

# Advocating for Sign Language Interpreting Services

As a parent, the more you know about interpreting, the better you will be able to advocate for your child and make sure she has the interpreting services she needs. It is also important that you be knowledgeable about policies regulating interpreting in your area. Below are some hypothetical (and not-so-hypothetical) questions about advocating for interpreting services.

**Q:** *My daughter's hearing loss is progressive. She knows only a little bit of sign language now and does not use an interpreter, but she is starting to miss things in class. How can we ask the school to hire an interpreter so she can start learning to use one?*

**A:** Be specific about your goals in providing interpreter services. Simply watching an interpreter is not an optimal way to learn sign language. You may want to explore options such as classes or tutoring, both for her and for the rest of your family. Learning sign language as a family will be very beneficial - particularly if you regularly practice, and use the language at home. Find opportunities for her to socialize with other children or adults who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing and communicate in sign language.

For a list of American Sign Language classes, see the resources at the end of this article. When it is confirmed that an interpreter is beneficial to your daughter's programming success, you can raise the feasibility of recruiting and hiring an interpreter in the case conference in preparation for the following year. If the school is not familiar with the process of hiring an interpreter, you can request an external consultation through the Regional Collaborative Service Delivery (RCSD). <https://education.alberta.ca/regional-collaborative-service-delivery/>

**Q:** *I visited school the other day, and the teacher had my child and the interpreter working on a lesson together in a corner of the room while she worked with the rest of the class. I thought interpreters weren't supposed to be tutoring?*

**A:** Depending on your child's school, the role of the interpreter could take on many different forms, from professional interpreter to tutor to signing educational assistant.

Ideally, the interpreter should only be interpreting. However, some school districts also include the role of tutoring - but not teaching - in the interpreter's day.

In practice, there are situations in which the student needs more support or in which direct instruction works better. How much tutoring the interpreter will do should be discussed and agreed upon by the interpreter and the school administration before their placement in the classroom. The interpreter should receive specialized training in tutoring and supervision from the teacher. Other tutoring services, including visits from a Teacher of the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing, are alternatives. Another reason you may see the interpreter working one-on-one with your child is that an interpreter and student may need time set aside for reviewing upcoming new vocabulary and agreeing on the signs to be used for specialized terminology.

**Q:** *When is the cost of interpreting covered, and when does the family have to pay out of pocket?*

**A:** The United Way provides funding for interpreting services (when services are not covered by the school district, business, or government department). Some examples of services covered are listed below – check with each interpreting agency concerning their available funding and how it may apply specifically to your needs.

Freelance agencies without United Way funding will attempt to secure funding from the service provider. If that is not possible, the family may then be asked to

pay for interpreting costs. If funding cannot be secured, check with the freelance agencies for other options. For a list of Alberta Freelance Interpreting Agencies, see the resources at the end of this article.

### **Medical/Mental Health**

Access to ASL interpreters during health appointments is mandated through the Supreme Court of Canada. If the appointments take place in a hospital or clinic, general medical/specialist/surgery appointments are always covered. Optometry services are covered once a year; visits to the dentist are covered twice a year.

### **Education**

Interpreting services are the responsibility of the school district from kindergarten to grade 12. Interpreting services are also covered for students in college and university. Vocational training and driver education training are also covered, but a pre-application is required. Education provided through government programs (i.e. Alberta Works, Prospect, etc.) is also covered.

### **Employment**

Job interviews and government-arranged job fairs are covered. Once hired, orientation, all subsequent training, staff meetings, employee performance evaluations, and employment social events are the responsibility of the employer.

### **Legal Needs**

Always covered. This could include but may not be limited to: court appearances, legal consultations, police interviews, parole/probation meetings, trials.

### **Social Services**

Programs within Alberta Human Services are covered. This could include but is not limited to: family counselling, visitation appointments, foster care, AISH (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped), PDD (Persons with Developmental Disabilities).

### **Celebrations/Events**

Baptisms, wedding ceremonies, graduation, and funerals are covered; however, these events have limited funding available. An interpreter may be provided through an agency for a limited amount of time (2-3 hours). Sometimes the family may have to cover some or all of the cost, particularly if the event takes place out of town.

