

# NATIONAL CODE OF ETHICS AND STANDARDS OF PRACTICE FOR INTERPRETERS IN EDUCATION

BY THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF INTERPRETERS AND TRANSLATORS IN EDUCATION

December 2023



[AAITE.ORG](https://AAITE.ORG)



## Acknowledgements

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We acknowledge Carola Lehmacher-Richez, Giovanna Carriero-Contreras, and Katharine Allen for their work as primary authors of the Preface to the *National Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for Interpreters in Education*. We thank Barbara Garrett and Sofía García-Bayearth for their invaluable contributions, and Eva Vargas for the design.

The *National Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for Interpreters in Education* was submitted to and reviewed by professional associations and selected stakeholders from distinct backgrounds in the interpreting field: academics, trainers, practitioners, service administrators, advocates, community members, and representatives of professional associations. We thank our fellow professional associations for their support and our stakeholders for their contributions.

As the educational interpreting and translation professions in the United States mature and evolve, it is essential to create a clear, shared understanding of research-based, relevant, and ethically appropriate principles and practices. To define and guide ethical behavior, AAITE followed a formal research process to obtain data about the critical ethical situations professional interpreters and translators in education face daily. To make this document accessible to all, in addition to selecting the ethical principles, we created standards of practice, each with accompanying examples, to clarify the scope of ethical behavior. This work is a labor of love that expresses our profound respect for those whom we serve as well as for those who work in this setting.

# NATIONAL CODE OF ETHICS AND STANDARDS OF PRACTICE FOR INTERPRETERS IN EDUCATION

American Association of Interpreters and Translators in Education

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Mary Hernández-Castellanos, Chair-Elect  
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Dr. Bill Rivers, Advisory Council to the Board

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The *National Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for Interpreters in Education* and *Standards of Practice* was reviewed and validated by the following stakeholders.

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National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and  
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## PREFACE

### Introduction

A code of ethics defines the core values and principles that guide the decision-making process of a particular profession or a group of professionals. The goal of this document is not to dictate rigid regulations or impose prescriptive behaviors, but to encourage critical thinking, responsible judgment, and adherence to ethical considerations for navigating professional situations and dilemmas.

In efforts to adhere to ethical standards, professionals strive for sound judgment and situational awareness, and they need to rely on critical thinking and systematic approaches to achieve balanced decision-making in any given context. They must also accept accountability for their actions in cases of non-compliance. Codes of ethics are intended to safeguard both the individual and society at large, providing guidance to all parties involved and promoting outcomes that benefit everyone.

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#### ***Education Is a Distinct Setting***

Interpreters and translators working in education face unique situations that differ from challenges encountered in other settings, and thus require a broader range of specialized knowledge. It is the only setting where legal, medical, community, and conference interpreting and translation regularly overlap. Education is driven by national- and state-level language access and disability legislation that involves diverse stakeholders interacting in a wide array of school encounters, programs, and mandates. In this specialization, limited English proficient (LEP) communities require continual access to language services, often for many years, while their children attend school. Interpreters and translators in education must obtain sufficient knowledge and expertise to navigate these multifaceted, ever-changing

intersections among educators, legislation, policies, students, families, and communities on a daily basis.

The research conducted by the Ethics and Standards Committee revealed the complexity and unique nature of the ethical challenges that arise in educational encounters—challenges different from those seen by practitioners of other specializations. It became clear that this complexity is not adequately addressed in existing codes of ethics for interpreters and translators. Nor are these codes sufficient to establish a common understanding of ethical behaviors and practices for the rapidly expanding and professionalizing interpreting and translation workforce in education. Having a nationally recognized code of ethics and standards of practice is imperative to ensure consistent expectations among all stakeholders



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and to elevate the quality of educational interpreting and translation across the country.


That being the case, the Ethics and Standards Committee chose to create new codes rather than merely adopting or attempting to adapt an existing set of ethical principles. The Committee was tasked with developing a validated, comprehensive framework to guide ethical decision-making for educational interpreters and translators in the practice of their professions. The approach the Committee applied is both revolutionary and evolutionary. It was chosen because of a desire to go beyond the traditional approach underlying existing codes of ethics, as those codes no longer fully meet the needs of interpreters and translators, particularly in educational settings. Modern interpreting and translation, with their various specializations, are embedded in increasingly disrupted and changing settings. As the demands of these settings evolve, so too must these professions, including the approach to ethical conduct.

