

Highly Qualified Educational Interpreters...

No Child Left Behind requires all children, including students who are deaf or hard of hearing, to make “adequate yearly progress”. In today’s world, students are expected to meet high academic standards and, in many states, to pass a rigorous exam in order to earn a high school diploma. Students who are deaf and hard of hearing have the same ability to learn as their hearing peers...provided they have equal access to curriculum and instruction. As Dr. Gaylen Pugh points out, however, “Achievement is limited when students do not have access to qualified interpreters” (NASDSE presentation, September 17, 2003). Our **Nation’s Children Learn Best** when they have meaningful access to all aspects of their educational experiences.

NASDSE has the opportunity to provide leadership by encouraging states to establish educational interpreter qualifications. This leadership would assure consistent standards for highly qualified personnel who serve students requiring educational interpreting services in order to receive FAPE. Further, this action would ensure that states and school districts implement recommendations that have already been made by national stakeholders, including NASDSE.

- In 1988, the Commission On Education of the Deaf report, *Towards Equality*, stated that, “There is a shortage of qualified interpreters; as a result, some state and local education agencies permit individuals with no formal training to interpret in the schools. The lack of minimum standards has also created confusion among classroom teachers, administrators, parents, students, and interpreters as to the exact role and responsibilities of the educational interpreter” (p. 104); and
- In 1989, the National Task Force on Educational Interpreting recommended that educational interpreters “possess minimally an associate’s degree or equivalent 2 years of college education” (p. 19); and
- In 1989, the National Task Force on Educational Interpreting noted that since the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) certification does not adequately assess the requisite criteria of a qualified educational interpreter and since school administrators do not have the background to evaluate the skills of educational interpreters, that “the field must institute the certification itself” (p. 23); the Task Force therefore recommended certification be “by written examination and/or evidence of successful completion of specific college-level courses and pass performance tests in one or more of the following endorsement areas: ASL, PSE, MCE, Oral, Cued Speech” (p. 24); and
- In 1994, NASDSE Guidelines for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students advocated that interpreters should be “fully certified”; yet, state counts for IDEA reports default to “fully certified” if the state does not have specific standards in their regulations/legislation. This inaccurate data collection results in misleading assumptions regarding the current qualifications of educational interpreters in the United States; and
- In 1997, the U.S. Department of Education stated in its discussion on proposed Section 300.23 of Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulations, “In order for interpreters to provide appropriate instruction or services to children with disabilities who require an interpreter in order to receive FAPE, States must ensure that these individuals meet appropriate State qualification standards” (p. 12547); and
- In 2002, a national survey conducted by Dr. Daniel Burch regarding essential education of educational interpreters indicated that: “Stakeholders (those most closely associated with the provision of sign language interpreting in pre-college [K-12] educational settings) perceived the **Bachelor’s** level of education as essential for entry level sign language interpreters at all levels of students served” (*Journal of Interpretation*, p. 143); and
- In NASDSE’s 2003-2004 “Serving Low-Incidence Children in a High Standards Environment”, Dr. Gaylen Pugh stated, “NCLB addresses highly qualified providers. Educational interpreters must be held to the provisions of this law”; and
- Currently both the House and Senate versions of the reauthorization of IDEA recognize Educational Interpreting as a “related service”; other related service providers require academic degrees and demonstrated competencies.

Valid Solutions Now Exist...

There are now defensible solutions to the educational interpreting crisis in the U.S. Efforts to date have focused on identifying the problems, gathering data, and educating the system about the complex work of educational interpreters and how it differs significantly from working in community settings with adult consumers who are deaf or hard of hearing. To date, effective training and assessment systems have been scarce. Today, however, there are proven systems for training and assessing educational interpreters across the nation.

1. There is a national distance learning opportunity for educational interpreters that has provided essential interpreting skills and knowledge sets to more than 250 educational interpreters in 16 states. Co-funded through OSEP grants and State Education Agency Partners since 1996, the Educational Interpreting Certificate Program delivers 30 semester hours of specialized coursework that prepares interpreters to better serve students in K-12 settings. The system has already been expanded for individuals to earn an associate’s degree by completing an additional 30 hours of general education requirements. The final step in the career ladder—a baccalaureate degree—is anticipated to be online by 2006. (Leilani Johnson, Ed.D., leilani.johnson@frontrange.edu).

2. There is a psychometrically valid assessment system available for State Education Agencies that will appropriately assess educational interpreting skills and the knowledge sets to effectively apply those skills in classrooms. These tools provide the system necessary for moving toward universally accepted standards for highly qualified educational interpreters.

- The *Educational Interpreting Performance Assessment* (EIPA) evaluates interpreting skills on stimulus materials depicting typical K-6 and grades 7-12 classrooms, with selections in American Sign Language, Pidgin Signed English, or Manually Coded English; and
- The *Educational Interpreting Performance Assessment: Written Test* (EIPA:WT) assesses knowledge sets (e.g., interpreting theory, child and language development, teaching methods and materials, tutoring techniques) required to apply interpreting skills in K-12 settings. (Brenda Schick, Ph.D., brenda.schick@colorado.edu)

3. There is a regional test administration system for the EIPA and EIPA:WT that has recently completed a successful pilot project through a Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center multi-state consortium. It is no longer necessary for State Education Agencies to work alone or to replicate their efforts. Currently the system is expanding to encompass additional states. (Bernhardt E. Jones, Ed.D. bejones1@email.arizona.edu).

Since viable options now exist, NASDSE is asked to advise all State Education Agencies to adopt and ensure standards for educational interpreters that incorporate the following:

ESSENTIAL QUALIFICATIONS	PREFERRED QUALIFICATIONS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Associate’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); 3. A passing score on a state or national assessment of knowledge sets to apply interpreting skills in educational settings (e.g., EIPA:WT); <i>and</i> 4. Continued Professional Development. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bachelor’s degree in Educational Interpreting or related educational field; 2. A passing score on a national assessment of interpreting skills (e.g., EIPA, RID) 3. A passing score on a national assessment of knowledge sets to apply interpreting skills in educational settings (e.g., EIPA:WT); <i>and</i> 4. Continued Professional Development