

# Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for Educational Translators and Interpreters of Spoken Languages



A publication of  
**NAETISL**

**National Association of Educational Translators  
and Interpreters of Spoken Languages**

[www.naetisl.org](http://www.naetisl.org)



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# VISION

In order to engage in their student's education, emergent bilingual families must receive the basic opportunity to share and understand information and concerns that are vital to their child's well-being, health, safety, and education.

Language rights are civil rights which are inextricably linked to the rights of students. If we have a genuine interest in providing a free and appropriate education for all students, then our commitment should also extend to meaningfully including all families as a critical part of their support base. Language access policies and practices must be centered in inclusive schooling practices and promoted as an integral piece to preserving the rights all families have to accessing the full benefits of public education in this country.

Family engagement, through quality communication, is a core component in strategies to eliminate the opportunity gap and appears in social justice goals that seek to disrupt discriminatory systems that perpetuate disparate outcomes based on race, ethnicity, and country of origin.

## **NAETISL believes:**

...that emergent bilingual students, their families, and the educators that support them, should have access to, and be able to collaborate with, professional, highly qualified, and nationally certified educational translators and interpreters of spoken languages.

## **NAETISL acknowledges:**

...the impact of professional, highly qualified, and nationally certified educational translators and interpreters of spoken languages, on family engagement and student achievement in early childhood and K-12 education.

## **NAETISL promotes:**

... high standards of ethical practice and professional integrity of educational translators and interpreters of spoken languages in early childhood and K-12 education, by developing and disseminating the academic and professional credentials required to attain and maintain a national certification in the field.

## **NAETISL advocates:**

...for emergent bilingual students, families, school districts, school administrators, teachers, educational translators and interpreters of spoken languages, and other community stakeholders, by striving to enhance the quality of translation and interpretation through the promotion of high standards, best practices, and accountability.

## **NAETISL IS A 501(C)(3) NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION**

Your membership supports the development of resources for emergent bilingual families, interpreters, translators and educators. For membership options, please visit: <https://naetisl.org/membership>



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## Acknowledgements

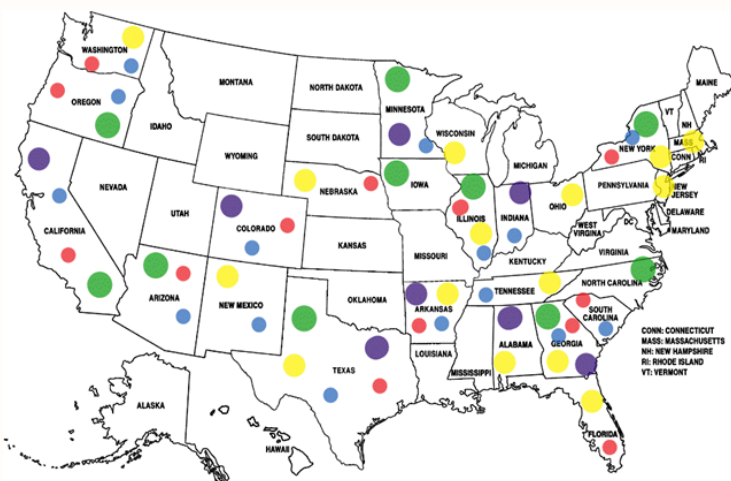
This document draws upon the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for Educational Interpreters of Spoken Language that was developed over five years by the University of Minnesota Program on Translation and Interpreting and the Minnesota Department of Education with support from grant #H323A100010 from the Office of Special Education Programs at the U.S. Department of Education. We appreciate the Minnesota Department of Education and the National Code of Ethics for Interpreters in Health Care (NCIHC 2005) for providing the initial framework for these nationally-vetted standards for educational translators and spoken language interpreters.

Abiding by our commitment to involve stakeholders in the process of establishing qualifications, standards and best practices for educational translators and interpreters of spoken languages, this Code of Ethics was reviewed by a sample of:

- Early Childhood and K-12 Teachers
- Multilingual School Personnel
- Department of Education Representatives (Title I, Title III, Early Childhood and Exceptional Student Offices)
- Emergent Bilingual/Multilingual Families
- Bilingual Family Engagement and Parent Outreach Coordinators
- Certified Medical, Legal and Sign Language Interpreters
- School District Faculty and Staff (School Principals, Special Education Teachers, General Education Teachers, Speech and Language Pathologists, and School Psychologists)

Our special thanks to NAETISL's Board of Directors, Standards and Best Practices Committee Coordinators, and the University of Georgia Faculty for providing guidance on survey development and data analysis, along with insightful recommendations and feedback.