## **Two Codes of Ethics**

Although interpreting and translation share many similarities, they are two distinct professions with separate skill sets and requirements. However, in education, the two professions have been folded into a single, confused job position in school settings for decades. Bilingual school staff with translation duties are widely assumed to be able to do both translation and interpreting when needed, with little to no recognition of the

different skills required for each profession. "In fact, employers of translators or interpreters in K–12 educational settings often expect them to perform tasks associated with both professions,"<sup>1</sup> as one report noted. To avoid further legitimizing this practice, and drawing on the results of its research, the Committee decided to create two separate codes of ethics and standards of practice in an effort to bring educational interpreting and translation into closer alignment with the broader interpreting and translation professions.

Only the creation of separate codes for interpreters and translators can effectively address the unique requirements and practices of each profession. The research-based development process used to gather the necessary data and insights to inform this decision is described below.



*Having a nationally recognized code of ethics and standards of practice is imperative to ensure consistent expectations among all stakeholders and to elevate the quality of educational interpreting and translation across the country.*

<sup>1</sup> Joelynn Ball, Mónica Rodríguez-Castro, Helena Senatore, Gabriela Siebach, Holly Silvestri, and Mónica Villalobos-Russell. "What Employers Are Looking For: A Nationwide Job Description Analysis for Translators and Interpreters in Educational Settings," AAITE, March 2023. Available at <https://www.aaite.org/>.

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The Committee members, members of the translation and interpreting professions who responded to the survey, the AAITE members and other key stakeholders who participated in the research and creation process come from across the United States. Together, they provided the Committee with the first and most comprehensive representation of the work translators and interpreters carry out in education in this country. As a result, the Committee is proud to present the first truly national codes of ethics for interpreters and translators in education. They are meant to serve as a foundational effort and a cornerstone resource for the continued professionalization of these two essential professions.

The remainder of this document focuses primarily on the *National Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for Interpreters in Education*.

In this context, “code of ethics” refers to the ethical principles and their corresponding standards of practice. The document has a two-part structure.<sup>2</sup> The first section details the research and development process the Ethics and Standards Committee undertook to create a nationally relevant, validated, and research-based code of ethics and standards of practice for educational interpreters. The second section provides a framework discussion on the approach to values, ethics, and standards that are embodied in the code itself.

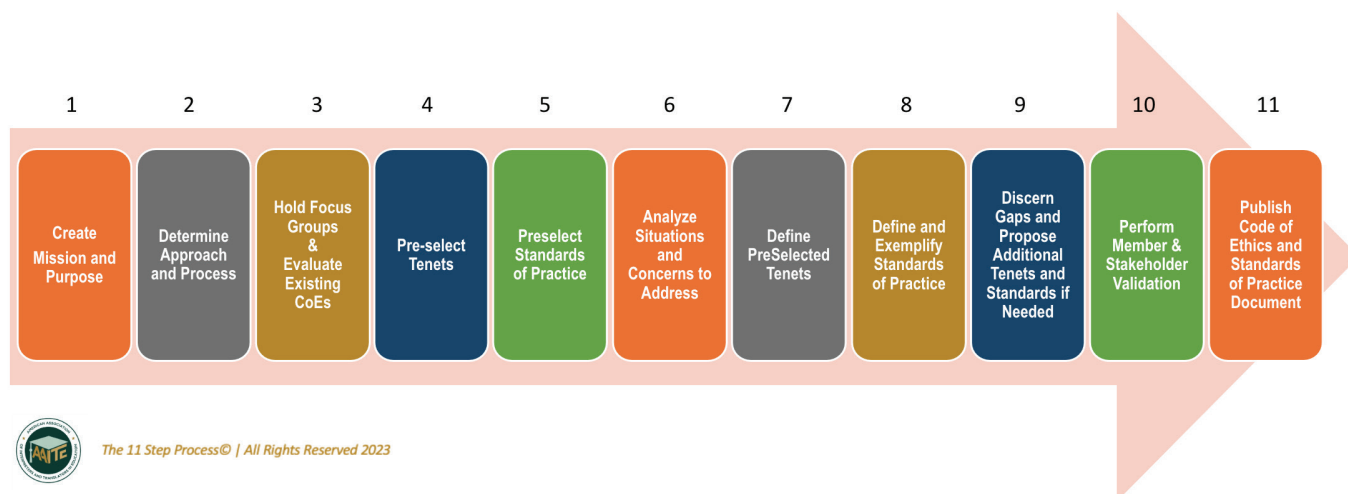
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<sup>2</sup> Please refer to the introduction of the *National Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for Translators in Education* for additional information about its creation.



