REMOTE INTERPRETING IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS
Best Practice Recommendations

The United States has more than 200,000 school districts and employ thousands of interpreters and translators to communicate with students and families who are limited English proficient. With schools closed across the nation due to the coronavirus, communication has moved to online platforms, and interpreters need to as well. To help schools, families and interpreters make that shift, the Interpreting and Translation in Education (ITE) Workgroup has created this guide to best practices in remote interpreting in educational settings.

DEFINITIONS:

- **Consecutive Interpreting**: In a dialogue meeting, one person speaks at a time and then pauses for the interpreter to interpret before the next person speaks.
- **Simultaneous interpreting**: For informational presentations, the interpreter speaks at the same time as the speaker, often using portable equipment. Attendees listen to the interpretation through a headset.

  NOTE: *Signed language interpreters interpret simultaneously for dialogic and informational meetings. They interpret remotely on VRI platforms.*

Remote interpreting takes place when the interpreter is not in the same place as the people who need interpreting. There are four kinds of remote interpreting.

- **Over-the-phone interpreting (OPI):** Participants are connected through a telephone (audio) line and the interpreter uses consecutive interpreting. OPI platforms are designed for multilingual communication with a back-end infrastructure that can assign calls to an on-demand interpreter.
- **Video remote interpreting (VRI)**: Participants are connected with audio and video on a platform designed for multilingual communication. Like OPI, VRI platforms are designed for multilingual communication with a back-end infrastructure that can assign calls to an on-demand interpreter.
- **Video conferencing interpreting (VCI):** The interpreter and other participants are connected with audio and video over a standard video conferencing platform not designed for multilingual communication. Interpreters interact with the platform like any other participant by invitation of whoever is organizing the session.
- **Remote simultaneous interpreting (RSI)**: The interpreter interprets at the same time as the speaker speaks. Participants can listen to the speaker or the interpreter. RSI platforms allow interpreters from more than one language to work at the same time.

In educational settings, VRI platforms are not yet widely used, which means that school districts have turned to ad hoc remote interpreting solutions, typically using standard video conferencing platforms for both consecutive and simultaneous interpreting. Over time, educational settings are encouraged to adopt the use of VRI and RSI platforms to ensure access to high-quality language services.

PLANNING FOR A MULTILINGUAL MEETING/EVENT

School districts communicate directly with students and families in small conversational meetings (parent-teacher conferences, IEPs, disciplinary hearings) or with the community through informational presentations (board meetings, press conferences, educational events).

When using remote interpreters, each of these requires a different kind of technology platform.

- Meetings with families use consecutive interpreting and need a single audio channel. Ideally schools will contract with a VRI platform to support these kinds of meetings. But other standard video conferencing platform can be used (Zoom, Google Hangouts, GoToMeeting, etc.).
- Informational presentations require simultaneous interpreting and multiple audio channels. These require a specialized remote simultaneous interpreting platform or a work-around solution using a regular video-conferencing platform with additional audio channels for the language interpreting (usually through a separate phone line). IT support before and during the event is essential for meetings that require remote simultaneous interpreting.

Bring your interpreter team into the planning process for any multilingual meeting or event early. They can help you identify the kind of platform you need and work through the technical and resource requirements to make sure your meeting is a success.

SCHOOL STAFF SHOULD:

- Be familiar with the technology used.
- Determine what kind of platform and interpreting are needed and schedule their interpreters accordingly. Meetings that require simultaneous interpreting longer than an hour should schedule two interpreters.
- Schedule a briefing prior to the session with the person running the meeting. Be sure to cover the following:
    - Test the equipment before the meeting. Make sure both the school providers and interpreters know how to connect and use the key features needed for the meeting (mute/unmute, video controls, sound levels, headsets, etc.)
    - Identify an alternate meeting platform and plan in the event of technology failure. The person responsible for this planning will depend upon your work status. If you are a staff interpreter, the person running the meeting should discuss this with you. If you are a freelancer, you need to address this with the agency/school that has contracted your services.