## Stakeholders Involved in the National Vetting Process



- **School district faculty and staff (School Principals, Special Education Teachers, General Education Teachers, Speech and Language Pathologists, and School Psychologists)**
- **Department of Education representatives (Title I, Title III, Early Childhood and Exceptional Student Offices)**
- **Early childhood and K-12 linguistically diverse families who received interpreter assistance**
- **K-12 Family Engagement and Bilingual Parent Outreach Coordinators**
- **Certified Medical, Legal and Sign Language Interpreters**

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# Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for Educational Translators and Interpreters of Spoken Languages

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# Overview

The National Association of Educational Translators and Interpreters of Spoken Languages (<https://naetisl.org/>) believes that our linguistically diverse families have the right to be supported by interpreters and translators who have been specifically trained to work in educational settings. The profession of the Educational Translator or Spoken Language Interpreter is unique and therefore, requires a specific set of standards of practice that professionals can follow as guidance to provide the best services possible to families, students and school personnel. This Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice includes guidelines for translators (who work providing language access through written documents) and spoken language interpreters (who provide oral renditions from one language to another). This Code also includes guidelines for those working with students, parents and school personnel in general education and special education in early childhood and K-12 settings.

This is intended to be a **living document**, providing in-depth explanations and examples that reflect our common experiences as professionals in education settings. We envision a framework where stakeholders will continuously share examples of the Code in practice to establish a collective understanding of the standards, qualifications and certification requirements for educational translators and interpreters of spoken languages. NAETISL and its Standards and Best Practices Committee will continue to seek and review stakeholder feedback and will update the Code of Ethics accordingly. Examples, case scenarios and suggestions specific to the NAETISL Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice can be sent to: [naetisl@gmail.com](mailto:naetisl@gmail.com)

## Language Access in Early Childhood and K-12 Settings

For more information about language access legislation and guidance in early childhood and K-12, access:

- Collaborating with Spoken Language Interpreters: A Primer for School Leaders: <https://naetisl.org/resources>
- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964: <https://www.justice.gov/crt/fcs/TitleVI-Overview>
- Executive Order 13166: <https://www.justice.gov/crt/executive-order-13166>
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statuteregulations/>
- Office of Civil Rights and Department of Justice Guidance on Schools' Civil Rights Obligations to English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/ellresources.html>

## Spoken Language Interpreter:

An interpreter renders verbal communications from one language (source language) into another language (target language). In order to provide language access to linguistically diverse families, school districts rely on a combination of bilingual/multilingual school personnel and freelance/contract interpreters. The job functions and titles of school personnel providing interpretation and translation services may include Parent Outreach Liaison, Family Engagement Facilitator, Teacher, Instructional Aid, Clinic Worker, Front Office Clerk and countless others. Therefore, a Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice must encompass the fluidity of the roles played by bilingual, multicultural and biliterate personnel in an early childhood and K-12 setting. Regardless of their function in a school setting, the bilingual and biliterate person who is called upon to interpret and/or translate, is responsible for maintaining the role, performance standards and ethical responsibilities of an interpreter or translator, while performing those functions. Ideally, a school staff member with a dual role, for example, a Bilingual Teacher, should refrain from interpreting at meetings that involve a family or student in their own class.

## Translator:

A translator abides by professional standards to render written communication from the source language to the target language effectively and accurately, ensuring that the meaning of the communication is clear and conceptually correct in the target language. In early childhood and K-12 settings, professionals hired to support families with interpretation are often, automatically, given the duties of a translator. Because the skills of an interpreter and a translator are distinct, early childhood and K-12 settings must ensure that translators have the literacy and terminology skills necessary to render accurate and effective communication in a written format.



# Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for Educational Translators and Interpreters of Spoken Languages (Short Version)



## CONFIDENTIALITY

All information learned in the performance of their duties as translators and spoken language interpreters in general and special education settings is kept confidential, while observing relevant legal requirements regarding disclosure. Interpreters and translators adhere to all existing federal, or state laws or acts concerning confidentiality, including, but not limited to, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), when reviewing, sight translating, interpreting, or translating student records, transcripts, medical records and other documents pertaining to the student or the family.