## Section 1: Research and Development The 11-Step Development Process

The *National Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for Interpreters in Education* and the *National Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for Translators in Education* are the culmination of an extensive, deliberate, and thorough process, grounded in formal research that began in 2020. They are the result of a four-year effort and thousands of hours of work conducted by a group of dedicated volunteers. This effort is a foundational step in AAITE's mission of contributing to the professionalization of the fields of educational interpreting and translation. To achieve this goal in a structured and organized manner, the Ethics and Standards Committee defined the following 11-step development process.



### **Step 1. Create the mission and purpose**

First, the Committee agreed that the following vision and mission would guide their work:

*To lend stature to the Interpreting and Translation roles in education by providing unified criteria and establishing expectations and norms to guide and support the profession.*

### **Step 2. Determine the approach and process**

Second, the Committee decided that, despite the relevance of existing interpreting and translation codes of ethics and standards of practice and their potential application to the education setting, it would focus on identifying gaps that reflect the reality and real-world experiences on the job. To achieve this, the Committee had to focus on obtaining real-world data from the field rather than solely analyzing academic work.

### ***Step 3. Hold focus groups and evaluate existing codes of ethics***

The third step consisted in conducting focus groups and forums to gather insights from a wide range of stakeholders regarding non-compliance with language access legislation requirements in the field of education. Concurrently, the Committee conducted a comprehensive and methodical review and analysis of existing codes of ethics for medical and court interpreters in the United States that were published by state entities and national associations, and of documents governing the profession in other countries such as Australia and Canada.

### ***Steps 4 and 5. Preselect ethical principles and standards of practice***

With this foundation, in steps 4 and 5, the Committee preselected nine ethical principles and their corresponding standards of practice from existing codes of ethics to guide its work and the initial data analysis. The results of this analysis informed the creation of a national survey that was conducted for step 6.

### ***Step 6. Analyze situations and concerns to address***

The goal of the national survey was twofold:

1) to gather formal data on situations and concerns interpreters and translators in education face to complement the information collected during the focus groups; and 2) to determine whether the preselected ethical principles and standards of practice actually addressed recurring issues in the field, as well as to pinpoint any gaps that required attention in order to help stakeholders navigate complex situations.

The in-depth data analysis of the survey results performed in step 6 identified more than 500 concerns, with many overlapping ethical issues. This information helped the Committee identify

## 11-Step Process

1. Create the mission and purpose
2. Determine the approach and process
3. Hold focus groups and evaluate existing codes of ethics
4. Preselect ethical principles
5. Preselect standards of practice
6. Analyze situations and concerns to address
7. Define preselected ethical principles
8. Define and exemplify standards of practice
9. Discern gaps and propose additional principles and standards if needed
10. Perform member and stakeholder validation
11. Publish National Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice documents

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gaps in the scope of existing codes of ethics, and informed the Committee's work to create codes of ethics that reflected and addressed the experiences reported by stakeholders currently involved in language access in education.

## ***Steps 7 and 8. Define preselected ethical principles and exemplify standards of practice***

The Committee proceeded with steps 7 and 8: draft the ethical principles, standards of practice, and examples. The Committee continually referred to the data collected in the survey (step 6) as well as to the information gathered during the initial forums and focus groups (step 3).

## ***Step 9. Discern gaps and propose additional principles and standards if needed***

In step 9, the Committee evaluated whether to incorporate additional ethical principles to ensure that all aspects of the over 500 concerns raised were addressed and to advance the creation of complete and purposeful codes of ethics.

## ***Step 10. Perform member and stakeholder validation***

Step 10 consisted of carrying out member and stakeholder validation in a three-step review process: 1) review by the AAITE Board; 2) review by AAITE members; and 3) review by stakeholders.

In early 2023, the Committee submitted the first draft of both the *National Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for Interpreters* and the *National Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for Translators* to the AAITE Board for review. The codes of ethics included the ethical principles, the corresponding standards of practice, and examples illustrating each standard. The Board provided extensive feedback to the Committee, which then proceeded with a thorough internal review of both drafts.

As part of step 10, the second draft of each code was presented to approximately 80 AAITE members<sup>5</sup> during a focus-group session at the AAITE Edu-Con conference held in Denver, Colorado, in May 2023. Presenting the draft to AAITE members was a crucial step in the development process. During this session, AAITE members were asked to review the proposed ethical principles, standards of practice, and examples for their accuracy, relevance, and clarity, and to provide feedback to the Committee.

The Committee then reviewed the feedback and suggestions received at the AAITE Edu-Con conference, conducted another review and submitted a final draft to additional groups of carefully vetted stakeholders. The Committee leadership and the Board intentionally selected stakeholders from distinct backgrounds in the interpreting and translation fields: academics, trainers, practitioners, service administrators, advocates, community members, and representatives of

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<sup>3</sup> AAITE members currently represent 39 states and are working interpreters and translators in education, language access coordinators, supervisors, and school and district administrators.

