



Illinois State Board of Education Special Education Department

Guidance Document Qualified Interpreters

This document is intended to provide non-regulatory guidance on the subject matter listed above. For specific questions, please contact the Illinois State Board of Education.

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Guidance Document Qualified Interpreters

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A. Definition

A-1. What is a “qualified interpreter”?

23 IAC 226.75 defines a qualified interpreter as a school staff member or other personnel who is bilingual and demonstrably qualified and competent to interpret between English and another language, trained in providing the interpretations requested and sufficiently knowledgeable in both languages of any specialized terminology needed, and trained in the ethics of interpretation. The qualified interpreter could be an individual that a Local Educational Agency (LEA) has on staff or an individual the LEA contracts with on an “as needed” basis.

23 IAC 226.800(l) provides the requirements for qualified interpreters. Although it went into effect on January 22, 2021, districts will not be required to fully comply until the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) has secured a training vendor and developed its qualification process.

B. Qualified Interpreter Training

B-1. What training is required to become a qualified interpreter?

To become a qualified interpreter, one must complete at least nine hours of training in the following areas:

- Interpreting into and out of English
- Interpretation standards of practice, ethics, and confidentiality
- Role of the interpreter and role boundaries
- Respect, impartiality, professionalism, cultural competence and responsiveness, and advocacy for communication and cultural needs
- Proper and improper interpretation techniques as depicted in video format.

Additionally, it is necessary to complete at least six hours of training on special education terminology and protocol. Individuals who hold special education licenses, endorsements, or approvals are exempt from this six-hour training requirement.

B-2. Who is responsible for providing the training?

ISBE will contract a vendor to develop the training and provide assessments. When contractual arrangements have been completed, the vendor will be identified and training will commence.

B-3. If there is no training currently available, what must districts do?

Districts must provide competent interpreters for parents who need or request interpretation for meetings. Districts should ensure that the interpreters they use understand special education terminology and processes. A known interpreter may be utilized via the telephone. There may be times, however, when commercial interpretation services for languages with which their staff is not familiar may be used. Caution should be exercised as there is no guarantee the interpreters from these commercial services have special education knowledge. At a minimum, districts should ensure that commercial services are reputable and have experience interpreting in schools. Districts should work with interpreters ahead of time, if possible, to prepare them for any topics or specialized language they may encounter while interpreting the meeting.

B-4. When must trainings be completed by?

Training must be completed within the timelines specified once the entity is selected and training becomes available. Guidance will be updated once this occurs.

C. Special Education Training

C-1. What are the requirements for training in special education?

In addition to the nine hours of training on interpreting in and out of English; interpretation standards of practice, ethics, and confidentiality; the role of the interpreter and role boundaries; respect, impartiality, professionalism, cultural competence and responsiveness, and advocacy for communication and cultural needs; and proper and improper interpretation techniques as depicted in video format, qualified interpreters must complete at least six hours of training in special education terminology and protocol. Individuals who already hold special education licenses, endorsements, or approvals are exempt from this six-hour training requirement.

C-2. What will be included in the six hours of training in special education terminology and protocol provided by ISBE's vendor?

The six hours of training will include terminology related to procedures for the referral, reevaluation, identification of disabilities, and eligibility of special education and related services. It will include knowledge of terminology related to the Individualized Education Program (IEP), including present levels of achievement and functional performance, goals and objectives,

supplementary aids, accommodations and modifications, postsecondary transition plan, behavior intervention plan, and educational services and placement. Training will inform interpreters about procedural safeguards, including dispute resolution options. Training will cover commonly used special education vocabulary, including acronyms that may be used by special education personnel during IEP meetings, and shall include, but not be limited to categories of disability, least restrictive environment, and related services. Pursuant to 23 IAC 226.800(I)(1)(E), individuals must pass a written exam on special education terminology and protocol, interpretation standards and techniques, and interpretation ethics. To be qualified, a minimum score of 80% must be achieved.

C-3. Can districts and cooperatives provide this training?

Until official training is put in place, it is recommended that districts and cooperatives provide training to ensure that the interpreters they use have a good understanding of special education terminology and processes; however, this training will not count towards the training required to become a qualified interpreter.

C-4. If a district uses an external vendor for interpretation services such as teleservices, how will those interpreters receive the special education training?

Qualified interpreter training will not be limited to individuals currently within the school context. Any individual is welcome to register for the qualified interpreter training once it is available. School districts should understand there is a risk that an external vendor (i.e., teleservices) may not have interpreters familiar with special education terminology and should work with the vendor to review as much as possible (without violating confidentiality) the terms and procedures the interpreter is likely to be presented with in the meeting.

D. Exemptions to Training

D-1. Which individuals will be exempt from the training?

All individuals who wish to serve as qualified interpreters must successfully complete training; however, individuals who already hold special education licenses, endorsements, or approvals are exempt from the six-hour training requirement on special education terminology and protocol. Individuals with a special education background, such as LBS I, LBS II, PEL with special education endorsements, including Director of Special Education, School Psychologist, School Social Worker, Speech Language Pathologist, or other licensed special education practitioners are exempt from the special education portion of the training; however, they will still have to

complete the rest of the required nine hours of training related to interpretation practice, ethics, etc.

D-2. Are certified court or medical interpreters required to complete the training?

Yes, while individuals who hold interpretation certificates from the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts or who are certified medical interpreters are exempt from the state-approved language proficiency tests pursuant to 23 IAC 226.800(l)(1)(B)(ii), they are not exempt from the training requirements.

D-3. If a district has community volunteers who interpret at meetings, will those volunteers be exempt from training and be able to still interpret at meetings?

State rules [23 IAC 226.210(e)] and federal regulations [34 CFR 300.322(e)] assert that qualified interpreters must be used to interpret for IEP meetings. Community volunteers who meet the minimum qualifications may participate in the training and earn a qualified interpreter certificate.

