

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, Hard of
Hearing or Deafblind (Replaces Bulletin 13.03)

Educational practice and technology have impacted how students who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind 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?

Educational interpreters have very specialized skills that are different from teachers of deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind students. Educational interpreters are trained in American Sign Language (ASL), English-based sign forms, and other visual communication techniques used by people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind. While under the supervision of the student's teachers, educational interpreters can provide additional educational support. Educational interpreters are responsible for having a knowledge base in the content taught in the classroom to be able to interpret this information to the student. Collaborations between the classroom teacher and interpreter are key to maintaining the interpreter's professionalism and meeting the needs of the student(s). Educational interpreters are not special education program aides. An educational interpreter may provide interpretation in a variety of settings beyond the classroom, including, but not limited to, field trips, club meetings, after-school programs, assemblies, extracurricular activities, and other school-sponsored events. Further information is provided in this [Guidance for DPI-Licensed Educational Interpreters Memo](#).

2. What is the role of the educational interpreter during an IEP team meeting?

Although educational interpreters are not required to attend the IEP team meeting, educational interpreters have valuable information to share regarding the student's present level of performance, disability-related needs, goals, and services. These services are 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. When educational interpreters are part of the IEP meeting, best practice is to

have another educational interpreter interpret the IEP meeting so the student's current educational interpreter can participate in the meeting without distraction.

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

The educational interpreter who works with the student daily has valuable information from observations and interactions with the student they can share during transition planning. For example, the educational interpreter may provide information about the student's disability-related needs, community communication, and transition skills. Educational interpreters may also know community resources specifically related to hearing loss that may benefit the student.

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 student's independence as the student progresses through the grades. As the student demonstrates their skills and abilities, the educational interpreter considers and communicates with the IEP team about the student's needs.

The educational interpreter in the preschool and early elementary settings 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 students have a broad vocabulary and knowledge of how language is used in spoken and written contexts. Students who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind, 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 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 providers with a minimum of two years of specialized post-secondary education and DPI licensure as an educational interpreter. [Licensure information can be found here.](#)

6. How does a teacher of the deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind and an educational interpreter work together to support the needs of students who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind?

Educational interpreters are trained in the interpretation of American Sign Language (ASL), English-based sign forms and other visual communication techniques are used by people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind. While under the supervision of the student's teachers, educational interpreters can provide tutoring support. They are responsible for

having a knowledge base in the content taught in the classroom to be able to interpret this information and provide tutoring support to the student, if needed. An interpreter should only tutor classes in which they know the content and goals of the lesson per teacher and assignments. Interactions between the classroom teacher and interpreter are key to maintaining professional standards. Educational interpreters are not special education aides. Teachers of the deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind provide specialized instruction, help determine eligibility for services, conduct educational evaluations, and provide consultative services through an IEP process.

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

Educational interpreters are part of the educational team. Their primary responsibility is to interpret for the student who is deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind. Educational interpreters may also provide some sign language instruction to other students in the classroom to support peer-to-peer interaction via sign communication. As part of the school team, the educational interpreter may also share general school duties such as recess and bus duty as long as these duties do not deny communication access for the student who is deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind.

8. Do educational interpreters follow a professional code of conduct or ethics?

Yes. They follow a code of professional conduct for Sign Language Interpreters ([NAIE](#), [RID](#), [BEI](#)). Educational interpreters inform the educational team, parents, and students of their code of professional conduct or ethics as it applies to educational situations. Educational interpreters are also expected to follow state and federal pupil record laws by maintaining confidentiality.

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

Educational interpreters are required by the DPI to hold an interpreter training program certificate from an accredited 2- or 4-year college or university. For license renewal, each educational interpreter must complete 5 credits or 7.5 RID CEUs and any other requirements to maintain their license. [For more information on the educational interpreter, click here.](#) [For information on the licensing requirements for an educational interpreter, click here.](#)

10. What is the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (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. The EIPA test is administered at the WESP-DHH Outreach offices in Delavan, WI. [Registration and test schedule information can be found here](#) (EIPA Written Test and Knowledge Standards). [Further information about educational interpreting and the EIPA can be found here](#) ([Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment](#)®).

Addressing Individual Student Needs

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

Educational interpreters have very specialized skills that are different from that of teachers of deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind students. They are trained in a visual language continuum used by people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind, which includes the interpretation of American Sign Language (ASL), English-based sign forms, and other visual communication techniques.

