



Information UPDATE

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TO: District Administrators, CESA Administrators, CCDEB Administrators, Directors of Special Education and Pupil Services, and Other Interested Parties

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SUBJECT: The Role of Educational Interpreters for Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (This replaces Bulletin 99.04)

Educational practice and technology has had an impact on how students who are deaf or hard of hearing access their education. The role of educational interpreters in providing the visual language access for these students has evolved. The department continues to receive questions from directors, teachers, parents, and educational interpreters regarding the role of educational interpreters. This Information Update Bulletin addresses these questions.

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Interpreter Role/Qualifications

1. What is the role of an educational interpreter?

The role of an educational interpreter is to provide a visual language, usually sign language, interpretation of auditory communication for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. The knowledge and competence of the educational interpreter to provide a clear and comprehensive interpretation of the language of the school as well as to function as an effective team player in the school has a direct impact on student learning and success.

Interpretation may occur in a variety of settings beyond the classroom including, but not limited to, field trips, club meetings, after school programs, assemblies, extra-curricular activities, and other school sponsored events.

2. What is the role of the educational interpreter on the IEP team?

Many students who are deaf or hard of hearing receive educational support through related services staff. For some students who are deaf or hard of hearing, this may include an educational interpreter. It is not required that interpreters attend the IEP team meeting. However, they may have valuable input for the student's present level of performance, goals, and services, particularly related to the student's language knowledge, use, and behaviors that support or impede learning. The unique relationship with the student provides the interpreter with knowledge of how the student learns and functions within the classroom.

3. How may an educational interpreter assist with transition planning?

Successful transition includes team discussion and planning related to the student's community experiences, daily living skills, post-secondary planning, employment, instruction, related services and other post-school adult living objectives. The educational interpreter who works with the student on a daily basis may have valuable information and resources to contribute to the team discussion.

4. Does the educational interpreter's role vary for students of different age groups?

Yes. Students demonstrate differing developmental maturity and language sophistication and it is important for the educational interpreter to support the independence of the student as the student progresses through the grades.

The educational interpreter in the preschool and early elementary setting typically does more than just interpret for the child. The interpreter may be a language model for the student and may also work with the other children supporting group and peer-to-peer communication and play. Repetition is necessary for language learning. The educational interpreter may provide additional repetition, description, and reinforcement of the language of the classroom.

As students progress through the grades, classroom content takes on more depth and academic language assumes greater focus. By third grade, it is often assumed that students have a broad vocabulary and knowledge of how language is used in spoken and written contexts. Students who are deaf or hard of hearing, especially those who rely on visual language, may struggle with academic language. The educational interpreter needs to emphasize the academic language used during instruction and provide additional support by explaining unfamiliar language.

Social language and effective interaction skills become increasingly important for students as they progress through the grades. Without the ability to overhear social language, including linguistic nuances, the student may demonstrate inappropriate interactive skills that may leave the student feeling isolated. The educational interpreter can interpret in social situations and work to bridge successful student interactions through supporting self-determination, self-awareness and self-advocacy skills that are increasingly important for student success, both within the school environment and within the community.

5. What are the qualifications of an educational interpreter?

Educational interpreters are related service personnel with a minimum of two years of specialized post-secondary education and DPI licensure. They also are required to earn six credits every five years to maintain their license. In addition to the required coursework for license renewal, educational interpreters must pass a national test of interpreting competency, the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) every five years.

6. What is the difference between the roles of a teacher of students who are deaf or hard of hearing and an educational interpreter?

Teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing complete a four to six year teacher preparation program. Teacher preparation programs focus on the general curriculum, child development and learning, and then focus specifically on the needs of students with a hearing loss. Most teacher preparation programs include sign language classes, but do not require sign language proficiency. The emphasis is on English language learning and literacy, and the listening technology that students may use to benefit from their education.

Educational interpreters complete a two to four year interpreter preparation program with intense focus on learning the language of sign, and then the process of interpreting from one language to another (e.g., spoken language form to signed language form). Upon completion, the interpreters must be fluent in sign language and be able to demonstrate interpreting skills.

Teachers have the knowledge and skills to evaluate student learning and to provide specialized instruction for students with a hearing loss. Interpreters have the knowledge and skills to listen to spoken language and present it in equal form in sign language. Their knowledge and skills are compatible but different. Together, they are an effective team for the student who is deaf or hard of hearing who uses sign language to access education.