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professional associations. This process provided validation and assurance that the Committee had comprehensively addressed all aspects of the work and that the suggested ethical principles and standards of practice were not aspirational but both practical and capable of being implemented.

## **Step 11. Publish two separate complete and accurate codes of ethics and standards of practice**

The Committee undertook this lengthy, comprehensive, and collaborative process to officially publish the *National Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for Interpreters in Education* and the *National Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for Translators in Education* on December 12, 2023.

The *National Code of Ethics for Interpreters* includes the following ethical principles:

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES FOR INTERPRETERS IN EDUCATION	
<b>Accuracy:</b>	The educational interpreter faithfully renders the message from the source language into the target language.
<b>Confidentiality:</b>	The educational interpreter keeps confidential all information obtained while interpreting except when required to disclose information because of organizational policies or as mandated by law.
<b>Impartiality:</b>	The educational interpreter remains objective and unbiased and does not express personal beliefs or give advice to the parties.
<b>Professional Conduct:</b>	The educational interpreter acts in a manner that reflects the highest standards and best practices of the profession.
<b>Professional Development:</b>	The educational interpreter commits to consistently improving and broadening their knowledge and skills through professional development.
<b>Representation of Qualifications:</b>	The educational interpreter provides an accurate representation of their credentials and of their relevant training and experience, along with truthful professional references.

## Section 2: Values, Ethics and their Application

### Introduction

The previous section outlined the meticulous field research the Ethics and Standards Committee undertook to select the core ethical principles included in this document. Assessing the on-the-ground reality that educational interpreters confront was essential, and heretofore unattempted, work necessary to create this code of ethics. However, the field research was not done in a vacuum. Professions have been governed by codes of conduct for thousands of years. Most are framed by centuries of research and discourse on human values, along with framework concepts and additional elements unique to each profession.

Section 2 of this document identifies the overarching values that govern the code of ethics and lays out AAITE's decision to move away from creating a more traditional normative code of ethics and instead embrace descriptive ethics for educational interpreters. This shift, combined with the field research, led to a fundamental reconsideration of the role that cultural awareness and advocacy play in the ethical conduct of interpreters.

Communicative autonomy, a relatively new framework concept for interpreting, and cultural awareness, commonly included in codes of ethics as a separate ethical principle, are presented here instead as framework concepts that are inextricably woven throughout the application of every ethical principle and therefore are not principles in and of themselves.

Advocacy, included in the National Council on Interpreting in Health Care (NCIHC) National Code of Ethics for Interpreters in Health Care as an ethical principle, is not in this code as a stand-alone ethical principle. Rather, along with critical thinking and ethical decision-making skills, advocacy is incorporated as an important, if cautiously used, strategy in the application of ethics.

This overall change in approach greatly expands and strengthens the practical resources interpreters, trainers, and educators have at hand to support ethical decision-making in the field. As the discussion below shows, embracing descriptive ethics represents a significant maturation in the professionalization of educational interpreting, and of interpreting in general.

## ***Normative vs. Descriptive Ethics***

Values are typically broad and general in nature, and represent overarching ideas or concepts. They play a significant role in shaping an individual's or profession's ethical framework and serve as the foundation upon which ethical principles are built.

Turning now to ethical principles, the Ethics and Standards Committee took into consideration two theoretical approaches to ethics while developing the codes of ethics: normative and descriptive.

Normative (or prescriptive) ethics prescribe how a group of professionals *should* act, whereas descriptive or comparative ethics *provide* the foundational guidance that supports professionals in the field when they are faced with an ethical situation or dilemma. Existing codes of ethics in the field of interpreting are highly normative, which often leaves practitioners with inadequate ethical guidance. The ethical challenges and dilemmas interpreters face are often not simply questions of right or wrong, or good or bad. Time and again, the greatest challenge when making a professional decision arises in one of two ways: 1) a personal value conflicts with professional expectations, or 2) two values are in conflict with one another. Sometimes both occur in a single interpreting encounter.

Working interpreters need guidance to make the best decision among several possible options; a code of ethics should provide a framework and guardrails for those decisions. If a code of ethics is normative, it does not provide practitioners with the real-life examples that support the critical thinking and decision-making they need to apply the ethical principles. It is not enough to simply have a code of ethics that provides only binary “do this, don’t do that” guidance. Professionals need to understand what a code of ethics is, know how the accompanying standards of practice apply, and use them to analyze the specific elements of each situation and then choose the most ethical course of action available.

