

MEMORANDUM

DATE: August 18, 2009

TO: Special Education Directors

FROM: Mr. Rich Pelletier, Chairperson
Council on Deaf & Hard of Hearing Equality

Ms. Daniese McMullin-Powell, Chairperson
State Council for Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Robert Overmiller, Chairperson
Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens

Ms. Julie Johnson
Delaware Families for Hands & Voices

RE: Interpreter Services

We write as a follow-up to the August 7, 2009 memorandum from Ms. Martha Toomey regarding "funding for interpreter tutors" to provide background and further specifics on this issue. It has been brought to our attention from families of students who are deaf and hard of hearing that children may not be receiving quality interpreter services. We have the following observations.

First, districts are hiring people who are not qualified under the current requirements of the Interpreter Tutor regulations (14 Admin. Code, Section 764) and placing them in an interpreter role. Section 3.0 of the regulations states the following:

The Department shall issue a Permit as an Interpreter Tutor for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to an individual who has:

- 3.1 A minimum of a Bachelor's degree in any field from a regionally accredited college or university; and maintains national certification as an Interpreter for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing by RID, or;
- 3.2 Maintains a current and valid license and is certified as a Teacher of the Hearing Impaired.

In a related context, we realize that funding for the position of interpreter tutor may not be adequate to hire qualified individuals. Therefore, it is our understanding that school districts are hiring individuals to act as interpreter tutors who are actually paraprofessionals or teachers' aides who lack the sign language skills, experience and qualifications to interpret in an educational setting. The paraprofessional or aide is trying to do the job of an interpreter without the experience, skill or pay of an interpreter.

Second, another concern is in 3.2 regarding the requirement that an interpreter tutor may be a person who "maintains a current and valid license and is certified as a Teacher of the Hearing Impaired." We believe that being a licensed and certified teacher of the deaf is not a guarantee that the individual has sign language skills sufficient to interpret in an educational setting. Indeed, this issue has even been reported by interpreters who are licensed and certified teachers of the deaf. Their experience indicates that very little time and effort is focused on acquisition of signing skills.

Third, although we realize that funding is an issue during this economic downturn, we also know that students with disabilities are entitled to appropriate accommodations. These accommodations include access to qualified interpreters to ensure that they receive an education on the same level as their hearing peers. In addition, we believe that the aforementioned regulations should be enforced statewide and not just be utilized by the Delaware School for the Deaf. When hiring individuals to serve as interpreters, we strongly recommend that school districts adhere to the current regulations.

Given the aforementioned concerns, we have established a workgroup to examine the current interpreter tutor regulations in multiple contexts as they relate to providing quality interpreter services for students who are deaf and hard of hearing.

Thank you for your consideration and please contact Kyle Hodges, SCPD Director, if you have any questions or comments regarding our observations.

cc: Ms. Martha Toomey
Developmental Disabilities Council
codhhe/district terp services