



Illinois State Board of Education

Special Education Services Department

Educational Sign Language Interpreter Approval: Frequently Asked Questions

This document is intended to provide non-regulatory guidance on the subject matter listed above. For specific questions, please contact the Illinois State Board of Education.

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Educational Sign Language Interpreter Approval: Frequently Asked Questions

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Introduction

Communication is a universal need and is the cornerstone of a student's academic and developmental journey. In recognition of this fact, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) includes the following statement as a directive to Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams to be cognizant of the following special factor in the development, review, and revision of a student's IEP:

Consider the communication needs of the child, and in the case of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing, consider the child's language and communication needs, opportunities for direct communications with peers and professional personnel in the child's language and communication mode, academic level, and full range of needs, including opportunities for direct instruction in the child's language and communication mode [[34 CFR 300.324\(a\)\(2\)\(iv\)](#)].

In order to understand and to be understood, students who are deaf or hard of hearing may require educational interpreters. These interpreters must comply with [23 Illinois Administrative Code \(IAC\) 25.550](#) and be approved by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). Students who are deaf or hard of hearing may require the services of oral/aural, sign language, cued speech, or deaf-blind interpreters to understand the instructional material presented by the teacher and the class discussions involving other students.

A. Responsibilities of Educational Interpreters

A-1: What are the overall responsibilities of an educational interpreter?

An educational interpreter must be made available to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing when indicated in the IEP. This person may provide the following services:

- Assistance in facilitating communication among students who can hear and students who are deaf or hard of hearing
 - Interpreting services at all school levels, including extracurricular activities according to individual need
 - Tutoring assistance under the direction of a teacher for students who are deaf or hard of hearing
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A-2: Can ISBE approved interpreters interpret for IEP meetings?

Only interpreters who are licensed by the Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission (IDHHC) may interpret for deaf or hard of hearing individuals who are not students. If an individual who is an ISBE approved sign language interpreter *also* has an IDHHC license at the level of [Intermediate or above](#), they may interpret for an IEP meeting or other

situation in which the “client” is not a student. Those with an ISBE approval *only* would not hold the correct qualification to interpret for someone who is not a student.

Under the Illinois Administrative Code (23 IAC 226.75), qualified interpreters are defined as “a school staff member or other personnel and demonstrably qualified and competent to interpret between English and another language, trained in providing the interpretations requested and sufficiently knowledgeable in both languages of any specialized terminology needed, and trained in ethics of interpretation.”

At this time, Sign Language Interpreters are not held to the requirements as stated in 23 IAC 225.75 “Qualified Interpreters.” However, those providing interpreting services for IEP meetings should have awareness and training in special education terminology.

A-3: What are specific responsibilities educational interpreters have in the support of students who are deaf or hard of hearing?

It is critical to students who are deaf or hard of hearing that only interpreters approved by ISBE be employed in regular educational settings. These interpreters must meet competency levels as specified in the code in both receptive and expressive aspects of the communication system used by the student. Particularly crucial is the ability of the interpreter to keep pace with the teacher’s presentation and class discussions, to interpret at the student’s functional language level, and to voice interpret for the teacher and students who are hearing so that the students who are deaf or hard of hearing can fully and freely participate in the instructional process. Students who are deaf or hard of hearing should be provided instruction on how to effectively use an interpreter’s services.

A-4: Can the educational interpreter interpret for field trips and extracurricular activities?

While there is no official, recommended policy for these activities, the district or school may decide that the educational interpreter can accompany a student on field trips or to activities which occur during school hours and in conjunction with school plans.

Community-based interpreters typically interpret at presentations, tours, plays, and other events when the student is on a field trip or school outing, although the educational interpreter may act as a communication liaison for the student in such cases. The district may also decide to hire community-based interpreters for activities such as special events whether or not the student receiving services is in attendance for the sake of the general public. Special events might include plays or graduation ceremonies attended by deaf or hard of hearing community members.

It is recommended that the best interests of the student be considered when decisions are made about the use of an educational interpreter on field trips or in extracurricular activities.

B. General Questions on Approval for Educational Interpreters

B-1: What are the educator licensure approval requirements for an educational interpreter?

