

SANTA CLARA COUNTY
NORTH WEST SPECIAL EDUCATION LOCAL PLAN AREA

INTERPRETERS

An acute national shortage of bilingual psychologists, speech and language pathologists and special education teachers requires reliance on interpreters. Informed participation by an interpreter will assist in appropriate administration of assessment instruments. It is imperative that interpreters be sensitive to the cultural and linguistic differences which may influence assessment decisions, enhance parental input, and contribute to educational planning.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTING INTERPRETERS

Ideally, a school district should arrange for a pool of interpreters, either using personnel with bilingual skills or hiring outside interpreters. In either case, interpreters should have qualifications other than bilingual skills. In developing a pool of interpreters, the following should be considered:

1. Language and Dialects Spoken

Some languages have distinct dialects, so it is important to ensure that your interpreters can speak the dialect of the individual that school personnel wish to communicate with.

2. Ability to maintain confidentiality of information

Interpreters should be persons who understand the need for confidentiality. Ideally, interpreters are personnel employed by a school district who are familiar with and obligated to follow the school district's confidentiality procedures and policies. Training in confidentiality may be needed.

3. Familiarity with nature and purpose of meeting

Interpreters need to be briefed on topics that will be discussed. A list of terms that will be used should be provided. An inexperienced interpreter may incorrectly translate technical terms, such as “*intellectually disabled*” as “*crazy*”.

4. Professionalism

Since the interpreter will be “doing the talking for you”, it is important that the interpreter convey the proper tone and professionalism of meeting. Appropriate dress, manner of addressing parents, and sensitivity in discussing issues are also qualities which should be considered when looking for interpreters.

5. Distinguishing opinion from interpretation

The danger of having interpreters convey the content from their own perspective should be understood. However, the interpreter should be encouraged to convey the intent when a literal word-for-word translation is impossible. When this occurs, the speaker should be informed by the interpreter.

EFFECTIVE USE OF AN INTERPRETER IN ASSESSMENTS

Before Testing – The assessment team member and the interpreter review the following:

- The general purpose of the testing session.
- Which tests will be administered.
- Some information about the child.
- Discuss test behavior.
 - Body language of the interpreter.

- Excessive reinforcement – type and frequency.
- Excessive cueing or prompting the child (verbally or with gestures).

During Testing – The assessment team member makes the following observations of the child:

- Mixing of two languages.
- Use of gestures for purposes of communication.

After Testing – Note observations by the interpreter.

MINIMIZING INTERPRETATION ERRORS DURING CONFERENCING

1. Introduce conference participants.
2. Seating arrangements are critical. The interpreters should not block the parent from the school person. Parents must be able to see both the interpreter and speaker.
3. Address your remarks and questions directly to the parents. Even though you are using an interpreter, you want to communicate with the parents, not the translator. When parents ask questions, look towards them, and listen. Remember that much is communicated non-verbally.
4. Communicate in short segments. Keep grammatical constructions as simple as possible and minimize the use of idioms.
5. Avoid professional jargon. Explain terms such as behavior modification, reading comprehension or dysfluency.
6. Observe body language. Rely on your interpreter to assist you in understanding culturally appropriate behavior.
7. Ask the interpreter to remain neutral.
8. Make the conference comfortable and non-threatening. Limit the number of participants, especially school personnel.
9. Caution should be used in including siblings, relatives, friends or acquaintances, especially as interpreters.