7. What non-interpreting duties are considered appropriate for educational interpreters?

Educational interpreters are part of the school team. Their primary responsibility is to interpret for the student who is deaf or hard of hearing. Educational interpreters also may provide some sign language instruction to

other students in the classroom in order to support peer-peer interaction via sign communication. As part of the school team, the educational interpreter may also share general school duties such as recess, bus duty, etc., in the same manner that is expected of teachers.

8. What is the Professional Code of Conduct for educational interpreters?

The national organization for sign language interpreters is the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc. (RID). RID oversees the professional conduct of its members through their Code of Professional Conduct, which includes seven tenets: confidential communication, professional skills and knowledge related to the situation, conduct appropriate to the situation, respect for consumers, respect for colleagues, ethical practices, and engagement in professional development.

9. What are the initial qualifications of educational interpreters? What are the requirements for license renewal?

The DPI requirements for an initial 5-year educational interpreter license includes the study of American Sign Language (ASL), and other forms of signed communication and communication strategies used by people who are deaf or hard of hearing. English is studied along with the process of interpreting from one language to the other. Most interpreter preparation programs in Wisconsin meet course requirements for the DPI license. Educational interpreters from out-of-state programs generally need to add child development courses which are available at most technical colleges.

Upon completion of an interpreter preparation program, educational interpreters have beginning interpreting skills. Educational interpreters need to continue their professional development. Professional development may include academic content for enhanced understanding of the language of education, knowledge of educational practices, child development, and continued study of interpretation models.

The DPI license renewal process for educational interpreters requires six credits for license renewal. One of these credits is a required interpreter competency test called the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA).

10. What is the EIPA?

The EIPA is a national test of interpreting competency specifically designed to measure the skills needed by an interpreter when interpreting academic content for students in K-12 school settings. The EIPA is owned, managed, and scored by Boys Town National Research Hospital: Educational Diagnostic Center in Omaha, Nebraska.

DPI coordinates the administration of the EIPA. The EIPA test is administered at the Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA) offices throughout the state. The schedule is developed each summer and may be found at http://sped.dpi.wi.gov/sped_hi-interpreter-licensing. Other information about educational interpreting and the EIPA can be found at www.classroominterpreting.org.

Addressing Individual Student Needs

11. What is the visual language continuum that interpreters use to communicate with students who are deaf or hard of hearing?

Educational interpreters are responsible for providing interpreted messages in the language that is used and understood by the student who is deaf or hard of hearing. The language or mode of sign communication used by the student ranges along a sign continuum. This visual language continuum includes American Sign Language (ASL), an English-based sign form, and other visual communication techniques used by students who are deaf and hard of hearing. The IEP team must determine the communication needs of the student,

including the student's language. The expertise of the educational interpreter may be helpful in determining the language use and communication needs of the student.

Many students who are hard of hearing may not use sign expressively to communicate but depend on it for receptive language clarity. Even with the increased effectiveness of listening technology, including cochlear implants, many students are unable to hear spoken English in all settings. They may not be able to discern words and meaning clearly when there are multiple speakers or background noise. In the upper grades, the complexity and pace of academic language, especially when new vocabulary is used, may determine the need for an interpreter.

These visual language and communication practices are options along the language continuum:

- **American Sign Language (ASL)** is signed language that has evolved in the United States over the past 200 years among persons who are deaf. ASL is a recognized language and is the language used most by adults who are deaf.
- **English-based signs** combine the rules of English and ASL. This form of communication uses the word order of English and visual and grammatical aspects of ASL. It may be useful depending on the student's language knowledge and use, prior acquisition of language/level of fluency in English or ASL/exposure to language at an early age, and use of assistive listening devices or speech therapy.
- **Sign-supported speech** may be used with a student whose first language is English and who is not fluent in ASL. It is intended to support a student's comprehension of spoken language through visual cues. It uses a combination of oral interpretation along with signs for new or unfamiliar vocabulary. Students who may benefit from sign-supported speech include those with a recent hearing loss, progressive hearing loss and students with cochlear implants.
- **Oral interpretation** is done by silently mouthing the spoken message of the speaker. It may be used with students who have the ability to hear speech and to speechread, which is a combination of listening, lipreading and using contextual clues. Facial expression, body movement and gestures all are components.
- **Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART)** represents a print form of speech to text. The message is typed and may be read on the student's computer. It requires the student to be able to read at the fourth-grade level. The captionist may be in the classroom or at a remote location. Some agencies provide Remote CART, where the teacher wears a microphone while the captionist provides the content on the student's computer. Prior to determining that the student's access to their educational day will be through print translation, the IEP team should determine the student's reading level. Reading all communication through the school day is fatiguing and its use should be reviewed carefully. A list of CART providers is at www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/sensory/CART/CARTListing.htm.