## **Normative Ethics or Prescriptive Ethics**

*“The study of moral problems which seeks to discover how one ought to act, not how one does in fact act or how one thinks one should act.”*

Source: P.L.E., “Morals, Ethics, and Metaethics.” <https://philosophy.lander.edu/ethics/types.html>

## **Descriptive Ethics or Morals**

*“The study of human behavior as a consequence of beliefs about what is right or wrong, or good or bad, insofar as that behavior is useful or effective. In a sense, morals is the study of what is thought to be right and what is generally done by a group, society, or a culture. In general, morals correspond to what actually is done in a society.”*

Source: P.L.E., “Morals, Ethics, and Metaethics.” <https://philosophy.lander.edu/ethics/types.html>



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The Ethics and Standards Committee therefore used a descriptive approach in creating the *National Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for Interpreters in Education*. The reason for this decision was that the Committee determined it was best to create a code of ethics that did not prescribe, or “tell” an interpreter what to do in a given situation. Before drafting the ethical principles and standards of practice that constitute the code of ethics, the Committee meticulously analyzed hundreds of survey answers from various stakeholders in the field, organized them by theme, and formulated the ethical principles to guide the interpreter’s behavior based on this comprehensive analysis. As a result, and in contrast to the traditional normative approach, the code of ethics focuses on describing values-based ethics in order to best apply professional ethical decision-making when faced with an ethical dilemma.

The Committee’s main goal was to close the gap between what is sometimes considered “prescriptive ideal behavior” and what actually happens in the field. For example, educational interpreters often have dual roles at work. In addition to interpreting, they may also function as cultural liaisons. This conflation of roles influences ethical decision-making because the individuals may find that the ethical guidelines for cultural liaisons and interpreters are in conflict. In these situations, there is typically no simple solution. Interpreters need to use critical thinking to make informed and professional decisions that are based on ethical values and the circumstances they face in that moment. Rather than a list of mere dos and don’ts, the Committee created the code of ethics and standards of practice using a descriptive approach that allows for ample flexibility to apply critical thinking and decision-making skills to make the most ethical decision.

## ***Codes of Ethics and Standards of Practice***

A code of ethics is usually defined as a set of rules that members of a specific profession must follow. Codes of ethics generally outline strict rules and expectations to standardize conduct. They are often normative and prescribe what members of such profession should or should not do.

In contrast, standards of practice are descriptive by nature. They reinforce ethical directives by specifying in greater detail how to implement the ethical principles and are often accompanied by examples that provide additional clarity. The purpose of standards of practice is to guide professionals in their decision-making and to support the use of critical thinking in applying the ethical principles. The table below outlines the main characteristics and goals of codes of ethics and standards of practice, and how they differ.<sup>4</sup>

4 Marjory A. Bancroft and Danielle C. Meder, “Chapter 6: A Guide to Ethics in Remote Interpreting,” in *The Remote Interpreter: An International Textbook, Volume 1, Foundations in Remote Interpreting* (Columbia, Maryland: Culture & Language Press, 2023), 315.

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Codes of ethics and standards of practice for interpreters Common characteristics and goals			
Codes of ethics		Standards of practice	
Characteristics	Goals	Characteristics	Goals
Are often prescriptive and rule-based.	Standardize interpreter conduct.	Are generally descriptive, not prescriptive.	Show how to do the work well.
Share a common goal of influencing conduct.	Set expectations.	Tend to focus on professional practice.	Reinforce ethical directives.
May focus on “right vs. wrong” behavior.	Uphold the profession.	Are far less common than codes of ethics.	Standardize conduct (in more detail than codes).
Are widely similar around the world.	Maintain professional standards.	Are often called standards, practices or guidelines.	Specify expectations.
Tend to be called a code. <sup>88</sup>	Preserve privacy.	Are typically longer than codes of ethics.	Clarify ethical directives with examples, guidance.
Are of varying lengths.	Convey full message.	Are mostly, like codes, published by professional groups.	Show how to apply ethics.
Are mostly published by professional groups.	Provide a faithful rendering.	Often based on a specific code to amplify it.	Support critical thinking.
Are typically issued by interpreter associations.	Support each other.	Have variable structures, lengths and formats.	Build trust in the profession.
May come from some courts.	Engage in honest business practices.	Include a wide variety of content (more than codes).	Build decision-making skills.
May be issued by language services or government bodies.	Respect all participants.	Are typically more detailed than codes.	Support professionalization.
Tend to be somewhat strict, rigid and binding (on members).	Respect colleagues.	Are sometimes included in codes of ethics documents.	Provide clarity and perspective on ethical requirements.