## IMPARTIALITY

Translators and spoken language interpreters in education strive to maintain impartiality and refrain from counseling, advising, or projecting personal opinions, biases, or beliefs, adopting a mantle of neutrality.



## RESPECT

Translators and spoken language interpreters in education treat all parties with respect, resolving conflicts with utmost professionalism.



## ADVOCACY

When the student's health, well-being, or dignity are at risk, or when student educational access and outcomes are compromised, translators and spoken language interpreters in education may be justified in acting as advocates.



## ACCURACY

Translators and spoken language interpreters in education strive to render messages accurately, conveying the content and spirit of the original message, taking into consideration its cultural context. Translators maintain accuracy of units of information avoiding omissions and additions, abiding by grammar rules in their respective language. Spoken language interpreters and translators preserve the register of the source speech/text, considering natural differences between languages.



## PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

Translators and spoken language interpreters in education maintain the boundaries of the professional role, refraining from other types of involvement.



## PROFESSIONALISM

Translators and spoken language interpreters in education must always act in a professional manner.



## CULTURAL AWARENESS

Translators and spoken language interpreters in education promote and maintain respect for the cultural beliefs and practices of educators, families and colleagues.



## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Translators and spoken language interpreters in education strive to continually further their knowledge and skills.

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## CONFIDENTIALITY

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As members of the multidisciplinary team, spoken language interpreters and translators working in early childhood and K-12 settings must protect the privacy of educational information and understand that only members of the education team should have access to such information. The only exceptions to data privacy are situations where child abuse is suspected and where the interpreter may be a mandated reporter as defined in state laws. Any information divulged according to mandated reporting disclosure requirements should be limited to specific information necessary and relevant to the suspected abuse. Spoken language interpreters and translators working in education, must obtain additional information about their status as mandatory reporters from immediate supervisors in their respective settings (early childhood, K-12 or language services agencies). Translators and spoken language interpreters in education shall:

- Inform parties that all the information will be confidential to reassure that no important information or helpful details are left unsaid.
- Not divulge either specific or general information to third parties or anyone outside of the actual encounter, including a student who is the subject of discussion.
- Refer all questions about confidential information to their immediate supervisor in the early childhood or K-12 setting or interpreter agency.
- Safeguard their notes when they are working as an in-person interpreter or Video Remote/Over the Phone Interpreter, shredding and disposing of them after a meeting as appropriate. Translators producing documents and forms that contain student/family information must prevent unauthorized access. Notes, drafts and glossaries produced while translating documents must also be safeguarded if they include student identifiable information.
- Refrain from revealing confidential information about a student or family, if for some reason the interpreter or translator needs to consult with a professional colleague or mentor about a matter discussed in a meeting. The professional shall give enough context to present the problem or concern, while limiting and protecting identifiable information.



## ACCURACY

**Translators and spoken language interpreters in education strive to render messages accurately, conveying the content and spirit of the original message, taking into consideration its cultural context. Translators maintain accuracy of units of information avoiding omissions and additions, abiding by grammar rules in their respective language. Spoken language interpreters and translators preserve the register of the source speech/text, considering natural differences between languages.**

Translators and spoken language interpreters in education shall:

- Avoid literal (word-for-word) interpretations and translations, as they are generally inaccurate. Ensure that all parties understand that some educational concepts may not exist in the target language and therefore, additional words and explanation may be needed.
- Understand that accuracy is both linguistic and cultural. Therefore, before making word choices, the interpreter and translator carefully weighs meaning given the cultural background and register levels of the parties. Translators are encouraged to use footnotes or notes to indicate the best solution to an unresolvable term, or highlight dialectal differences in their respective languages.



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- Recognize that accuracy at times requires the interpreter or translator to convey offensive and emotional content. The interpreter or translator maintains the message in all its complexities and impact. The professional must understand the concept of Functional Equivalence to ensure that the speaker's effect on an audience is the same among audience members who understand the speaker's language.
- Include hesitation and pauses (such as "um", "ah" and others) in the message as they may have an impact on the meaning of the message relayed.
- Relay and preserve any errors, inaccuracies, falsehoods, and omissions contained in the original message.
- Strive to convey the meaning behind nonlinguistic elements such as gestures of emphasis, body language, and tone of voice. To maintain the accuracy of a message, the interpreter may need to evaluate whether nonverbal cues need to be interpreted verbally or nonverbally and ask the speaker to clarify their meaning.
- Ask for repetition and clarification when necessary and request examples if needed.



