



Working with a Professional Interpreter in Education

These guidelines to work with a Professional Interpreter in Education were developed with the input and collaboration of Certified Medical Interpreters, Parent Engagement Facilitators, School Administrators, SeSo, Inc. and students who completed the University of Georgia Professional Interpreter in Education Certificate course (<https://www.georgiacenter.uga.edu/courses/teaching-and-education/languages/professional-interpreters-edu>).

We believe that our English Learner families have the right to be supported by interpreters who have been specifically trained to work in educational settings, in order to protect the integrity and accuracy of the information.

Selecting an Interpreter

Selecting an interpreter requires careful consideration to ensure that the intent of the message is fully understood and that communication is provided at a proficiency and professional level appropriate for the task. Prior to assisting school districts with interpretation, medical, legal and community interpreters must obtain additional training and terminology to equip them to relay information related to academics, behavior, special education, parental engagement and other important matters that pertain to the educational system.

Working with an Interpreter

- **Speaking the target language does not ensure that person will be a good interpreter.** Make sure that the interpreter you selected has received the appropriate training to work in an educational setting.
- **Do not use children or family members as interpreters.** Children often do not have the language skills necessary to interpret and they may, along with family members, be inclined to omit or edit information that is crucial for parents to hear. In addition, when acting as interpreters, children are placed in an awkward situation which may disrupt family roles.
- If at all possible, **speak with the interpreter prior to the meeting** to discuss the nature and goals of the meeting and terminology that may need clarification.
- Begin by **introducing the parents and invited parties to the others** and allow school personnel to introduce themselves by name and position.
- Advise the group that **only one person will speak at a time** and speak directly to the parties involved, **not the interpreter**. Maintain eye contact with the persons to whom the comments are being directed, not the interpreter. **The parent needs to feel that the communication is as direct as possible.**
- **Pause frequently** to allow the interpreter to relay thoughts in meaningful “chunks.”
- **Avoid long, complex sentences, slang, jargon and colloquial expressions.** Humor can often be difficult to interpret.
- Many people with some fluency in English may still prefer to use an interpreter because they are not comfortable with the nuances of the English language. Please don't assume that a family does not speak or understand English at all. **Since many parents have some level of understanding in English and the Professional Interpreter must be able to hear all parties, side conversations should be limited.**
- **Pace yourself.** Allow time for the message to be conveyed. While your message may be short, interpreted messages are often much longer.
- Allow time for the parent to provide additional information and ask questions. It is important that the **parents feel that they have been heard.**
- A Professional Interpreter in Education will also be able to help you navigate the parents' culture and make sure that messages relayed are accurate, complete and sensitive to the English Learners in the room.