**Table 6.4:** Comparison of common characteristics and goals of ethics and standards for interpreters

The AAITE Ethics and Standards Committee chose to move away from the traditional normative approach of existing codes of ethics for interpreters. Instead, it has created a descriptive set of principles, supported by accompanying standards of practice for each principle.

Consequently, the standards of practice and examples presented in this document are based on real-life experiences of interpreters working in educational settings. These standards and examples do not cover an exhaustive list of scenarios; instead, they suggest possible acceptable behaviors for when ethical principles are used in efforts to guide professionals in their decision-making. Professional educational interpreters, indeed all interpreters, develop professional conduct over time. It is therefore recommended that practicing interpreters seek additional training to learn how to navigate the complexities of the code of ethics, the standards of practice, and the challenges they may encounter in their daily work. Interpreters are invited to explore the comprehensive resources provided by the Ethics and Standards Committee in addition to those offered by other AAITE committees, such as the Job Task Analysis report.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Joelynn Ball, Mónica Rodríguez-Castro, Helena Senatore, Gabriella Siebach, Holly Silvestri, and Mónica Villalobos-Russell “What Employers Are Looking For: A Nationwide Analysis of Job Description for Translators and Interpreters in Educational Settings,” AAITE, 2023. Available at <https://www.aaite.org/>.

## ***Overarching Values***

In the context of philosophy and human moral conduct, an overarching value refers to a fundamental principle or belief that serves as a guiding force for individual and collective actions. It represents a shared understanding of what is considered good, right, and desirable in a particular society or culture. Overarching values transcend personal interests and provide a framework for making ethical decisions that align with the well-being of others and the broader community. Moreover, they serve as guiding principles that determine interactions and shape the behavior of society at large. They create a shared understanding of acceptable conduct and delineate societal boundaries.

The core overarching values that guide our moral behavior and that are central to our conduct as professional interpreters are non-maleficence (“do no harm”), dignity, respect, honesty, and solidarity.

- Non-maleficence is grounded in medical ethics and is the ethical principle of doing no harm. It dates to ancient times and is still relevant today as applied to human services professions. It is the prohibition against causing harm to others and is often expressed in the maxim, “First, do no harm.”<sup>6</sup>
- Dignity, in human services professions, is the principle of supporting a person’s sense of self-respect, acknowledging, and honoring each person’s capacities and ambitions, promoting self-determination, and doing “nothing to undermine it.”<sup>7</sup>
- Respect is demonstrating regard for the feelings, wishes, rights, or traditions of others. It includes accepting people for who they are, even when you disagree with them or if they are different from you.<sup>8</sup>
- Honesty is commonly known as being truthful; it is the opposite of deceit. One is honest when genuinely adhering to that which is legitimate.<sup>9</sup>

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6 Oxford Reference, s.v. “Nonmaleficence,” accessed December 6, 2023, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100237642>.

7 Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), “Defining Dignity in Care,” para. 7, <https://www.scie.org.uk/dignity/care/defining>.

8 Oxford Reference, s.v. “Respect,” accessed December 6, 2023, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/respect>.

9 Merriam-Webster, s.v. “Honesty,” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/honesty>.

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- Solidarity refers to a bond of unity between people who are united around or toward a common goal.<sup>10</sup>

Ethical principles are rooted in values, most of which are universal in nature, and provide guidelines applicable across diverse cultures and contexts. Moreover, these principles help identify fundamental questions of right or wrong and offer guidance on how to act accordingly.

As many previous interpreter codes of ethics have done, the Ethics and Standards Committee sees overarching values as the foundation on which the *National Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for Interpreters in Education* stands, but not as ethical principles in themselves. Rather, each overarching value is expressed through every individual ethical principle. For example, when interpreters remain impartial by accurately interpreting what is said whether they agree with the statement or not, and when they maintain confidentiality even when pressed not to by community members, they support the overarching value of respect.

## Ethical Framework Concepts

In addition to including the above-mentioned overarching values, the Committee incorporated two essential framing concepts that help guide the ethical conduct of interpreters and that are integrated into each individual ethical principle: communicative autonomy and cultural awareness.

Ethical conduct is a process, one that requires individual interpreters to combine foundational knowledge with practical tools and skills. A complete code of ethics provides all the necessary elements. It can be likened to the construction of a building. The overarching principles provide the building's foundation, upon which the entire structure rests. Next comes the frame, the dynamic beams and posts that create a stable structure for the rest of the building's features. In the context of this code of ethics, communicative autonomy and cultural awareness are the frame that supports the concrete and practical elements necessary for ethical conduct contained in the

building: ethical principles, critical thinking, ethical decision-making and intervention strategies. In other words, along with the overarching values, communicative autonomy and cultural awareness uphold the entire structure, ensuring its strength and integrity.