## IMPARTIALITY

**Translators and spoken language interpreters in education strive to maintain impartiality and refrain from counseling, advising, or projecting personal opinions, biases, or beliefs, adopting a mantle of neutrality.**

Translators and spoken language interpreters in education shall:

- Disclose any prior personal or previous professional involvement with any party that may be perceived as a conflict of interest, and allow the school personnel conducting the encounter to determine if impartiality will be an issue.
- Decline to accept an assignment when there is a conflict of interest and impartiality cannot be maintained. Instances when this may occur are when one of the parties is a family member, friend, or business associate.
- Cite the Code of Ethics and professional judgement as reasons to avoid sharing advice, information, likely outcomes, or personal opinions if asked by a parent/staff member. The interpreter must share this concern with all parties present.
- Refrain from becoming personally involved with the parties.
- Avoid any conduct or behavior that may suggest preference for one party over the other.



## RESPECT

**Translators and spoken language interpreters in education treat all parties with respect, resolving conflicts with utmost professionalism.**

Respect is a fundamental principle of successful and mutually beneficial interactions. Translators and spoken language interpreters in education shall:

- Work collaboratively and cooperatively with colleagues, families, school staff members, and other interpreters and translators.
- Attempt to resolve any conflict that may arise in a prompt and professional manner.
- Strive to recognize personal cultural biases and work towards a resolution.
- Discuss language variations with professionalism providing constructive criticism, resources and peer support when needed.
- Collaborate with school personnel to determine the steps to take should a family decline the services of the interpreter. Schools should follow best practice and allow a trained spoken language interpreter to remain in a meeting for language support, even when a family brings a bilingual community member to assist.
- Always be respectful and not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, cultural beliefs, or national origin.





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## PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

**Translators and spoken language interpreters in education maintain the boundaries of the professional role, refraining from other types of involvement.**

Professional educational interpreters provide meaningful language access services and should stay within the confines of that role during encounters that require them to interpret. We recognize however that there are individuals with dual roles within the school settings. Any individual serving as an interpreter -- including cultural liaisons, parent facilitators, administrators, paraprofessionals, or other bilingual staff called upon to interpret -- will fully comply with the interpreter's code of ethics and standards of practice while they are interpreting. There may be situations where roles unavoidably shift within the timeframe of a single encounter. If this occurs, however, all parties must be made fully aware of the fact that the role has changed. This can be done by making a statement such as the following in both languages: "The interpreter needs to step out of the interpreting role to share information about our upcoming reading workshops."

Educational interpreters should exercise caution when stepping out of their role during an encounter. They should only do so if they feel it is critical to clear communication and all other communication efforts by the parties involved have been exhausted. Interpreters and translators must take into careful consideration the tenet of the Code of Ethics concerning Advocacy and associated standards of practice. Translators and spoken language interpreters in education shall:

- Always introduce and define the limitations of their role as an interpreter to all parties in both languages before a meeting.
- Ask all parties to address situations pertaining to the second role before or after the session to maintain the integrity of the interpreter's job at the meeting.
- Refrain from personally discussing the case at hand with the parent and/or student.
- Not perform favors for clients such as providing transportation or childcare which may have a negative impact on the interpreter's ability to remain impartial. Interpreters can, however, direct parents to someone at the school who can provide such assistance while continuing to address language access.
- Strive to share any additional pertinent information with the team whenever possible in a pre or post-session, unless an urgent situation arises and it is not recommended for the interpreter to step out of their role during the meeting.



## ADVOCACY

**When the student's health, well-being, or dignity are at risk, or when student educational access and outcomes are compromised, translators and spoken language interpreters in education may be justified in acting as advocates.**

Advocacy is understood as an action taken on behalf of an individual that goes beyond facilitating communication, with the intention of supporting good educational outcomes. Interpreters serve to facilitate direct communication between parties who speak two different languages. Steps to advocate for any party should only be undertaken after careful and thoughtful analysis. If other less intrusive actions have not resolved a well-defined and specific problem, the interpreter may intervene if the situation is urgent and has not been noticed by other parties. For example, the interpreter may intervene on behalf of a student with a life-threatening allergy if it has been overlooked by the other parties. This can be done by making a statement such as the following in both languages: "The interpreter needs to step out of the interpreting role to share information about the student's life-threatening allergy."



