

# **Illinois Association of the Deaf**

## **Position Statement on Educational Interpreters**

The purpose of this position statement is to acknowledge and emphasize the need for qualified sign language interpreters working in K-12 educational settings in the state of Illinois. The Illinois Association of the Deaf (IAD) wishes to use this platform to increase awareness regarding required changes to implement to enhance the communication access needs of Deaf and Hard of Hearing students in the educational system.

### **Raising Minimum EIPA Score**

Title 23, Subtitle A, Chapter 1, SubChapter b, Part 25, Section 25.550 of the Administrative Code (the "Section 25.550") lists criteria required for educational interpreters in the state of Illinois. As part of these criteria, a 3.5 minimum score on the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) is required to interpret in K-12 classrooms.

The IAD recommends revising Section 25.550 to reflect a minimum total EIPA score of 4.0 on the written and performance assessments. This will bring Illinois up to standards with other states that currently require an EIPA score of 4.0 to interpret in K-12 classrooms: Arkansas, California, Delaware, Kansas, Kentucky, Minnesota, New Mexico, Nevada, Rhode Island, Texas, and Utah.

In alignment with the National Association of the Deaf's position on inclusion, the IAD believes uninhibited communication access to all facets of a school's programming, including all curricular and extracurricular offerings in totality, is essential for a deaf or hard of hearing child to realize his or her full human potential.<sup>1</sup>

Unqualified interpreters cannot provide effective access to a free and appropriate public education. Research shows that interpreters who fall below minimum standards omit and distort a significant amount of teacher and peer communication. When an interpreter is not highly qualified, a student who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing misses vital classroom communication and does not receive adequate access to the general education curriculum.<sup>2</sup>

EIPA Diagnostic Center at Boys Town National Research Hospital developed research-based standards for educational interpreters and the corresponding written and performance assessments. The EIPA Diagnostic Center stipulates minimum qualifications of an educational interpreter shall include an EIPA score of at least a 4.0.

As such, a minimum 4.0 EIPA standard will ascertain at a minimum, an interpreter "would be able to convey much of the classroom content, but may have difficulty with complex topics or rapid turn taking."<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, the current minimum requirement ascertains an interpreter "would be able to communicate very basic classroom content, but may incorrectly interpret complex information resulting in a message that is not always clear."<sup>4</sup>

Having a qualified sign language interpreter in the classroom is critical to the educational and social/emotional development of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing student. As a whole, interpreters shall also have the ability to adapt to the maturity level and expectations for students at various developmental levels.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to providing communication access, interpreters are often language models for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students in the mainstream setting. As Deaf and Hard of Hearing children have limited access to Deaf adults as native language models, educational interpreters often assume this

role in the educational setting. Increasing minimum EIPA score requirements will ensure educational interpreters have excellent English and sign communication skills.<sup>6</sup>

### **Revise Grace Period**

An interim approval of two years is considered too long of a grace period as this is at the expense of Deaf and Hard of Hearing students receiving sub-par interpreting services. The grace period should be reduced to one year.

Furthermore, the clause in Section 25.550 (a)(4) exempting individuals who have been issued approvals prior to June 30, 2013 should be eliminated. These individuals have now had five years to improve their signing proficiencies, and shall be required to meet minimum standards.

### **Required Transition Period**

Increasing the score from 3.5 to 4.0 may cause a detriment to the hiring process, so it is recommended to have a 3-5 year transition period to allow training programs to improve their standards so their graduating students can obtain jobs in a competitive field.

While we appreciate changes may affect interpreters' respective livelihoods, it is not acceptable for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students not to receive effective access to a free and appropriate public education. To this end, it is critical the State of Illinois, either via funding through the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and/or the Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission (IDHHC), provide monies to augment costs of trainings designed to assist educational interpreters with skill and knowledge development.

### **Salary Expectations**

Interpreters' salaries need to be competitive; as such, interpreters shall not be classified as "paraprofessionals" when negotiating contracts. If we look to raise standards for interpreters, compensation shall also improve to ensure we attract higher qualified individuals into the field of educational interpreting.

### **Develop and Distribute Guidelines**

There is a need to develop and distribute guidelines for school districts to follow. These guidelines should include:

- Sample job descriptions for educational interpreters – this shall include a list of responsibilities and requirements.
- Best practices to ensure interpreters are adequately prepared.
- Recommendations regarding educational interpreters' involvement with IEP and their role and responsibilities as a member of the educational team.
- Recommendations for contingency planning to ensure coverage is always in place in case enough interpreters are not available.

In conjunction, we recommend developing guidelines for using teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing as classroom interpreters.

### **Parent and Guardian Education**

There is a need to ensure every parent/guardian of Deaf and Hard of Hearing children understand the role of an educational interpreter and how to advocate for their Deaf and Hard of Hearing children. The following information needs to be shared with parents:

- The role of an educational interpreter and minimum qualifications interpreters need to have to do their job effectively.
- Who to contact if there are concerns regarding the interpreter and/or effectiveness of interpreting services.
- A comprehensive list of parents' legal rights and options for their children.

### **Advisory Council Establishment**

We also recommend the ISBE look to establish an advisory council to gather information, feedback and ideas from experts, consumers, parents and other pertinent stakeholders. The advisory council shall address issues raised within this position statement and draft comprehensive fair practice guidelines and recommendations, as well as make recommendations to the General Assembly and other pertinent executive state agencies.

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Adopted September 8, 2018 by the Illinois Association of the Deaf Board of Directors with great appreciation to the 2017-2019 Education Strategy Team.

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### **Resources/References**

<sup>1</sup> N/A. (2012) *Position Statement on Inclusion*. National Association of the Deaf. Retrieved August 9, 2018, from <https://www.nad.org/about-us/position-statements/position-statement-on-inclusion/>.

<sup>2</sup> Schick, B. (2014). *Classroom Interpreting for Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing: A Guide for Administrators*. Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center. Retrieved August 13, 2018, from <http://www3.gallaudet.edu/clerc-center/our-resources/publications/classroom-interpreting-for-students-who-are-deaf-or-hard-of-hearing.html>.

<sup>3,4</sup> N/A. (2018) *Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment*. Boys Town National Research Hospital. Retrieved August 9, 2018, from <https://www.classroominterpreting.org/eipa/performance/rating.asp>.

<sup>5</sup> N/A. (2018). *EIPA Guidelines of Professional Conduct for Educational Interpreters*. Boys Town National Research Hospital. Retrieved August 18, 2018, from [https://www.classroominterpreting.org/Interpreters/proguidelines/EIPA\\_guidelines.pdf](https://www.classroominterpreting.org/Interpreters/proguidelines/EIPA_guidelines.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> N/A. (2018). *Classroom Interpreting*. Boys Town National Research Hospital. Retrieved August 22, 2018, from <https://www.classroominterpreting.org/Interpreters/children/Interpreting/languagemodel.asp>.