



# Introduction

Team meetings depend on **good communication** among **all** team members including **families, students, and school personnel**. When family/students' home/native language is **not English**, the school district **must include interpreters** to ensure that parents are fully participating in the team decision making process. School staff also need to learn how to work with the interpreter. Following are guidelines on how to conduct effective special education meetings **when an interpreter is involved**. These guidelines are based on input from **experienced school and agency personnel, interpreters, and parents**.

## At the End of the Meeting

- Summarize any decisions made and ask parents again if they have questions.
- Explain exactly what will happen next and when.
- Identify the school point of contact who speaks the family's home/native language for follow-up or questions. Ensure that the family knows how to reach them.
- After the meeting, thank the interpreter for their services.

## Resources

**The RI Department of Education Office for Diverse Learners**  
[ride.ri.gov/Special\\_Populations/default.aspx](http://ride.ri.gov/Special_Populations/default.aspx)

**RI Technical Assistance Project**  
[www.ritap.org](http://www.ritap.org)

**The RI Parent Information Network**  
[www.ripin.org](http://www.ripin.org)

**Parent Support Network of RI**  
[www.psnri.org](http://www.psnri.org)

**The National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems**  
[www.nccrest.org](http://www.nccrest.org)

**RIDE English Language Learner Website**  
[www.ride.ri.gov/applications/ell/](http://www.ride.ri.gov/applications/ell/)

**Web-Based Resource Guide For Families and Providers of Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs**  
[www.ritap.org/ritap/content/WEB\\_Based\\_Resource\\_Guide.htm](http://www.ritap.org/ritap/content/WEB_Based_Resource_Guide.htm)

*Adapted with permission from the Minnesota Department of Education*



RIDE  
 Office for Diverse Learners  
 255 Westminster Street  
 Providence, RI 02903  
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## Holding Meetings Related to Special Education

## with Interpreters and Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Families & Students

Ensuring that Parents **Understand & Participate** in All Team Decisions

RI Regulations §300.322(e) and §300.501





## Selecting an Interpreter

Good interpreting for special education requires knowledge and experience. When hiring an interpreter or contracting with an agency for interpretation services, consider the following:

- Ask what type of training on school interpretation is provided for agency employees.
- Ask interpretation/translation agencies whether they have had any training or prior experience with special education.
- Ask the interpretation/translation agency for confirmation prior to the scheduled meeting.
- If school employees are used, be certain they have the necessary skills in both languages and professional development in special education.
- Family members or children who are attending the special education meeting should not be assigned to the role of interpreter.



## Before the Meeting

School identifies the point of contact who will invite the family in home/native language.

School ensures the availability of materials (procedural safeguards, forms, etc.) in the home/native language unless the parents' language of communication is not a written language.

When the parents' language of communication is not a written language, review the material orally in the home/native language.

The meeting facilitator communicates with the interpreter in advance of the meeting to review:

- The purpose of the meeting.
- The tentative agenda.
- The expectation of confidentiality.
- Any technical terms that will be used.

- Who will attend the meeting and pronunciation/accuracy of names.
- Seating arrangements.
- How the interpreter will be introduced.
- The expectation is consecutive interpreting style where one person speaks a few sentences and pauses for interpretation.
- Written materials in advance wherever possible (e.g. bilingual glossary of terms or sample forms).
- The signal or cue that will be used when the discussion needs to slow down or pause.

## During the Meeting

Welcome the family and team members including the interpreter.

Introduce interpreter; explain that the school has invited an interpreter to facilitate communication and family participation. Encourage family members to ask questions.

- Explain that everything is confidential.
- Avoid side conversations. It is the role of the interpreter to interpret everything that is said at the meeting.
- Use family friendly language and pause frequently to allow for interpretation.
- Speak plainly and be patient. It takes time to interpret.
- Allow the interpreter, family, or student to ask for rephrasing or clarification when necessary.
- Face the family when speaking and direct your words to them.
- Use first person language and call team members by name.



- Speak one at a time.
- Support technical terms with explanations and child-specific examples where possible.
- Consider that interpretation is not word for word but thought for thought. Something said in one word in English might take many words in other languages (and vice versa).
- Provide a written copy in the home/native language if possible, whenever a parent signature is required. Give the interpreter time to go over the document so parents know what they are signing.
- Include the interpreter in the list of individuals present at the meeting.
- Remember, it is never the role of the interpreter to advocate or to give advice or opinion.