was not communicated accurately.

It is assumed that all verbal communication as well as environmental sounds will be signed when appropriate and that all signed communication will be voiced when appropriate. There may be situations when it is impossible or inappropriate to interpret all communication and sounds. Decisions regarding what to represent and what to disregard should be discussed with the classroom teacher.

Some deaf or hard of hearing students may not fully understand the interpretation of an English message due to differences in culture, language, or experience. It is appropriate for educational interpreters to clarify bits of information that fit into this category (e.g., hearing-culture jokes, certain English vocabulary which does not translate well). However, this is to be done on a limited basis for the benefit of clear communication and should not interfere with the teacher's message.

While the interpreter is responsible for interpreting, like all adults in an educational environment, he or she is also responsible to the school's discipline goals. The classroom teacher determines the philosophy of discipline for the classroom. The extent to which the interpreter should participate in classroom discipline of all students should be discussed with the classroom teacher. For the most part, discipline should be administered by the classroom teacher.

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However, it is not appropriate for the interpreter to disregard highly inappropriate behavior from any student in the classroom. From a developmental perspective, all students should know that adults are consistent in their judgment of inappropriate behavior as well as their response to it.

It is not the interpreter's role to protect the student from discipline or failure. With regard to homework, fooling around, persistent lack of attention, and failure to participate appropriately, the deaf or hard of hearing student should be treated like all other students in the classroom. The Deaf or hard of hearing student should be allowed the freedom to make choices and to learn as independently as possible (as the hearing

students do). The interpreter should not help the student with work, unless explicitly acknowledged by the educational team. This should be considered tutoring and follow tutoring guidelines (see Tutoring Section).

The interpreter should clarify his or her role to any member in the school setting, including the deaf or hard-of-hearing student. It is appropriate for the interpreter to help deaf and hearing students understand the role of an interpreter. This may involve giving clues to a student or explicitly informing the student of how to handle an interpreted situation. The student should be guided to assume more responsibilities for directing the interpreter as he or she becomes more mature.

Students who are deaf and hard of hearing are very dependent on their vision. When the teacher is talking, it may be necessary for a student to also look at a picture, graph, or other sources of information. This can easily create barriers to learning in that the student has to look at too many competing sources of information. The interpreter should work with the classroom teacher to ensure that all educational content, language and visual information are accessible to the student. In addition, the interpreter should be aware that:

- Eye fatigue will be experienced by the student.
- All students vary in their attention span and tendency to be distractible, and this changes as children mature.
- All instructional and non-instructional stimuli will be in competition for the student's attention. The student cannot be expected to attend to everything at the same time. Because of this, the student may occasionally look away from the interpreter.
- An interpreter may need to adjust communication depending on a student's need to rest their eyes momentarily.
- For a student who is young, a subtle cue from the interpreter may be

necessary to help the student re-focus attention.

- If a student is consistently inattentive, it should be discussed with the classroom teacher and the educational team. Initially the classroom teacher should address the problem with the student directly. If necessary, the educational team may assist the student in learning about how to use interpreting services.

The primary mode of learning for many students who are hard of hearing or students with cochlear implants is through the auditory channel, with the interpretation providing critical supplemental information. This student may choose to watch the teacher, using the interpreter to provide missed information or to verify information received. Because of this, the interpreter should continue to interpret even if the student chooses to watch the teacher.

An educational interpreter shall consider the following information about an assignment to determine if his or her skills are adequate for the assignment:

- the age level of the student,
- the content of the various classes,
- situations calling for special interpreting skills (i.e. films, assembly programs)
- the student's language skills
- the interpreter's language skills (ASL, PSE, MCE, spoken and written English)
- The student's sign language preference (ASL, PSE, MCE, spoken and written English)

Interpreters should continue to develop knowledge and skills through participation in workshops, professional meetings, interaction with professional colleagues and reading of current literature in the field. All professionals should take part in continuing education activities, both general to education and specific to interpreting. In order to be respected as a member of the educational team, and to provide students

with access to the classroom, interpreters should be improving their skills and knowledge continually. Interpreters should be aware of continuing education requirements in their state.

Interpreters shall dress in a professional manner that is appropriate to the

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setting. An interpreter's appearance needs to be non-distracting in order to prevent eye fatigue among the Deaf and hard of hearing students. Clothing should be of contrasting color to the skin and pattern free. Jewelry should not be distracting. Facial hair should be trimmed to allow clear viewing of lip movements. The style of dress should be consistent with that of the classroom teachers.

### **Tutoring**

In many schools, educational interpreters are asked to tutor the deaf or hard of hearing student. Typically, interpreters are not trained to tutor, so training and supervision are essential. There are advantages to having the educational interpreter conduct tutoring. It allows direct communication during tutoring, which is preferable to interpreted communication. The interpreter often knows the student and classroom materials. The interpreter also understands aspects of how hearing loss affects language and interaction.

There are also disadvantages. It may be difficult for the student or the interpreter to separate roles and responsibilities associated with tutoring from those associated with interpreting. This may mean that the student and the interpreter assume that they are

constantly in the role of interpreter/tutor, rather than two distinct roles. The student may become overly dependent on the interpreter. The interpreter may not have sufficient grasp of the content or tutoring techniques to be effective. Also, if the student failed to understand classroom concepts because of a poor interpretation or lack of sign vocabulary, the interpreter may not be able to communicate the concepts during tutoring either. If the educational interpreter is asked to tutor, the following guidelines should be followed.

- The interpreter should not tutor if it interferes with the primary responsibility of interpreting.
- Tutors should receive training, which includes understanding effective tutoring techniques as well as an understanding of the subject matter.
- Tutoring should be conducted under the supervision of the classroom teacher. Under no circumstances should interpreters develop their own lesson plans or determine what should be tutored.
- Tutoring is not a substitution for effective interpreting. A student should not be tutored separately unless there is a clear educational need for it, as determined by the educational team.
- The interpreter should make it clear to the student when a role other than interpreter is assumed, such as tutoring.

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