



Seeing interpreters as an integral collaborator and part of the school’s multidisciplinary team will improve interpretation services in terms of accuracy and effectiveness and give interpreters more meaningful opportunities to engage with families. School leaders should consider offering professional learning opportunities to school teams seeking to advance their knowledge of and effectiveness when collaborating with interpreters. Below, school staff can access a guide that provides strategies for improving collaborative relationships with interpreters.

## Who can interpret?

- **This depends on the type of meeting or interaction.**
  - Federal law requires that parents and guardians of students in U.S. schools receive information in a language they understand. This is referred to as "language access," which involves providing parents/guardians with meaningful access to information and services, regardless of their ability to speak, understand, read, or write English fluently. This is done through interpreting (oral) and translation (written).
  - **Formal interpretation with a trained professional is required for any formal meeting and should be used any time important information is being shared.**
- Remember that bilingual/multilingual staff speak multiple languages but may not have any formal training in translation and interpretation. Interpreters have extensive special training related to best practice as well as specific legal, ethical, and educational considerations around matters they will be interpreting. “Bilingual staff members' ability to communicate directly with families in their native language is a valuable asset for establishing partnerships with multilingual families. However, bilingual staff without formal interpreter training should not be responsible for facilitating

interpreted communication between families and staff for meetings and events — only trained interpreters should be interpreting for families.”  
([Colorín Colorado](#))

- Do **not** rely on students or family members to interpret your meeting.

## **Before the Meeting**

- Explore your district’s resources for interpretation and schedule an interpreter for your interview meeting.
  - Whenever possible, secure an interpreter who has a knowledge of special education.
- When scheduling the amount of time, remember that depending on the type of interpretation provided, everything may need to be said twice when it is being interpreted, so schedule extra time.
  - It may be beneficial to schedule the interpreter to arrive shortly before the family is scheduled to arrive to ensure the interpreter is prepared and to allow a few minutes to preview the meeting with the interpreter.
- In-person interpretation, when possible, is preferable for a personal meeting like this, though virtual interpretation or over-the-phone is always preferable to not having appropriate interpretation services.

## **Previewing Purpose and Logistics**

- Give the interpreter a summary of the goals and/or procedures for the session. Prepare the interpreter for any sensitive topics that may arise.
- It may be helpful to ask your interpreter if there are any communication norms in the family’s culture that you should be aware of. However, the interpreter should not be thought of as a cultural mediator.
- Discuss with the interpreter any logistical needs. Confirm how long the interpreter is available for the meeting. Determine what type of

interpretation will be used and if there are any requests in advance. This should be confirmed with the family as well.

- Some interpreters like to clarify or write down some key words, such as participant names or the school name, prior to the start of the meeting. If there is any specialized vocabulary that needs to be used, share this with the interpreter.
- Prepare the interpreter for the possibility of discussions about traumatic events if necessary and applicable.

## **Types of Interpretation**

- Simultaneous: interpreter translates what is being said as the speaker continues to speak. There is no need to stop after each sentence.
- Consecutive: interpreter translates what is being said in segments after the speaker stops speaking. The speaker should chunk what they are saying into sentences or segments of no more than a few sentences. It is often helpful to pause at the end of an idea and not mid-sentence (interpretation is not an exact word to word correspondence and stopping before the meaning of the sentence is clear can make interpretation difficult).

## **During the Meeting**

- Make sure the introductions include the interpreter and their purpose at the meeting.
- Some individuals who require an interpreter may understand English as well.
- Avoid side-conversations, allow all communication to be interpreted.
- When speaking, speak to the individuals you are addressing, not the interpreter. Do not use phrases like “tell him/her” but instead, speak directly to the person you are addressing.

# PARTNERING WITH INTERPRETERS CHECKLIST



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- Make the family the center of the interview by using eye contact, warm body language, and speaking directly to them. Remember to be aware that different cultures may use different eye contact and other nonverbals.
- Speak clearly and at a normal pace or slightly slower, if you tend to speak quickly.
- Avoid the use of jargon and use simple language.
- Periodically check for the family's understanding.
- Be cognizant of body language and what it is communicating.
- (Adapted from [Rosas and Winterman, 2023](#) and [¡Colorín colorado!](#))

## Learn more about Interpretation

- [Tips on Using Interpreters for IEP Meetings - Brookes Blog](#)
- [Equity Through Language Access: Best Practices for Collaborating with Interpreters](#) ¡Colorín colorado!
- [Working with Interpreters](#) (Video)
- [Hints and tips for working with interpreters](#) (video)
- [AAITE - Best Practices in Remote Interpreting](#)