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<sup>10</sup> Merriam-Webster, s.v. "Solidarity," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/solidarity>.

## ***Communicative Autonomy***

Communicative autonomy, defined as “the capacity of each party in an encounter to be responsible for and in control of his or her own communication,”<sup>11</sup> was first expressed in 2015 and represents a significant advancement in our understanding of the interpreter’s fundamental role to capture and express what each speaker says without inserting themselves or interfering with the intended message.

*When service users and service providers encounter language barriers, they may need professional assistance to communicate. Yet having an intermediary—the interpreter—inserted into the process of giving and receiving messages has an inescapable impact on the communicative process. The professional community interpreter is trained to use a variety of strategies to keep that impact to a minimum, such as strategic positioning, the use of direct speech (first person), choosing which interpreting mode to use, refraining from side conversations and so on. These strategies help both service users and providers to be responsible for their own dialogue, and the interpreter’s presence. They support communicative autonomy. ..ethics and standards... [also] provide a framework that can help the interpreter strive for an unobtrusive presence. In this way, the parties can stay focused on communicating directly with each other and not with the interpreter.<sup>12</sup>*

The Ethics and Standards Committee developed the *National Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for Interpreters in Education* with the understanding that each party in the encounter has the right to express their thoughts, opinions, and feelings without interference. The interpreter’s role is to honor this right and the speaker’s autonomy, and therefore, the interpreter refrains from intervening in or influencing the direct communication between the parties in the encounter. Communicative autonomy is woven throughout the interpreter’s actions, from the modes used, to the strategies they select for managing the session, to the choices they make when applying ethics. It is not an ethical principle, but a framework concept embedded in all aspects of professional conduct.

With this understanding, the Committee has adopted “communicative autonomy” as a framework concept that, together with overarching values, governs the work of interpreters in education.

The effective and appropriate application of individual ethical principles inherently supports the communicative autonomy of all parties in the interpreted encounter.

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<sup>11</sup> Sofía García-Beyaert, Marjory A. Bancroft, Katharine Allen, Giovanna Carriero-Contreras, and Denis Socarrás-Estrada, *Ethics and Standards for The Community Interpreter®: An International Training Tool* (Columbia, MD: Culture & Language Press, 2015), 5. Online access: [www.thecommunityinterpreter.com](http://www.thecommunityinterpreter.com).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

## **Cultural Awareness**

As previously discussed, educational settings are uniquely complex and demand adjustments to how traditional codes of ethics for interpreters are structured. One such adjustment applies to our current understanding of how interpreters should navigate the topic of culture. Because educational settings blend community, legal and conference interpreting encounters, interpreter ethics can't take a binary approach to whether, how and when interpreters are allowed to address culture, nor can it choose to adopt a fully collaborative or fully adversarial approach, as healthcare and court interpreting codes of ethics do respectively. Thus, the Ethics and Standards Committee had to consider a different approach when considering *culture* and its role in educational interpreting.

Culture refers to a collective framework comprising the shared values, beliefs, customs, and societal norms that are embraced and practiced by a specific group of people in a distinct cultural context. In this framework, the definition of culture goes beyond a geographical concept. It includes the totality of an individual's lived experiences, which inevitably include their own local and national culture, as well as their interactions with groups, places, and institutions that can span digital and other geographies.

In reality, no one person can ever claim to fully understand the cultural reality of another. What, then, is meant by *cultural awareness* in the context of ethical practice for interpreters? In this document, cultural awareness refers to having a partial knowledge of the unique mix of beliefs, customs, and social norms of the different cultures the people they interpret for come from. Cultural awareness also means being mindful of how our own culture shapes our perceptions of others and our interactions with them. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, cultural awareness means being aware that multiple cultures are present in every interpreted encounter and can influence the intended outcome, positively or negatively.

Most interpreting codes of ethics address culture as distinct from language by siloing cultural awareness as a separate ethical principle, or by prohibiting its application altogether when interpreting. Whether or not an interpreter is allowed to address culture is an unsettled issue in interpreting.

*Around the world, there is no agreement among codes of ethics about whether or not the interpreter should try to manage cultural misunderstandings, a specific type of communication breakdown rooted in cultural difference.<sup>13</sup>*

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<sup>13</sup> Marjory A. Bancroft and Danielle C. Meder, "Chapter 6: A Guide to Ethics in Remote Interpreting," in *The Remote Interpreter: An International Textbook, Volume 1, Foundations in Remote Interpreting* (Columbia, Maryland: Culture & Language Press, 2023), 348.