12. Are there guidelines for IEP teams to determine the visual communication needs of a student who is hard of hearing, including the possible use of an educational interpreter?

The clarity of a student's speech and/or ability to converse with adults should not be the sole indicator regarding the student's need for visual language supports, including an educational interpreter. Some students with a significant hearing loss have very good speech clarity and are able to speech-read in conversations. Speech-reading is the combination of using lip-reading skills, with listening, along with context clues to determine what is being said. Even with successful conversations, the student may miss some of the language. This may significantly impede the student's learning during academic instruction. Classroom noise and other visual distractions and/or limitations of visual information may inhibit the student's ability to hear

and understand what is being said. Misunderstandings and fatigue are common with students who are hard of hearing.

DPI has developed a document, *Student Need for an Interpreter – A Guided IEP Team Discussion*, at sped.dpi.wi.gov/sped_hi-interpreters, that may be used by the IEP team.

13. What is the impact of incidental language learning and how can the educational interpreter support student opportunities for incidental language learning?

At home and in the community, children are surrounded by language. Research shows that up to 90% of our language learning is incidental through informal processes that occur instinctively and effortlessly by children with typical hearing. The ability of children to hear and understand language directly impacts their language development.

Most children enter kindergarten with fairly sophisticated language use and effective communication skills. Since children with a hearing loss do not have the same natural access to language learning, they may enter school with gaps in language knowledge and use. This is true for students who are hard of hearing or have cochlear implants as well as for those who are deaf. Assumptions are often made about students' language sophistication based on their ability to speak clearly and to participate in simple and/or one-one conversation. This is an inaccurate measure of their ability to increase receptive language knowledge and use.

Incidental learning never ends. Students continue to learn through 'overhearing,' on TV, video, computer, radio, conversations, and so on. The educational interpreter is present to 'overhear' and then to interpret the language within the school environment. It may be valuable for the educational interpreter to take time with the student to discuss content just learned, repeating and reinforcing the academic language and content. Conversations about incidents in school, the community, and the world also supplement the students' missed opportunities to hear, learn about, and use social language.

14. Do children with cochlear implants need educational interpreter services?

The success of the child to hear and understand with their cochlear implant depends on multiple factors. Effective early education and family support are essential to the child's success in using the cochlear implant. Advances in listening technology continue to expand, providing students with the ability to hear and understand spoken language. Students' success with their technology will vary. Not all children with a cochlear implant will be able to discern meaningful speech throughout all settings. While the cochlear implant provides access to sound, including speech, it does not provide correction to allow the child to hear clearly in all situations. The student may have difficulty in discerning noise from speech. Noisy classrooms (active classes with active interaction) or classrooms near noise (next to the band room, gym or cafeteria, facing a busy street, etc.) may be a difficult environment for the student to listen with understanding.

Each IEP team should assess the student's ability to listen with understanding in the classroom. As academic content becomes increasingly more abstract with less repetition, the student may struggle to listen and learn without visual supports.

15. What are some recommendations for the educational interpreter when working with students who also have cognitive disabilities?

Students with cognitive disabilities who also have a hearing loss may demonstrate limited expressive language, including sign language and other communication skills. It may be difficult to determine the actual language knowledge and language potential of these students. In classrooms where the interaction with the student is limited to short directive statements from staff with limited sign language knowledge, and with limited expectations for the student to respond, measures of student comprehension and opportunities for language expression may be difficult to determine. It is important for the student's language and

communication development that the student is given repeated opportunities for signed dialogue with expectations for language exchange that encourage language exploration and interactive use. If the student has a hearing loss and the IEP team determines that an educational interpreter is an appropriate service for this child, it is important to be clear about the type of services and expectations the educational interpreter is to follow with the student. Educational interpreters can be a language resource for the child providing age appropriate language models that build language expression.

