



# GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOL INTERPRETERS



## Orange County Department of Education Multilingual Consortium

### INTRODUCTION

The OCDE Multilingual Consortium was created in 2014 as a new professional network to support high quality translation and interpretation services for Orange County schools. The OCDE Multilingual Consortium is open to all school districts in Orange County and surrounding areas. The role of the OCDE Multilingual Consortium is to develop common language resources and tools which may be used consistently throughout the County to support multilingual oral and written communications. The professional network serves as a repository and distribution point for language resources as well as a collective of expertise in the field.

The OCDE Multilingual Consortium developed these *Guidelines for School Interpreters* as a collective effort through a consensus process with the active participation of several Orange County school district representatives. The resources used to create these *Guidelines* include:

- International Association of Professional Translators and Interpreters  
[https://www.iapti.org/code\\_of\\_ethics/](https://www.iapti.org/code_of_ethics/)
- National Council on Interpreting in Health Care  
<http://www.ncihc.org/ethics-and-standards-of-practice>
- American Translators Association  
[http://www.atanet.org/governance/code\\_of\\_ethics.php](http://www.atanet.org/governance/code_of_ethics.php)
- United States Courts, Ethical Obligations for Court Interpreters  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JawVinVsNIE&list=PL4bcxoLSIaXfPvX9FXws4S6XirPhUObBQ>
- Minnesota Department of Education  
<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/dse/sped/div/el/index.htm>

### BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The *Guidelines for School Interpreters* is intended to help facilitate the interpreting and translation process at each school site and educational facility. The *Guidelines* is also intended to promote consistency to enhance interpretation and translation assignments within school districts, improving the



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quality of interpretation, and fostering accurate communication between parents, teachers and the community.

Often, school district employees need to interpret at different types of meetings. In developing these *Guidelines*, the OCDE Multilingual Consortium took into consideration the variety of settings as well as the variety of school district employees called upon to provide interpretation and translation services such as bilingual clerks, bilingual aids, community liaisons, parent advocates, secretaries, psychologists, speech and language pathologists, and school administrators to help school employees feel comfortable when performing these additional duties. It is important to note that the *Guidelines* is intended to be a resource and individuals providing interpretation and translation services still need to follow and comply with the directives of their school districts.

## EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

**Education Code Section 48985 states:**

*If 15 percent or more of the pupils enrolled in a public school that provides instruction in kindergarten or any of grades 1 to 12, inclusive, speak a single primary language other than English, as determined from the census data submitted to the department [CDE]...all notices, reports, statements, or records sent to the parent or guardian of any such pupil by the school or school district shall, in addition to being written in English, be written in the primary language, and may be responded to either in English or the primary language.*

California is the most linguistically and ethnically diverse state in the nation, and the number of English learners in California public schools is greater than ever. According to the California Department of Education Dataquest Language Census information, 61 languages are spoken by significant numbers of students in Orange County schools. Adapted from: <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>

For additional information, please see the California Department of Education website at: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/cm/transref.asp>

Interpreters and translators are required and critical in Orange County schools. Each district has its system in place for identifying and training interpreters and translators that will provide services for students and their parents. Given there are no state or national standards or a certification program for interpreters in education, the OCDE Multilingual Consortium looked at international, national, federal, and state guidelines of interpreting organizations for consistency in its efforts.

## COMMON ASSIGNMENTS IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

The most common situations in which a school interpreter may be needed include:

- IEP meetings
- Parent Teachers Conferences



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- Graduation Ceremonies
- Enrollment Activities
- Board Meetings
- Expulsion Hearings
- School Site Meetings
- Community Presentations
- Local and Regional Conferences

Interpreters may find themselves in a variety of situations within the educational setting. Below are useful tips identified by the OCDE Multilingual Consortium for interpreting in these situations:

**IEP Meetings/Section 504 Meetings/SARB:** Establish the point person for the meeting, such as the school principal, special education case carrier, counselor, or psychologist. Prior to the meeting ask about the subject and objectives of the meeting. If the interpreter is not familiar with the subject matter, ask for an agenda, power point presentation and any handouts that will be distributed, so the interpreter can research for unfamiliar technical and academic words. Confirm where the interpreter will be sitting. Have the meeting point person inform the team about timing, pauses, and signs to check for understanding. Also, notify the team about interpretation style and ask parents for their preference. Be familiar with the format of the meeting, reports, goals progress, legal documents, and technical vocabulary as well as confidentiality requirements. Ask for a break when needed. At the end of the meeting, maintain any handwritten notes in your personal confidential file for each student. Interpreters should discuss with their supervisor when to destroy these notes in accordance with district policy. Interpreters may need to reference their notes for clarification based on requests from school personnel. Also, interpreters should sign any IEP/Section 504/ SARB form to document attendance at the meeting, including any meeting sign-in sheet.

