

# I nterpreting D etermines E ducational A ccess

## FACT SHEET CRISIS in Educational Interpreting Services

***“If communication goes awry, it affects the intellectual growth, social intercourse, language development and emotional attitudes, all at once, simultaneously and inseparably.”***  
*(Oliver Sacks, 1989)*

Schools are accountable for what their students learn.

- Educational performance of students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing remains poor. The average reading comprehension of 18 year old students was reported at just below 4<sup>th</sup> grade on the SAT-9 (Traxler, 2000).
- If performance on standardized assessments is to improve, students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing must have full (100%) access to all aspects of the curriculum and instruction.
- The ability to learn is denied when students do not have qualified interpreters.

### No Child Left Behind

- In addition to accountability, adequate yearly progress, and school improvement, NCLB addresses “highly qualified” providers. Educational interpreters must also be held to the provisions of this law. Because there are currently no national professional standards for educational interpreters, it is imperative that IDEA defines a standard.
- Current OSEP data is unreliable because there is no national professional standard.
  - US Office of Education 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Report to Congress (2002), based on 98-99 school year data, indicated that there were 4,588 interpreters employed by schools in the US and that 567 (12.4%) were not certified. How are states determining whether interpreters are qualified or not?
- Schools must also have an objective, verifiable method of assessment to determine whether its sign language interpreters are qualified.
- Achievement is limited when students do not have access to a qualified interpreter.

### Role of the Educational Interpreter

The educational interpreter’s responsibilities include:

- Interpreting all school-related communication according to the student’s language ability and the goals of the IEP.
  - Many students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing enter school with language competencies below those of their hearing peers. Interpreters must be able to convey the intent of the instructor into language that is meaningful to the student.
- Tutoring, or clarifying, instructional information for the student.
- Participating on the educational team related to student progress and achievement.
- Providing expertise to the educational team (e.g., helping student learn to use interpreting services) (MENUS, p. 14).

***In regular classrooms, hearing students generally communicate by speaking and listening. For many deaf students, however, interpreters are needed to facilitate communication with their teachers and classmates. IDEA requires that deaf students be integrated into regular classroom settings to the maximum extent possible, but if quality interpreting services are not provided, that goal becomes a mockery.***  
*(COED, 1988, p. 103).*

## Most children are not receiving services from a qualified interpreter.

- Most states do not have minimum standards for educational interpreter qualifications (Project Forum, Nov. 2000, NASDSE).
- For states with minimum interpreter qualifications, many current standards are at a level that results in interpretation reflecting accuracy at approximately 75% of the classroom discourse (EIPA level 3.5), with frequent errors, confusions, and deletions.
- Most states have no measure related to the knowledge sets that are necessary in order to effectively apply the interpreting skills in a K-12 setting.
- For states with minimum standards, there is no reliable data regarding the percentage of educational interpreters who meet the requirements.
- Approximately 50% of working interpreters' qualifications is unknown because they have not been evaluated. (Jones, In Press)

***“The primary problem of our students is not too little hearing, but too much interpersonal and informational isolation.”***

*(Harold Johnson, Ph.D.,  
Kent State University, 2003)*

## Communication remains the primary challenge within educational settings for students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing.

- Each student's communication needs are individualized. They are based on variables unique to the student, such as age of onset and severity of the hearing loss, as well as the student's and parent's preferences (MENUS, 2002).
- IDEA further requires that the communication needs of each student be considered. 34CFR300.346[a](2)(iv).
- 80% of students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing spend a portion of their day in the general education classroom; approximately 23% of these students utilize interpreters (Gallaudet Research Institute, 2003).
- For many students, the interpreter is the only communication link during their school day.
- 72 percent of families of children who use sign language do not use sign language with their children (Gallaudet Research Institute, 2002); for these children, the interpreter may be the only person with whom they can communicate effectively.
- Communication access is denied to students when they do not have qualified interpreters.

## Recommendation for “Qualified Interpreter” in IDEA

Educational interpreters provide a variety of interpreting services (e.g., American Sign Language, Cued Speech, English Sign Systems, Oral) in an educational setting. Individuals who function as interpreters, regardless of job title, in providing these related services to students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing, should document the following:

Essential qualifications	Preferred qualifications
1. Associate's degree in Educational Interpreting or related educational field;	1. Bachelor's degree in Educational Interpreting or related educational field;
2. A passing score on a state or national assessment system of interpreting skills (e.g., State Quality Assurance, EIPA, RID);	2. A passing score on a national assessment of interpreting skills (e.g., EIPA, RID);
3. A passing score on a state or national assessment of knowledge sets to apply interpreting skills in educational settings (e.g., EIPA:WTA); and	3. A passing score on a national assessment of knowledge sets to apply interpreting skills in educational settings (e.g., EIPA:WT); and
4. Continued Professional Development.	4. Continued Professional Development.

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