If you are interpreting virtually, ensure that the family has a chance to ask questions about the technology used.

Smile. These meetings are intimidating for everyone regardless of language or culture differences.

Come prepared to take notes and learn new terminology for your next special education meeting.

Be prepared to sight translate documents always in the presence and under the guidance of school staff.

Debrief with school staff after the meeting.

Ask for and provide feedback to improve future special education meetings.
PLAN & PREPARE

- Ensure the interpreter selected has received specialized training in the field of special education.
- For meetings longer than 1 hour, plan to have two interpreters. Interpreting is mentally exhausting, especially when complex information such as special education terms are presented.

SHARE INFORMATION

- Send the interpreter as much information as possible about the meeting to help them prepare. The interpreter can benefit from knowing the disability category and school level of the student.
- Share templates of special education forms that are used in your school district.
- Share the names and titles of the staff members present with the interpreter. This will help the interpreter come prepared and plan ahead for seating arrangements for in-person sessions.

ONE-ON-ONE

- Have a conversation with the interpreter before the meeting clarify terminology and cultural factors that may impede communication.
- Remember, interpreters are not culture experts. However, they can share valuable information about their specific experiences that may help guide you.
- Some interpreters prefer to relay information simultaneously (almost at the same time as you speak) or in consecutive mode (taking turns when speaking). Have a conversation with the interpreter ahead of time to select the best choice.
- Encourage interpreters to ask questions about terms they may not know.

DURING THE MEETING

- Allow interpreters to introduce themselves and their role in English and the language they are interpreting.
- Use clear and plain language to explain special education procedures and terminology.
- Spell out abbreviations.
- Understand that some terms may not exist in other languages and the interpreter may need more explanation and examples to be accurate.
- Allow time for the interpreter to relay the information.
- Pause after 3-4 sentences to allow the interpreter to relay the information accurately.
- Encourage everyone to speak one at a time.
- Everything spoken during the meeting will be interpreted. Side conversations are distracting and will prevent the interpreter from providing complete information to the family.

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

- Avoid asking interpreters for input, suggestions, or guidance about a family’s decision. A trained and professional interpreter in education will remain neutral and impartial at all times.
- Some interpreters can read a document in English and relay the information to the family in their language of interpretation. However, you should remain present as all questions should be directed to you and not the interpreter.
- Teach Back. Make sure the family understands the information by asking them to tell you, in their own words and through the interpreter, what is heard.
- Notice non-verbal cues from the family or the interpreter that may reflect that they are not understanding or need clarification.

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