Per [23 IAC 25.550\(a\)](#), there are three sets of requirements to be approved as an educational interpreter in Illinois: an educational component, a performance component, and certification in transliteration skills:

1. Each applicant for approval as an educational interpreter either for sign language interpreter or cued speech interpreter shall provide the following to meet the educational component:
 - Transcript(s) depicting 60 or more hours of college credit from one or more regionally accredited institutions of higher education
 - Transcript(s) depicting that the applicant holds an associate degree from a regionally accredited institution of higher education
 - Documentation of achievement of a score of “passing” or higher given by ISBE on one of the examinations for paraprofessionals
 - Documentation of having passed the written examination administered by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID)

The purpose of the educational component is to demonstrate proficiency in the English language. English language proficiency is important in this profession as educational interpreters facilitate communication between signers and English speakers as well as providing a language model for students.

2. The performance component requires one of the following options:
 - A rating of Level 3.5 or above on the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA)
 - Valid certification from the RID
 - Valid Illinois Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI) Basic Certification or higher as administered by the Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission (IDHHC)
3. Additionally, for approval as a cued speech interpreter, an applicant must provide proof of having obtained the Transliteration Skills Certification at Level 3 or above.

B-2: How can I apply to be an educational interpreter?

To apply to be an educational interpreter in Illinois, go to ISBE's [Educator Licensure Information System](#) (ELIS) and follow these steps.

1. If you have not previously registered with ELIS, engage the prompt on the left side of the site's opening page that says "Login to your ELIS account" because the registration and login page are the same.
2. If you are a new ELIS user, create an account by engaging "Click Here for First Time Access to the ELIS System"
3. After you provide all the necessary information, you will be assigned an Illinois Educator Identification Number (IEIN).
4. On your account page, you can click "Apply for an Approval."
5. Complete the application and submit.

Transcripts can be submitted by your Institute of Higher Learning to transcripts@isbe.net. Proficiency test scores can be uploaded by the educator into their ELIS account.

Alternatively, Your Regional Office of Education (ROE) can upload required documentation (transcripts, test scores, etc.) to your ELIS account. <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/contact-licensure.aspx>

Periodically check your ELIS account to see when you have been approved. All ISBE licensure and approval applications are reviewed on a first-come, first-serve basis.

If your information changes, please be sure to update it in ELIS by clicking "on the pencil icon in the upper right-hand corner of your ELIS account and selecting "Edit Educator".

To add professional development, click on the Professional Development tab on the left-hand side of your ELIS account. To update your employment status, click on the pencil icon in the upper right-hand corner of your ELIS account and select "update Your PD/Employment Status" from the drop-down menu.

B-3: What if my approval isn't complete and I have a job starting soon?

Approval applications are reviewed on a first-come, first-serve basis. If you require approval to start your employment in a short time, contact your supervisor and/or

Regional Office of Education (ROE) to request a rush application. Please see the ISBE [ROE Directory](#) to locate your regional office.

B-4: Is interim approval ever an option for someone who is seeking approval as an educational interpreter?

If you are unable to provide evidence of meeting one of the criteria, you can apply for a one-time interim approval if the following conditions are met:

- Evidence of meeting one of the educational component criteria
- Proof of having attained a score of at least 3.0 on the EIPA

The interim approval lasts two years. The interim approval CANNOT be renewed.

B-5: How often must the approval be renewed? Are there any requirements for renewal?

An approval is valid for five years and must be renewed every five years [[23 IAC25.550\(b\)](#)]. The interpreter shall complete 50 continuing professional educator development hours during that time [[23 Illinois IAC 25.550\(b\)](#)].

Continuing professional educator development hours are earned by participating in conferences, workshops, institutes, seminars, symposia, and other events which are designed to improve the skills and knowledge of the educational interpreter and are organized by approved Illinois providers. It is recommended that educational interpreters seek out professional development throughout their careers to increase their skill level in the provision of services to deaf and hard of hearing students and improve student outcomes.

Some continuing professional educator development hours that appear unrelated to interpreting are acceptable as long as they are organized by an approved Illinois provider and are related to the educational interpreter's job function. For example, training to be a "mandated reporter" as presented by a school or district is within the scope of allowable professional development. It is recommended, however, that the majority of educational interpreters' professional development opportunities apply to skill development within their profession as providers of supportive services to deaf and hard of hearing students. Please see the list of ISBE-approved professional development providers at [this link](#).