- How the interpreter will obtain any needed documents for the upcoming session. Keep in mind that privacy laws still are applicable even in the current crisis. (Note that email that is not encrypted end to end is NOT appropriate for obtaining documents for these sessions.)
        - How the interpreter will obtain a list of the meeting participants names and their roles, if possible.
        - Who is in charge of presenting the rules of engagement during the session, the person running the meeting, or the interpreter, or both.
    - Ensure all required participants are onboard with the technology to be used, including students and their family members. Inform meeting participants about the technology in the appropriate language by:
        - Email
        - Phone
        - Instructional videos
    - Obtain the following information from families prior to the meeting:
        - When can the family meet (date/time)?
        - Does family have access and/or familiarity with the technology and/or apps to be used?
        - Does the family need assistance with any of the above?
    - Provide the interpreters all pertinent documents needed for the meeting, in advance if possible.
    - Use appropriate means of communication and document transfer to comply with privacy laws.

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT FOR THE INTERPRETER

- Computer (desktop, laptop and/or tablet with keyboard and monitor)
- Headset (lightweight, 2-ear USB headset with rotating boom arm and microphone preferred, noise cancelling microphone to filter out background sound.
- Webcam (built-in preferred)
- Large Monitor or two monitors (preferred)

The following are not recommended:

- Earbuds
- Wireless headsets
- One-ear headsets

CONNECTIVITY

- Use of ethernet cable preferred (this may require an adapter depending on the ports available on your computer)
- High speed Internet connection preferred. Test your connectivity speed before an assignment
- (Visit http://www.speedtest.net/ - a minimum of upstream/downstream mbps of 2-5 is strongly recommended)

FOR INTERPRETERS

Items to have available:

- Notepad (paper or tablet) and multiple pens
- Computer and phone chargers
- Printer and extra ink cartridges and paper (if you regularly need to print out meeting documents)
- Any other device you use when interpreting, such as a tablet with dictionaries)
- Water

Before beginning any interpreting session:

- Place your computer station in a quiet environment.
- Ensure your workspace is properly lit and background is professional (consider using a green screen or photo background if your living space doesn't allow for a neutral background).
- Turn off all notification sounds on all equipment.
- Verify connectivity and bandwidth.
- Open the specific platform after downloading and updating any needed apps.
- Make sure you are using your professional email or professional account for any app used.
- Position the screen/webcam so your image on the screen is clear.
- Verify microphone and computer volume are at appropriate levels.
- Plan on a pre-session to share best practices about video interpreting (see tips).

At the beginning of the session:

- Introduce yourself. Explain your role to all parties in the session if the facilitator does not introduce you.
- For OPI and VRI – establish how you will ask speakers to pause so you can interpret or solve a problem.
- For RSI – establish your tech support to problem solve any issues during the session.
- Alert all parties that the interpreter will return if dropped from the call.
- Tell attendees how you will ask them to pause if you need to interpret or solve a problem.

During the session

- If on screen, maintain professional tone and facial expressions.
- Use consecutive as the default mode for all meetings that are meant to be a dialogue.
- Use simultaneous for all meetings that are providing information in a presentation format and that are using a platform with multiple audio channels.

After the session

- Have a post-session briefing if necessary.

Additional Tips for Interpreters

- If your only option is to connect to a video call using your smartphone instead of a computer (to be avoided if possible) do not hold your phone in your hand. Place the phone so that you are displayed professionally. Use earbuds for the best audio and to keep your hands free for note-taking.
- Remember to note down the name/roles of all participants.
- Dress professionally. Business attire is appropriate for most sessions.
- Be aware that you are constantly visible to others on the screen.
- Your microphone should not rub against clothing or be too close to the mouth. It distorts the audio and or/create background noise for the meeting.
- Check that your note-pad is not too close to the microphone to avoid rustling paper. Sit up straight when taking notes during a session.

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This document is the first in a series of guidance documents to promote best practices for remote interpreting in educational settings. Upcoming documents include:

- Remote interpreting for IEPs and Group Meetings
- Remote Simultaneous Interpreting for Educational Settings
- Adapting Interpreter Protocols for Remote Interpreting in Educational Settings

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