

Role of the Educational Interpreter

Evidence-Based Guidance for School Administrators in Minnesota

What is an Educational Interpreter? An educational interpreter is a professional member of the educational team who facilitates equal access to communication and instruction for students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (D/HH). The interpreter is not a teacher, paraprofessional, or personal aide.

Primary Responsibilities

- Conveys all spoken class content to sign/transliteration and voices student signs accurately.
- Previews curricula, technical vocabulary, and lesson media to ensure technical precision.
- Provides objective data on student's communication usage and access needs.
- Environmental Management: Assists teacher with sightlines, lighting, and acoustic positioning.
- Encourages direct interaction between teacher, peers, and student.

Outside Scope of Role

- Monitoring or enforcing general behavior policies for any student.
- Modifying tests, grading assignments, or choosing curriculum materials.
- Acting as personal companion, runner, or clerical aide like a paraprofessional might.
- Teaching new academic content without explicit teacher direction.
- Serving as a substitute teacher or supervising duty periods during class time.

Interpreter or Paraprofessional: Who Does What?

Dimension	Educational Interpreter	Paraprofessional/Teachers' Aide
Primary focus	Facilitate complete auditory and visual communication access.	Provide direct academic support, behavior management, and supervision.
Student autonomy	Acts as a neutral communication bridge; avoids dependency.	Provides step-by-step guidance, prompts, and personal assistance to aid students.
Curriculum control	Transliterates content without adding, omitting, or altering meaning. Will use knowledge of student language level to determine how they present the message in a way that ensures clarity.	Applies teacher-assigned modifications and adaptations directly.
Classroom interactions	Redirects student questions back to the classroom teacher.	Directly answers student queries and assists with assignment completion.

REFERENCES & RESOURCES FOR ADMINISTRATORS

- Boys Town National Research Hospital – Classroom Interpreting: <https://www.classroominterpreting.org>
- EIPA Guidelines of Professional Conduct for Educational Interpreters (Schick, B. / Boys Town)
- Minnesota Statute § 122A.31 (Educational Interpreter Standards & Mentoring Requirements)
- Minnesota Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (MRID): <https://mrid.org>
- IDEA Federal Regulations: 34 CFR § 300.34(c)(4) Related Services





Myth

"The interpreter is assigned solely to assist one specific student."

Reality: Interpreters serve the entire classroom environment. They allow hearing teachers and peers to communicate with the Deaf/Hard of Hearing student just as much as they help the student hear the class.

Administrative Myths vs Realities

Myth

"If the student isn't paying attention, the interpreter should stop or discipline them."

Reality: The interpreter must continue interpreting available auditory information regardless of student attention. Managing student engagement remains the classroom teacher's duty.

Myth

"Interpreters can cover duties or substitute when the student is absent."

Reality: Reassigning interpreters to general supervision (recess, lunch, subbing) compromises their required preparation time and cognitive recovery, directly impacting legal IEP compliance.

What Does Collaboration Look Like for Educators?

Timeframe	Classroom Teacher Responsibilities	Interpreter Responsibilities
Before Lesson Preparation	Provides lesson plans, readings, vocabulary lists, and videos (with captions) 3–5 days in advance.	Reviews materials, researches specialized technical signs, and plans communication strategies.
During Lesson Instruction	Addresses the student directly ("What do you think?") rather than speaking to the interpreter ("Ask him...").	Renders all spoken communication, environmental sounds, and peer comments faithfully.
After Lesson Debrief	Evaluates student comprehension and determines needed academic remediation.	Shares observations regarding communication access and signing clarity with the teacher.

Administrative Checklist for Principals

Make sure these conditions are met in your building to maintain legal compliance and interpreter performance:

- ✓ Schedule dedicated daily **prep time** equal to classroom teachers for content/sign vocabulary review.
- ✓ Provide **short breaks** during intensive block periods (interpreting fatigue sets in after 45-60 min).
- ✓ Include the interpreter in **IEP meetings** as an active team member regarding language access.