Continuing professional educator development hours can also come from participating in college coursework as part of an interpreter training program offered by an Illinois regionally accredited institution of higher education or an Illinois community college.

Evidence of completion of professional development activities should be provided by the approved Illinois provider at the conclusion of the training/professional development or in the form of a transcript depicting completion of college coursework. Any licensed education professional in Illinois can keep track of continuing professional educator development hours in ELIS [[23 Illinois IAC 25.8000\(b\)](#)].

C. Specific Questions on Approval for Educational Interpreters

C-1: I already have an interpreter’s license. Why do I need to apply for ISBE approval?

ISBE holds specific standards for all educational personnel to ensure the highest quality of services provided to students. The Educational Interpreter Approval process allows ISBE to ensure interpreter candidates are able and ready to work in an educational environment with the appropriate skills to effect positive student outcomes.

C-2: Do I need ISBE approval even if I am employed by an agency and assigned to a school posting?

Yes, any interpreter looking to work in a school environment must have an active ISBE approval.

C-3: Do I need to take the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) to gain ISBE approval?

No, a score of 3.5 or above on the EIPA is **one** of the options which fulfills the performance component of educational interpreter approval. You can also provide a score of basic or higher on the Illinois BEI or RID certification to fulfill this requirement.

Some schools or districts may implement a specific policy requiring the EIPA, but it is not a requirement to gain ISBE approval.

C-4: Can ISBE accept my Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI) from another state?

ISBE can only accept the Illinois BEI. If you have taken the BEI in another state, contact the IDHHC to start the process to convert your credential to Illinois. There is a small fee related to the conversion.

C-5: What do I need to submit if I am using the English proficiency portion of the RID certification as my educational component?

You need to provide documented proof of your score on the written portion of the RID certification to use it as the educational component. You can provide a copy of your RID certification card as proof of competency for the performance component.

C-6: Do I need to take the Test of Basic Skills?

No, you do not need to take the Test of Basic Skills, but you do need to submit proof of your proficiency in the English language, described above as the educational component. English language proficiency is important in your profession as you are facilitating communication between signers and English speakers as well as providing a language model for your student(s).

C-7: Is there a standard rate of pay for educational interpreters?

No, it is up to districts and agencies to decide on the rate of pay for educational interpreters.

C-8: Is there an educational interpreter's union?

No, there is no overarching educational interpreter's union; however, educational interpreters employed by school districts or cooperatives may be part of a collective bargaining unit for support personnel.

C-9: Do I need a background check to work in a school district even if I am employed by an agency?

Yes, any person looking to work in an educational institution must submit to a background check. This might be completed through your employment agency or through the school district in which you are working. Discuss this policy with your agency if it is unclear.

D. Resources

68 Illinois Administrative Code Part 1515 – Interpreter for the Deaf Licensure Act of 2007
<https://www.ilga.gov/commission/jcar/admincode/068/06801515sections.html>

23 Illinois Administrative Code 25.550 – Approval of Educational Interpreters
<http://www.ilga.gov/commission/jcar/admincode/023/023000250G05500R.html>

Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools
https://iarss.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/IARSS-Directory_2019_2020_FINAL2.pdf

Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission
<https://www2.illinois.gov/idhhc/Pages/default.aspx>

Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission – Illinois Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI) Certification and Testing
<https://www2.illinois.gov/idhhc/licensure/Pages/Certification.aspx>

Illinois State Board of Education - Educator Licensure
<https://www.isbe.net/Pages/educator-licensure-approvals.aspx>

Illinois State Board of Education – Educator Licensure Information System (ELIS)
<https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Educator-Licensure-Information-System.aspx>

Illinois State Board of Education - Illinois Professional Development Providers
<https://www.isbe.net/Documents/prof-dev-provider-list.pdf>

Individuals with disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
[34 CFR 300.324\(a\)\(2\)\(iv\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34-title-34-chapter-300-title-34-chapter-300-subchapter-A-subchapter-A-section-300.324(a)(2)(iv))

Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID)
<https://rid.org/>