**Parent Teacher Conferences:** Establish the point person for the meeting such as teacher, school secretary, or school clerk. Prior to the meeting ask about the subject and objectives of the meeting. If the interpreter is not familiar with the subject matter, ask for an agenda and any other handouts, so the interpreter can research for unfamiliar technical and academic words. Confirm where the interpreter will be sitting. Inform the parent and the teacher about timing, pauses, and signs to check for understanding. Also, notify the meeting participants regarding interpretation style and ask parents for their preference.

**Board Meetings:** Establish the point person for the meeting such as the district superintendent secretary, executive assistant, or senior executive assistant. Prior to the meeting ask about the subject and objectives of the meeting, as well as for a copy of the meeting agenda and any handouts that will be distributed, so the interpreter can research for unfamiliar technical and academic words. Confirm the number of people requesting interpretation. Confirm where the interpreter will be located in the room (standing or sitting). Have the meeting point person or other appropriate school staff inform the board members about the use of an interpreter during the meeting as well as timing, pauses, and signs to check for understanding. Also, notify the meeting point person or other appropriate school staff about interpretation style and whether



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the interpreter will be whispering or using equipment. Be aware of the time for each intervention, and advise the person you are interpreting for of the board meeting procedures and rules when asking questions. If equipment will be used, advise the meeting point person to inform the board members and also that the interpreter will be testing the equipment beforehand.

**Community Meetings:** Establish the point person for the meeting such as a community liaison, parent advocate, family resource specialist, or school secretary. Prior to the meeting ask about the subject and objectives of the meeting. If the interpreter is not familiar with the subject matter, ask for an agenda and any other handouts, so the interpreter can research for unfamiliar technical and academic words. If the assignment is at a school site, community room, or conference center, confirm the number of people requesting interpretation. Confirm where the interpreter will be located in the room (standing or sitting). Inform the meeting point person about timing, pauses, and signs to check for understanding. Notify the meeting point person about interpretation styles and ask parents for their preference. Also, notify the presenters about interpretation style. If equipment will be used, advise the meeting point person that the interpreter will be testing the equipment beforehand.

When interpreting in the educational setting, the interpreter may also encounter requests to perform additional roles or access specific technology:

**Dual Roles:** Any person serving in the role of interpreter should decline to perform any additional roles, such as community liaison, school counselor, psychologist, administrator, advocate, teacher, etc. during the meeting. If the school district hires bilingual staff who wear multiple hats during their work day, it is still important that the person try to avoid serving more than one role at a time when interpreting. Regardless of job title, the person who is called upon to interpret is responsible for maintaining the role, performance standards, and ethical responsibilities of an interpreter.

**Using Technology and Equipment:** When using interpretation equipment, establish a point person for the meeting/event, such as media or technology staff, to ensure that the interpretation equipment is available, with batteries/fully charged, and accessible. Have a sign-in sheet ready for users to sign and request an ID prior to distributing the interpretation equipment for use. Test microphones and volume before each session.

## STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

### 1. Accuracy

Interpreters will maintain a high level of professionalism providing accurate communication without omissions, additions or any other variations to the original message.

**Note:** Providing accurate information is critical to ensuring an accurate message is being conveyed. Important medical, legal, or academic decisions may be made based on the information provided.



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- Interpreter should speak in the First (1<sup>st</sup>) person and should refrain from adding phrases like “teacher said,” “parent said,” etc.
- Interpreter should use the Third (3<sup>rd</sup>) person when speaking for him/herself. For example, “The interpreter would like to clarify...”
- Interpreter should not omit or summarize. The interpreter’s main role is to convey everything that is said between parent, educators and other team members.
- Interpreter should not embellish or make a statement more interesting by adding details that were not stated.
- Interpreter should interpret everything that the interpreter hears, including foul language, repetitive wording, side conversations, etc.
- Interpreter should not alter the register. Interpreter should maintain formal speech if the source message is formal, or informal if source message is informal. Interpreter should replicate register, style and tone of the speaker.
- Interpreter should be knowledgeable of the acronyms, technical language, and jargon that are used in the school setting.
- Interpreter should correct errors of interpretation as soon as becoming aware of them.

## 2. Confidentiality

Interpreters will maintain spoken and written information of students, parents, and educational institution in strict privacy.

**Note:** Disclosing information about school personnel, students and families could lead to legal issues.

- Interpreter should not disclose confidential information about the students, parents, or their families to anyone outside the meeting.
- Interpreter should follow the school or district’s confidentiality policy and procedures.
- If the interpreter takes notes during an assignment, he or she should consult with the supervisor as to whether the notes need to be retained for future reference in case there is a question pertaining to the matter.



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### 3. Professionalism

Interpreters should dress professionally, be accountable, reliable and responsible at all times. Interpreters should maintain their professional role and refrain from providing advice, assistance or other types of support when requested from the parties involved.

**Note:** Being careless, late, or unprepared may negatively impact the reputation and the job performance of the interpreter, the school site and the organization that the interpreter represents.

