



NEW MEXICO SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF Position and Standards for Use of Sign Language Interpreters in K-12 Educational Settings

The New Mexico Education of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Task Force Report published in 2003 and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children's Educational Bill of Rights signed into law in 2004 compel a communication and language-driven educational delivery system in New Mexico for children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. In response to these mandates, the New Mexico School for the Deaf articulates the following standards for the use of sign language interpreters in educational settings.

Direct, multidimensional communication through sign language, in the educational setting, is more efficient, effective and empowering than interpreted communication which is much more linear. However, when direct and multidimensional communication is not possible for all or part of the educational process for a student, it is critical that quality standards for interpreters be in place.

This document considers quality standards in three categories:

1. student readiness to utilize an interpreter;
2. interpreter qualifications;
3. and responsibilities of the hiring agency.

To ensure that a student can effectively use an interpreter to access the curricular content and the whole educational experience, all components of the three categories must be carefully considered or determined.

CONSIDER STUDENT READINESS OR POTENTIAL IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

- Student is age appropriate and interpreter-ready. His/her sign language level and overall language level enables him/her to have effective and age-appropriate communication with adults and peers, resulting in standard academic benefit with meaningful and interactive participation.
- Student knows how to utilize an interpreter for a wide variety of purposes.
- Student demonstrates self-advocacy skills or is ready to begin the incremental process of learning self-advocacy.

DETERMINE THE FOLLOWING INTERPRETER QUALIFICATIONS AND SKILLS:

- Interpreter is fluent (at a minimum is state licensed and striving to exceed licensure standards set by the Public Education Department) in the student's predominant signed language or system and in the instructional spoken language(s) of the school.
- Interpreter has experience and/or training specific to educational interpreting and has adequate knowledge and background to interpret academic content.
- Interpreter provides objective and neutral information to the student's educational team to help the team determine developmental readiness of the student to utilize an interpreter.
- Interpreter is part of the educational team that guides the student to become a self-advocate. The student/interpreter relationship evolves over time, from student inexperience and dependency to student proficiency and independence.
- Interpreter understands that incidental communication with peers/adults and opportunities to learn from others' conversations are valuable learning opportunities and interprets these appropriately, providing quality access to incidental language.
- Interpreter understands that he/she is not the certified or licensed teacher and does not take on that role.
- Interpreter recognizes the importance of the interpreter role and does not accept assignments and responsibilities for which he/she is not qualified.
- Interpreter identifies and engages in on-going professional development and is a member of an interpreter association.
- Interpreter provides interpretation consistently in and out of the classroom as assigned.
- Interpreter follows code of ethics, adheres to the interpreter role, and applies the code to the educational setting.

HIRING AGENCY DETERMINES ITS CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE FOLLOWING:

- Hiring Agency is sensitive and aware that interpreted communication does not replicate fluid direct communication with peers and adults.
- Hiring Agency ensures the student and the school community know how to use an interpreter by accessing a variety of resources.
- Hiring Agency ensures provisions for interpretation at all times; in the event that the interpreter is absent, the agency has implemented appropriate strategies to support the student in accessing the curriculum and all aspects of the school day.
- Hiring Agency ensures interpreters are evaluated annually by a certified interpreter/interpreter educator/deaf adult who is familiar, skilled and qualified to assess classroom environments in relation to the educational interpreter.
- Hiring Agency establishes a policy for district licensure standards that exceed minimal requirements in order to ensure that students have quality access to the curriculum and people in their environment.
- Hiring Agency approves and monitors each interpreter's professional development plan and establishes a timed requirement for exceeding PED minimal licensure standards. *
- Hiring Agency supports interpreter related professional development opportunities.
- Hiring Agency ensures that their educational teams are carefully considering solutions when a student lacks readiness to use an interpreter. The educational team and hiring agency must be creative in establishing teaching and interpreting positions that will address the specific language needs of individual students, ultimately making them interpreter ready. Until a student is ready to use an interpreter, he/she requires specific instruction through an educator skilled in sign language and deaf education, giving the student opportunity to increase language and communication abilities and access to age appropriate curricular content.
- Hiring Agency understands the importance of the interpreter position and does not hire unqualified individuals.
- Hiring Agency understands the term "interpreter" refers to an individual who has met PED minimal licensure standards.* Hiring Agency will use this title only when staff members have met those standards. Likewise, when listing interpreting as a support service for students, the title "interpreter" will only be listed when the staff person has met PED standards.
- Hiring Agency recognizes RID code of ethics and ensures interpreters adhere to their role.

***NMSD's position is that a score of 4.0+ on the EIPA is an acceptable standard.** This position is in line with the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf's recognition of an EIPA score of 4.0

(<http://www.rid.org/EIPAnewsrelease0906.pdf>).

An interpreter qualifying for licensure through an EIPA should be required to meet both requirements related to the student's educational level (elementary, middle or high school) and the language or communication system (American Sign Language, Pidgin Signed English, Manually Coded English).

Communication needs of the student who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing must be carefully considered through the IEP process supported by the Communications Considerations dialogue addendum. NMSD recommends utilizing the standards listed in this document as part of the Communications Considerations dialogue.

There are many challenges facing students, educational interpreters and Local Education Agencies, particularly in isolated and rural environments. Establishing and following high standards is critical to the education of students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. NMSD is committed to being a resource for interpreters and school districts by providing information about interpreter training programs and providing on-going professional development opportunities on a variety of topics related to education of students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing throughout the state.

Contact NMSD's Outreach Department at 505-476-6400 for more information or visit our website at www.nmsd.k12.nm.us .

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