12. Are there resources for IEP teams in determining the visual communication needs of a student who is deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind, including the possible use of an educational interpreter?

Yes. Consultation can be given by contacting [WESP-DHH Outreach Services](#). The DPI developed a [Guided IEP Team Discussion document](#) to assist IEP teams in determining the need for an educational interpreter. The guide may be used when determining if a student who is deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind needs or continues to need Interpreter Services, as well as determining the role of the interpreter. The tool is designed to guide discussion during an IEP team meeting.

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

Educational interpreters are crucial for incidental learning for students who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind. Students without a hearing loss learn through incidental hearing or 'overhearing' of TV, videos, computer, radio, conversations, during lunch, recess, and transition times. When the educational interpreter is present, they are able to 'overhear' and interpret the language within the school environment for students who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind. 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 student's missed opportunities to hear, learn about, and use social language.

14. Do students who use assistive technology (cochlear implants, hearing aids, classroom/personal FM and DM systems, speech-to-text services, captioning support) need educational interpreter services?

Regardless of the assistive technology a student may use, decisions regarding the need for an interpreter would still be determined by an IEP team. The success of the student to hear and understand with their assistive technology depends on multiple factors. Effective early education and family support are essential to a young child's success in using assistive technology. 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 students with assistive technology will be able to discern meaningful speech throughout all settings. While assistive technology provides access to sound, including speech, it does not provide correction to allow the student to hear clearly in all situations. The student may have difficulty in discerning noise from speech. Active classes with active interaction and noise or classrooms near noise (e.g., next to the band room, gym or cafeteria, facing a busy street) 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 intellectual or additional disabilities?

Students with an intellectual disability or additional disabilities who also have a hearing loss may demonstrate limited expressive and receptive language, including sign language and other communication skills. 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. It is important to be clear about the type of language, services, and expectations the educational interpreter is to follow. Educational interpreters can be a language resource for the student providing age-appropriate language models

that build language expression. [WESP-DHH Outreach services](#) can provide consultation services to teams working with this population of students. For students who have a combined vision and hearing loss (deafblind), [many valuable resources are available to the LEA](#).

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. Exceptions concerning pronunciation should be considered. Others may need to learn with an 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, hard of hearing, or deafblind arrives from another country with limited communication and language?

The role of the educational interpreter is to create a language-rich environment. This can be achieved by working with parents, teaming with language specialists in the school, providing adult language models, and tutoring by the educational team.

Local Educational Agency (LEA) Responsibilities

18. Who supervises educational interpreters? Are there sample job performance tools for school administrators to use to evaluate an educational interpreter?

An LEA administrator is the educational interpreter's supervisor and provides the educational interpreter's annual evaluations. A sample rubric may be downloaded and modified to meet LEA standards. This rubric measures professional skills, interpersonal skills, team skills, and support for students. [DPI Resources to Support Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing can be found here](#).

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

There are no guidelines or credentials that dictate a particular pay rate for an educational interpreter. Information regarding current staffing may be found through [WISEdata](#). You may also contact [WESP-DHH Outreach for more information](#). Educational interpreters are typically interested in full-time positions with benefits.

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 the deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind are not substitutes for educational interpreters. A teacher of the deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind that has a current educational interpreter license or substitute educational interpreter license in Wisconsin may concurrently provide interpreter services for a limited time, but otherwise, a substitute interpreter must be provided. There is a DPI license for substitute interpreters. [For more information on applying for an educational interpreter substitute license, click here](#). To find interpreter referral agencies around the state, check the [Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#) website. Ask for interpreters with the DPI license.

21. Should daily preparation time be given to educational interpreters?

Yes, educational interpreters should have daily preparation time to review the content of instruction and specific vocabulary, other materials, goals, and expectations in order to provide a more accurate 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. [Additional information on scheduling time for preparation can be found here.](#)

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 and preschool dollars.

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

LEAs must ensure that each student with a disability participates with nondisabled students in extracurricular activities to the maximum extent appropriate. The LEA must provide the necessary supports and services, as determined by the IEP team, to allow the student to participate in the extracurricular activity. [Guidance for Licensed Educational Interpreters can be found here.](#)

For questions about this information, contact the DPI Special Education Team at (608) 266-1781.