



## Working with a Professional Interpreter in Education

**It is important that schools take extra steps to communicate with culturally and linguistically diverse families. Bilingual school staff may be able to help with casual communication. For meetings such as parent-teacher conferences, IEPs, SSTs and Disciplinary Hearings, among others, it is necessary to take more deliberate steps to protect the integrity of the information.**

- ✓ **Remember:** Speaking the target language does not ensure that a person will be a good interpreter.
- ✓ **Students should not be asked to interpret** as they may not have the language skills necessary to transfer messages from one language to another, and may be inclined to omit or edit information that is crucial for parents to hear. When acting as interpreters, children may also be placed in an awkward situation which may disrupt family roles.
- ✓ If at all possible, **speak with the interpreter prior to the meeting** to discuss goals, terminology and background. Share any documents that you will be reviewing during the meeting. Professional Interpreters in Education abide by a Code of Ethics <https://www.naetisl.net/code-of-ethics/> that requires them to protect student and family information.
- ✓ Professional Interpreters in Education **should introduce themselves** explaining that all information will be kept confidential, that everything heard will be interpreted, and that they will be impartial members of the meeting. This information will be relayed to both, the school personnel and the English Learner family.
- ✓ Advise the group that **only one person** will speak at a time. It is hard to interpret multiple conversations and the goal is to ensure that English Learner families and schools have all the information they need.
- ✓ **Speak directly to the parties involved**, not the interpreter. The parent should feel that the communication is as direct as possible.
- ✓ **Ensure comprehension** by asking, through the interpreter, if the English Learner understands what you are saying. Do not depend upon the interpreter to ensure understanding. The interpreter is there to deliver messages in both languages. Feel free to ask the interpreter to clarify or rephrase any information.
- ✓ **Pause frequently** to allow the interpreter to relay thoughts in meaningful “chunks.” While your message may be short, interpreted messages are often much longer. The interpreter may request that speakers pause if the speech is occurring too quickly or if a term is unknown.
- ✓ Avoid **long, complex sentences, slang, jargon and abbreviations**. Humor can often be difficult to interpret.
- ✓ Professional Interpreters in Education **will speak in first person** to emphasize their role as a neutral and impartial party.
- ✓ Many **people with some fluency in English** may still prefer to use an interpreter due to the complexity of educational terms. Please don't assume that a family does not speak or understand English.
- ✓ **Allow time for the parent** to provide additional information and ask questions. It is important that the parents feel that they have been heard.
- ✓ Professional Interpreters in Education **can also be cultural mediators**. However, they are not experts in all cultures. Interpreters can help you navigate through cultural dilemmas.
- ✓ As a neutral party of the meeting, Professional Interpreters in Education **cannot provide their opinions, suggestions or advice**. Interpreters can provide cultural and language insight before or after the meeting if needed.
- ✓ Monitor the quality of communication. **Stop and make adjustments** at the first signs of miscommunication. The closer you can maintain an even pattern and keep focused on the English Learner, the more the interpreter will seem to disappear from the conversation.
- ✓ When you are **supported by a Professional Interpreter in Education**, you should be able to forget that you and the English Learner are speaking two different languages!

