



**NAETISL**  
National Association of Educational Translators and  
Interpreters of Spoken Languages

www.naetisl.org

# BEST PRACTICES FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION INTERPRETATION

## INTERPRETERS

### PLAN & PREPARE

- If possible, find out the **names** and **titles** of the people attending, and **how many**.
- Study **terminology** related to the student's disability and eligibility categories, as well as their school level.
- Study the **Parent Rights** and get familiar with the process.



### QUICK TIPS

### KEEP IN MIND



If you're a **school-based** interpreter, ask for a **copy** of the special education document ahead of time. If you're a **contract** interpreter, ask your **agency** to request as much information as possible.



Arrive **early** to talk with school staff about the meeting or unknown terminology.



Remain **flexible** with your schedule as not all special education meetings are created equal.



Understand that the school must protect **confidentiality** and **family privacy** and may be able to only share basic information.

### PRE-SESSION

- Request an opportunity to do your pre-session for both school staff and families.
- Ask school staff to spell out **abbreviations**.
- Remind all participants of the importance of **confidentiality** and to avoid **side conversations**.
- **Disclose** your skill limitations, if any.
- Ensure the **families understand** the importance of asking questions and providing feedback.



### INTERPRET

- Ask school staff whether you should interpret **consecutively** or **simultaneously** and respect their preference.
- Ask questions and **clarify**. **Accuracy** and completeness of information are crucial.
- Ask for an **example** if a term or concept is unknown. Oftentimes, **complex terminology** is easier to understand through an example.



### BE PROFESSIONAL

- Always use **formal** language when addressing families.
- Avoid simplifying information on your own. Rely on **school staff** and **families** to lead your **register** adjustments.
- **Respect** the family's wishes for their children's education. Do not undermine their decisions.
- Do not assume the responsibility of **sight translating** long and complex text (such as Parent Rights). Demonstrate **professionalism** and **professional boundaries** by asking school staff to summarize the information for you.



### DEBRIEF

- **Debrief** with school staff after the meeting.
- Ask for and provide **feedback** to improve future special education meetings.



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



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



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.

Brought to you by the [National Association of Educational Translators and Interpreters of Spoken Languages \(NAETISL.org\)](http://www.naetisl.org), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

We are dedicated to strengthening family engagement by connecting emergent bilingual families, school administrators, teachers, and educational translators and interpreters of spoken languages with information about language access and language justice in early childhood and K-12 settings.

Thank you to the NAETISL Members who contributed to the creation of this Best Practices Series.

# BEST PRACTICES FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION INTERPRETATION

## SCHOOL LEADERS AND EDUCATORS

### KEEP IN MIND



Remember that trained **professional** interpreters must follow a **national code of ethics** and **standards of practice**.



If you are **bilingual**, meet with the interpreter **prior** to starting the meeting to understand the **expectations** of who will interpret when.



Meetings with an interpreter will **take longer**. Plan accordingly and inform the team of teachers present.

### 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.



### SHOW RESPECT

Avoid **underestimating** the family's level of education and knowledge about special education.



Maintain **eye contact** with the **family**, not the interpreter.



Use a **respectful** and **formal** style to address the family.



**Respect the family's wishes** for their children's education. Do not undermine their decisions.

### ROLES & RESPONSABILITIES

- 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.