E. Qualifications

E-1. How does an individual become qualified as a bilingual interpreter?

An individual must first demonstrate language proficiency in two languages, one being English, by passing state-approved language proficiency tests. After successful completion of the tests, the individual must register for and complete the training courses. At the end of the training courses, the individual must pass two exams, an oral exam and a written exam. The oral exam tests the interpretation skills into and from English through consecutive or simultaneous interpreting and sight translation, and applicants must score 70% or higher. The written exam tests the applicant's knowledge of special education terminology and protocol, interpretation standards and techniques, and interpretation ethics, and the minimum score to be achieved is 80%.

E-2. Does an individual have to take the training through the vendor to become qualified?

Yes, an individual will have to take the training through the vendor to become qualified.

E-3. When will the qualification be available?

Qualification will not be available until a vendor has been selected and has developed the training and exams. ISBE will send out notifications once this qualification is available.

E-4. How do qualified interpreters maintain qualification?

According to 23 IAC 226.800(l)(2), to maintain the designation of "Qualified Interpreter," an individual must, at least once every two years, participate in at least six hours of ongoing professional development related to interpretation in the following categories:

- A. Confidentiality
- B. Accuracy
- C. Impartiality
- D. Interpreter ethics and professionalism
- E. Cultural awareness
- F. Special education processes
- G. Special education vocabulary
- H. Language acquisition.

F. Examinations

F-1. What are the requirements to demonstrate proficiency?

Qualified interpreters must demonstrate proficiency in English and the target language by passing state-approved language proficiency tests. A state-approved language proficiency test must include the domains listed at 23 IAC 226.800(l)(1)(B) of listening, speaking, and reading. An individual is exempt from the testing requirements of 23 IAC 226.800 (l)(1)(B) if he or she meets any of the following:

- i) For an English language proficiency test exemption, the individual possesses a post-secondary degree in which the official language of instruction, as documented, is English
- ii) For a target language proficiency test exemption, the individual
 - possesses a post-secondary degree in which the official language of instruction as documented, is the target language;
 - possesses the State Seal of Biliteracy with a minimum score of Advanced Low in the target language;
 - receives a score of 4 or higher on the AP language test in the target language;

- currently possesses, or has possessed, an educator license with stipulations endorsed for transitional bilingual educator or a professional educator license endorsed in LBSII/Bilingual Special Education Specialist or bilingual education;
 - currently possesses an Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts Court Interpreter Certification, a Certified Medical Interpreter certification, or an Advanced Proficiency Level Interpreter License under 68 Ill. Adm. Code 1515, and the individual has completed additional coursework on special education terminology, as referenced in 23 IAC 226.800 (I)(1)(C).
- iii) In the instance of a target language for which an exam does not yet exist, a reliable alternative assessment or documentation of proficiency in that language shall be established by the State Board if it is not feasible for the State Board to otherwise offer a test in that language within a reasonable amount of time” [23 IAC 226.800(I)(1)(B)].

F-2. What is required to pass the examination?

After completing the required training, the following requirements of 23 IAC 226.800(I)(1)(E), must be met:

- i) successfully complete, with a score of 80% or higher, a written examination to demonstrate knowledge of:
 - special education terminology and protocol;
 - interpretation standards and techniques; and
 - interpretation ethics; and
- ii) successfully complete an oral examination, with a score of 70% or higher, to demonstrate proficiency in:
 - interpreting in and out of English, through consecutive or simultaneous interpreting; and
 - sight translation.

F-3. How will individuals register to take the oral and written exams?

This will be addressed once the vendor is selected and the qualification program is open.

G. Notifications to Parents

G-1. What are the requirements for notifying parents about how to request an interpreter?

In accordance with 23 IAC 226.530, the district shall take whatever action is necessary to facilitate the parent's understanding of and participation in the proceedings at a meeting, including

arranging for and covering the expense of a qualified interpreter, as described in Section 226.800(l), for parents whose native language is other than English or for an interpreter licensed pursuant to the Interpreter for the Deaf Licensure Act of 2007 (225 ILCS 443) for parents who are deaf.

Each school district must provide to all parents of children with disabilities as well as in each Notice of Conference the following information annually:

- 1) notice to all parents of children eligible for an IEP about the availability of interpretation services at IEP team meetings
- 2) an explanation of how parents can request an interpreter
- 3) notice that a parent has the right to request that the interpreter provided by the school district serve no other role in the IEP meeting other than as an interpreter and that the school district should make reasonable efforts to fulfill this request
- 4) a point of contact for any questions or complaints about interpretation services.

G-2. What documentation must school districts maintain regarding parental notification?

According to 23 IAC 226.530(c), each school district must record the following information:

- 1) if a parent requested an interpreter, had previously requested interpretation services, or had otherwise indicated that an interpreter was necessary to ensure meaningful parental involvement in the IEP meeting
- 2) the language for interpretation
- 3) if a qualified interpreter was provided for each IEP meeting
- 4) if a parent requested that the interpreter serve no other role in the IEP meeting and, if so, whether the school district granted that request.

H. Sign Language Interpreters

H-1. Do the requirements for qualified interpreters apply to sign language interpreters?

23 IAC 226.800 (l) is intended for qualified interpreters for parents whose native language is other than English, excluding American Sign Language. Requirements for sign language interpreters are included in 23 IAC 25.550 (Educational Interpreter). Regardless, it is recommended that when

sign language interpreters are provided to parents who are deaf, districts provide the interpreters with training in special education terminology and processes.

Districts must adhere to the requirements 23 IAC 226.530 (Parents' Participation) and take whatever action is necessary to facilitate the parent's understanding of and participation in the proceedings at a meeting.