For students who have a combined vision and hearing loss (Deaf-Blind) many valuable resources are available to the LEA. To learn more about these, go to www.wdbtap.wi.gov.

16. What guidelines exist for educational interpreters when a student takes a world language class?

Students who are deaf or hard of hearing have successfully participated in a variety of world language courses including Spanish, French, and Chinese. The expectations and strategies for success in these classes will vary depending on student abilities, needs and interests. Some students will be able to listen and speak the language in a manner similar to other students. Others may need to learn with emphasis on reading and writing in that language. In some situations, the student may be able to learn, through independent study, the sign language of the country such as French sign language.

17. What considerations should the IEP team use to determine the role of the educational interpreter when a student who is deaf or hard of hearing arrives from another country with limited communication and language?

When a student who is deaf or hard of hearing moves into the LEA from another country, the student's communication and/or language skills and educational experiences may vary widely. While some will have extensive school experience, others may have limited language and/or communication skills.

During a comprehensive evaluation of the student, the IEP team will need to consider the student's language knowledge and use, the student's educational experiences, and how the family communicates with their child. When possible, consultation with a teacher of students who are English Language Learners (ELL) may provide valuable insight and instructional strategies.

Local Educational Agency (LEA) Responsibilities

18. Are there sample job performance tools for school administrators to use to evaluate the educational interpreter?

A job performance rubric may be used by school principals while providing valuable professional feedback to the educational interpreter on staff. This rubric measures professional skills, interpersonal skills, team skills, and support for students. It does not measure specific sign language skills. Evaluation of sign language knowledge and use along with interpreting skills is accomplished through the national competency test (EIPA) required by DPI for license renewal.

The rubric may be downloaded and modified to meet LEA standards. It is at <http://dpi.wi.gov/files/sped/doc/hi-ei-rubric.doc>.

19. Are there any guidelines, credentials, or considerations that may influence the pay rate for an educational interpreter?

DPI does not determine pay scale or any contractual issues between an LEA or CESA and its employees. Due to requests from districts regarding appropriate pay and benefits for educational interpreters, data was collected from the 2008-09 school year report for 238 educational interpreters statewide. The summary is at http://sped.dpi.wi.gov/sped_hi-interpreters.

20. When the interpreter is absent, does the LEA need to hire a substitute interpreter? If so, what license does this person need to have? How does an LEA locate an interpreter?

An interpreter must be provided as required by the student's IEP. Teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing are not substitutes for educational interpreters. A substitute interpreter must be provided.

There is a DPI license for substitute interpreters. The DPI substitute educational interpreter license requires minimal interpreting skill, along with a background check. For more information, go to: <http://tepd.dpi.wi.gov/licensing/educator-licensing#types>.

To find interpreter referral agencies around the state, check the website of the Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing at www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/sensory/Interpreting/terpagencies.htm. Ask for interpreters with the DPI license.

21. What is the LEA's obligation to provide preparation time for educational interpreters?

The more familiar the educational interpreter is with the content of instruction, including specific vocabulary, materials, goals and/or expectations of the students, the more accurate the interpretation. Time to preview materials will enhance the educational interpreter's ability to provide an interpretation of the lesson that is equivalent to the instruction heard by the other students in the class. When the interpreter knows the goals of the educational unit and the purpose of each activity in supporting that goal, the interpreter can emphasize key vocabulary terms and concepts. LEAs should provide preparation time as appropriate.

22. Is the LEA eligible for categorical aid for interpreters hired through an agency?

Yes. WI Stat. §115.88(1) includes educational interpreters as a contracted service eligible for state categorical aid reimbursement. Contracted interpreter services for the student also may be funded by IDEA flow-through dollars.

23. What are the expectations and responsibilities of the LEA in contracting for interpreter services when the student participates in extra-curricular activities?

LEAs must ensure that each student with a disability participates with nondisabled students in extra-curricular activities to the maximum extent appropriate. The LEA must provide the support and services necessary to allow the student to participate in the extra-curricular activity.

Wisconsin Interpreting Referral Agencies

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services; **Office for Deaf and Hard of Hearing** (ODHH) maintains a current listing of interpreter referral agencies in the state. This list is at: www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/sensory/Interpreting/terpagencies.htm

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This information update can also be accessed through the Internet:
http://sped.dpi.wi.gov/sped_bulindex