

DATE: March 2018

TO: District Administrators, CESA Administrators, CCDEB Administrators,  
Directors of Special Education and Pupil Services, and Other Interested Parties

FROM: Barbara Van Haren, PhD  
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SUBJECT: Guidance for Department of Public Instruction (DPI)-Licensed Educational  
Interpreters

Staff from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) continue to respond to questions from school district staff, parents, interpreters, and others about when a DPI-licensed educational interpreter may provide services. Section 440.032 of the Wisconsin Statutes requires interpreters to have a DSPS sign language interpreter license, except for “school or school-sponsored events.” Neither state law nor the administrative code provide guidance relating to the meaning of “school or school-sponsored events.” Consequently, the kinds of questions we receive generally relate to how DPI and DSPS define “school or school-sponsored events” and when a DPI-licensed educational interpreter may provide services. Staff from DPI and DSPS met recently to revisit this issue, and this bulletin is intended to reflect the current understanding of what is meant by “school or school-sponsored events.”

In all situations the district should ensure that the interpreter is able to meet the needs of the student and can provide equal access. An interpreter licensed as an educational interpreter by DPI is considered to be acting within the scope of his or her license when providing sign language interpreting services to students preschool through high school graduation. Increasingly, the education of students, including students with disabilities, occurs outside the traditional classroom and even outside normal school hours. Community experiences, including learning to use public transportation and shopping, vocational training, dual-enrollment coursework through technical colleges and universities, as well as authentic work experiences will take place in settings other than the student’s school and at times other than traditional school hours.

In addition, a student’s educational program includes after school events, such as extracurricular activities or school plays, dances, and ceremonies such as graduation.

Below are examples of activities that occur within the framework of “school or school-sponsored events”:

- Activities that occur within the school building that are open for all students.
- Activities that occur within the school building that are open for all families.
- Extracurricular activities offered to all students, on or off school grounds.
- Field trips including senior class trips that are offered to all students.
- Events sponsored by the school or the school district for the benefit of parents and the community such as athletic events, plays, musical performances, award ceremonies, or graduation.
- Activities listed in a student’s individualized education program (IEP) such as drivers education, work experiences in the community, SAT/ACT testing, coursework through technical colleges and universities, and experiences relating to daily living skills, such as shopping, using public transportation, orientation and mobility training, et cetera.
- School sponsored summer school activities that are open to all students.
- School sponsored summer recreational or sports programs, such as softball, swimming, hunter safety classes, et cetera.

Please note that the school may or may not provide funding for the activity and may or may not grant credit for the activity. This list also includes activities that may not be required specifically by the student’s IEP.

Also included in “school or school-sponsored events” are the following:

- Parent-teacher meetings, conferences and other meetings open to parents such as school board meetings, PTA or PTO meetings, et cetera.
- A meeting requested by the parent to discuss his/her child with school staff.

Because the activities described above constitute “school or school-sponsored events”, DPI-licensed educational interpreters may interpret for deaf adults attending or participating in such events. If a parent who is deaf requires an interpreter at an IEP team meeting, the interpreter must be DSPS licensed. Likewise, if there is a meeting regarding a health plan, a DSPS licensed interpreter should be used. In addition, if a parent who is deaf determines a DPI-licensed educational interpreter is not able to meet the language and interpreting needs of the adult, schools should honor a request for a DSPS licensed sign language interpreter.

For questions about this guidance, please contact Wisconsin Educational Services Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (WESP-DHH) Center Director or Outreach Director.