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Translators and spoken language interpreters in education shall:

- Notify an appropriate supervisor or authority if they recognize that emotional or physical harm is imminent to a party.
- Notify an appropriate supervisor or authority if the interpreter is aware of an educational disadvantage affecting the student.
- Provide information about internal/external community resources that may be helpful to the English Learner's family as long as resources are also shared with school personnel to maintain transparency and strengthen trust among all parties.



## CULTURAL AWARENESS

**Translators and spoken language interpreters in education promote and maintain respect for the cultural beliefs and practices of educators, families and colleagues.**

Educational interpreters and translators need to be aware of the unique cultural dynamics of those they serve. It should be noted that educational institutions have their own unique cultural norms and expectations. Translators and spoken language interpreters in education shall:

- Strive to understand cultural differences within the language groups they serve such as traditions, practices and beliefs. If a particular recommendation conflicts with cultural practices, the interpreter addresses the issue when meeting with school staff outside of the interpreted encounter without many generalizations, without stereotyping, and without making assumptions of a family in a particular culture.
- Share cultural understanding and impressions as members of the multidisciplinary educational team (preferably during the pre or post meeting with school personnel), without explaining culture on behalf of the family.
- Mediate to point out a break in communication due to a cultural difference. The mediation must be conducted in a sensitive manner in order to maintain the flow of communication. The spoken language interpreter can make a statement such as the following in both languages: "The interpreter needs to step out of the interpreting role to clarify cultural differences." Translators must consult with the author or the original document to ensure that cultural differences and misunderstandings are addressed prior to completing the translation.
- Develop awareness of idioms, slang, jokes, and cultural/regional differences.
- Be a source of cultural information but not consider themselves experts in a particular culture nor convey this misconception to other members of the multidisciplinary team.
- Ensure that dialectal and cultural differences are addressed in the evaluation and special education process. Translators and interpreters must be aware of the additional skills required to support families during early childhood screening sessions and psychoeducational evaluations.



## PROFESSIONALISM

**Translators and spoken language interpreters in education must always act in a professional manner.**

Translators and spoken language interpreters in education shall:

- Only accept assignments for which they have been sufficiently trained, prepared, or briefed, in particular when the assignment involves the assessment of speech/language, mental health, and/or student academic performance, and meetings that involve the eligibility and individualized education program of a student.
- Always introduce and define their role to all parties and in both languages.
- Always arrive prepared for the assignment.
- Present themselves appropriately in their attire and demeanor.
- Refrain from discussing students or situations with people outside of the educational setting or outside of the educational team.



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- Accept the responsibility to mentor new interpreters and translators entering the field, and those in need of developing their skills.
- Engage in appropriate and timely self-care and take advantage of debriefing opportunities, particularly after a difficult meeting.
- Request and be allowed to work, if possible, with another interpreter for assignments lasting longer than two hours and assignments that are expected to be emotionally charged or difficult in nature.
- Accurately represent their credentials such as training, certifications, certificates, and work experience.
- Disclose their cultural and/or linguistic limitations when supporting multidisciplinary teams. A translator and spoken language interpreter must assist linguistically diverse families and school personnel only when the appropriate level of skills, training and certification have been attained.



## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### **Translators and spoken language interpreters in education strive to continually further their knowledge and skills.**

Educational translators and spoken language interpreters are expected to foster and maintain competence through ongoing learning.

Translators and spoken language interpreters in education shall:

- Seek to improve their interpreting and translation skills and language competency.
- Keep abreast of any changes in special education and general education laws, policies, practices, procedures, and rules.
- Understand the implications of not having appropriate training to assist multidisciplinary educational teams. For example, assisting school psychologists and speech-language pathologists with interpretation of measures used during assessments, requires specific knowledge of assessment protocols, timing and factors that protect reliability and validity of results.
- Make every effort to attend district-sponsored training events or other continuing education opportunities that can contribute to their professional development.
- Maintain awareness of cultural and current events of the communities they serve.

## **Approved by the National Association of Educational Translators and Interpreters of Spoken Languages (NAETISL) and the National Code of Ethics and Standards Review Committee– 2020 (Revised August, 2022)**

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