- Interpreter should explain the process and the role of the interpreter to the parents and other team members prior to the meeting (introductions, interpretation technique, etc.).
- Interpreter should be transparent- interpreting everything that is said in the presence of the parent or other team members. No party should feel like they are being left out of the conversation.
- Interpreter should be neutral and impartial, and not allow personal judgments, biases, feelings, beliefs or values to interfere in the rendition of the message.
- Interpreter should avoid any conflict of interest regarding the assignment. If the interpreter has a conflict with the assignment, such as biases, personal knowledge or relationships with those involved, notify the person in charge to request a different interpreter.
- Interpreter should not evaluate/discuss/offer opinions of the matter with family members, friends or others in connection to the subject matter.
- Interpreter should continue professional growth by reading articles related to education, individualized education program (IEP) meetings, parent engagement, multicultural tolerance and learning specialized vocabulary, and attending trainings and other events for interpreters.
- Interpreter should follow all interpreting standards of practice while interpreting, even if she/he has additional roles in the district, such as a paraeducator, clerk, bilingual assistant, etc., who qualify to receive a bilingual stipend.
- Interpreter should discuss with his/her supervisor any concerns regarding a particular assignment, such as possible skill limitations, prior to the assignment.
- Interpreter should not offer advice to school personnel, parent, student, or other individuals in attendance.
- Interpreter should not offer personal opinion to school personnel, parent, student, or other individuals in attendance.



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## **4. Cultural Awareness**

Interpreters should be culturally aware of their communities and surroundings. They should have the ability to step back from their own principles and become aware of the cultural values, beliefs and perceptions of others showing respect and tolerance.

**Note:** Cultural misunderstandings may lead to a lack of communication from all parties involved and convey the wrong message.

- Interpreter should be familiar with idioms or expressions (English to target language), keeping in mind regional or dialectal differences.
- Interpreter should alert parties of any cultural misunderstandings.
- Interpreter should offer insight about culturally unique situations.
- Interpreter should be aware of slang or words that carry different meanings depending on country, region, or even between generations.

## **5. Check for Understanding, Breaks and Pauses**

Interpreters should check for understanding with all parties involved in the meeting. Interpreters should also advocate for themselves, such as asking meeting participants to speak slower or to request a break. Interpreters should respectfully ask the meeting participants to pause if the speech is too fast.

**Note:** Often, the vocabulary that is being used at the meetings is very technical and academic, which might create confusion, making it more difficult to interpret the message precisely. In some situations, a break may be needed and the interpreter is encouraged to ask for one.

- Interpreter should ask for clarification of the source message from the parent, school personnel, or other team members, when needed.
- Interpreter should ask for a break, if needed. For example, during high profile meetings that last over an hour or if the interpreter needs a break to use the restroom or get a drink of water.
- Interpreter should, when providing consecutive interpreting, ask the parent, school personnel, or other team member giving the information to speak in short phrases, giving one or two ideas at a time and allow the interpreter to render the message in the target language.



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## TIPS FOR THE INTERPRETER:

- Allow yourself enough travel time and set up time.
- Know which mode of interpretation you will be using.
- Have your badge or work ID readily available and/or visible.
- Carry a bottle of water.
- Carry business cards.
- Carry pens/pencils and a notepad.
- Carry a "cheat sheet" of new or unfamiliar translated terms that you know will come up (as needed).
- Have equipment ready when interpreting for a large group.
- If necessary, have sign-in/out sheet for the equipment.
- Dress in professional attire.
- Speak loudly and clearly.
- Remember that the interpreter promotes direct communication among all parties in the encounter. (For example, an interpreter may tell the parent and the teacher to address each other, rather than the interpreter.)

## Preparation for the Interpreting Assignment:

- Become familiar with the subject matter prior to the meeting/event. Request any available documents or pertinent information from the school team.
- Ask for written material ahead of time.
- Prepare and research specialized terminology that the interpreter knows will come up during the meeting. (Terminology about audiology, specific syndrome, medical, etc.)
- Continue education and expand vocabulary.
- Obtain video/audio tapes that will be included in a presentation in advance.
- For purposes of quality interpreting, if presented with a video/audio tape that was not provided in advance, inform audience and presenter that interpretation may not be able to be provided.

## When Working with an Interpreter:

- School personnel and other service providers should check frequently for understanding (parents and/or student).
- School personnel, parents, students, and other team members should speak to each other and not to the interpreter.
- Be aware that interpreter may ask for a break, if needed.
- Everything that is being said and can be heard will be interpreted.
- Avoid side conversations.
- Audibility - speaker should keep in mind his or her rate, volume when communicating through an interpreter. Be aware of trailing off voice.





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- Run meeting in one language - all school personnel and other service providers should speak in English when the school interpreter is present.

### CONCLUSION

The *Guidelines* were developed by the OCDE Multilingual Consortium to assist school staff and interpreters in providing consistent and accurate interpreting within a variety of educational settings. The *Guidelines* are intended to be a general resource for individuals providing interpretation and translation services in the schools. Additional information and resources are available through the OCDE Multilingual Consortium.