### **Community Events**

Many organizations will provide interpreting services during a public event and/or in public venues to ensure accessibility. This can include tours, performances, political events, speeches, ceremonies, etc.

**Q:** *My daughter was just elected prom queen. The school didn't budget for the extra interpreter hours. A football game at night is going to be a communication nightmare for her. What can we do?*

**A:** The above scenario is one of social inclusion. Here are some ways to advocate for social inclusion for your daughter:

- Start with the school. Make an argument for coverage by asking if the school considers 'social inclusion' an elective activity. Refer to <http://humanservices.alberta.ca/department/premiers-council-alternative-communications-policy.html>, which outlines the access policy for services provided by government departments. It could be said that public school districts are fundamentally governmental institutions, given that they receive the majority of their funding through Alberta Education.
- Is there a fundraising option within the school for social inclusion events? Perhaps along with fundraising for band or intramural activities, the school can include a portion for social inclusion.
- Are there scholarship funds that can be designated for social inclusion?
- Is there a community-based organization (perhaps one with a focus on Deaf and Hard of Hearing children) that would be willing to donate money towards a 'social inclusion' fund?

- Are there local interpreters who would be willing to donate their time to interpret at socially inclusive events?
- Are there local interpreting agencies that would be willing to provide interpreter services on a pro bono basis?

**Q:** *My son had a wonderful interpreter this year, and I want her to continue on as his interpreter forever! Can I request this interpreter on his IPP?*

**A:** An IPP, or Individualized Program Plan, is a school-based document. You can't request a specific individual service provider on an IPP. However, you can, with help from your son and his current interpreter, figure out what made this interpreter such a "good fit." Perhaps it is her overall skill level, or skills with ASL or English or the ability to rapidly switch between the two. To some extent, you can request specific skills in the IPP. On the other hand, if you are too specific about interpreter characteristics, it may be impossible to find the right person. Staying with the same interpreter year after year, no matter how "perfect," can be detrimental in the long run, limiting his exposure to other individuals' styles and possibly creating dependence.

**Q:** *My son has ADHD in addition to his hearing loss and can be a handful. The teacher wants the interpreter to monitor and control his behaviour in addition to interpreting. Is this appropriate?*

**A:** The role of the interpreter is to interpret, and if she is also the disciplinarian, this can lead to confusion and resentment on the part of the student and other classmates. After all, no other student in the room has an adult watching him full-time. Ideally, all discipline should be handled by the teacher, with the interpreter facilitating communication to make sure the child understands the rules and consequences.

**Q:** *My son's community baseball team is hosting an informal awards ceremony. We would really like to have his interpreter from school come to interpret, but it's not a school-sponsored event. Is there a way we can book her for this event?*

**A:** Before you take any further steps, it would be wise to inquire as to the interpreter's availability! If she is not available on the date and time of the ceremony, you need go no further in seeking to hire her services.

If she is available, it is quite possible that the staff interpreter from the school is also on the roster of one or more community interpreting agencies. If you have direct contact with the interpreter, you could ask her for referral to an agency through which they work outside of the school setting. You could then investigate possible funding options through that agency, as outlined above. If you aren't able to contact the interpreter directly, you can call the agencies directly and inquire as to whether that interpreter is on their roster. You are welcome to request specific interpreters through community agencies – the interpreter coordinator will make every effort to book your preferred interpreter before offering you the services of other interpreters on the roster. Also bear in mind that there may be a coordinator of the community baseball league who could assist in investigating these arrangements and possibly even help secure some community-based funding, if no other funding source is available.

In order to ensure full participation, whether it is in school or out in the community, access to interpreters is your child's right. Many professionals are inexperienced working with Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing children, so you are likely to encounter those who are unaware of what services are available. You will greatly benefit your child – as well as the community at large – if you are prepared with the resources and knowledge to educate and advocate for socially inclusive services. By working with your child's team of professionals, you can establish a positive collaboration for any environment your child interacts in – home, school, and community.

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