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For example, in the United States, the national code of ethics for healthcare interpreters<sup>14</sup> includes cultural awareness as an ethical principle. Healthcare and community interpreters are trained to use cultural mediation strategies to identify and point to potential cultural misunderstandings when the communication between parties is at risk because of a cultural barrier. Yet U.S. court and legal interpreters must follow national and state codes of conduct that prohibit interpreters from taking cultural barriers into account. They are not allowed to intervene to point to cultural misunderstandings affecting communication.

These conflicting codes of ethics pose a difficult challenge for educational interpreters. As noted earlier, educational settings combine many kinds of encounters. Some are collaborative and based on a shared desire to achieve the best educational outcome, as most medical encounters seek the best health outcome for the patient. Others, however, are adversarial in nature where families and students are in conflict with school policies or programs. For example, a family denied special education services may challenge the school's decision or a student may be expelled from school against their family's wishes based on school and state regulations. Other encounters blend both collaborative and adversarial elements. For instance, a student called in front of a district attendance board may face formal consequences for nonattendance, but the family and school representatives may still work collaboratively to find a way to overcome the issues leading to the student's absences.

In practice, culture cannot be separated from language. Language carries the values, beliefs, customs, and societal norms of the culture it comes from. The ways in which people express themselves, the words they use, their idioms and metaphors, all reflect the unique aspects of their cultural identity. Language not only conveys information but also encapsulates the worldview of a community. It shapes how individuals perceive the world, interact with one another, and interpret experiences.

Interpreters interpret meaning for meaning—they do not translate word for word; and the only way to achieve an accurate, impartial, and complete interpretation is by exercising cultural awareness.

In addition to monitoring the cultural beliefs and perspectives that shape human communication, interpreters must also comprehend their own cultural perspectives to avoid inadvertently imposing biases when they make linguistic choices. Every single linguistic choice an interpreter makes is saturated in culture, which means that cultural awareness is also inseparable from the ethical principles of accuracy and impartiality.

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<sup>14</sup> National Council on Interpreting in Health Care (NCIHC), Code of Ethics, 2019, <https://www.ncihc.org/assets/documents/publications/NCIHC%20National%20Code%20of%20Ethics.pdf>

Furthermore, interpreters cannot demonstrate the overarching values of respect, diversity, and dignity without cultural awareness. Being culturally aware is essential to ethical conduct. Interpreters working in education must develop the ability to mindfully engage in intercultural interactions with respect, empathy, and openness, while still being able to choose the appropriate intervention strategies for each encounter. Interpreters should have a certain degree of cultural knowledge based on the languages they speak and the cultures or regions they are familiar with. However, interpreters face a diversity of cultures and individual lived experiences in their daily work; they are not in a position to assume knowledge and explain someone else's culture and should refrain from doing so under any circumstances.

Normative codes of ethics that attempt to corral cultural awareness into a single ethical principle or to prohibit culture from being considered at all when interpreting ignore the on-the-ground reality that culture cannot be stripped from the linguistic expression of all parties in an encounter; nor can its presence be ignored in the context of the session. As the above analysis shows, shifting to a descriptive code of ethics means providing interpreters with flexible strategies for applying cultural awareness that reflect reality. Those strategies are described in many of the examples provided in the standards of practice that support each ethical principle.

For all these reasons, the Ethics and Standard Committee chose not to include cultural awareness as an ethical principle, but to elevate it to a framework concept, one embedded in every linguistic and ethical decision interpreters make.

## **Application of Ethics**

A descriptive code of ethics is based on situations practitioners face in real life and avoids prescribing simplistic dos and don'ts. To abide by its principles, interpreters need well-developed critical thinking and ethical decision-making skills. This section outlines essential concepts and skills interpreters in education need to follow to apply the ethics and standards contained in this document. In addition, it positions advocacy as a strategy for applying ethics, not as an ethical principle on its own.

### ***Critical thinking***

Critical thinking is a concept that has evolved over centuries. Like *culture*, it can be defined in many ways and from different perspectives. A useful definition of critical thinking in the context of interpreters and ethical decision-making is:

*..the ability to effectively analyze information and form a judgment. To think critically, you must be aware of your own biases and assumptions when encountering information and apply consistent standards when evaluating sources.<sup>15</sup>*

Critical thinking is pivotal in our ethical decision-making process as interpreters. It empowers us to clearly discern, analyze, and navigate complex situations. It serves as a cornerstone in the transition from prescriptive to descriptive ethics, where professionals navigate decision-making based on situational demands and the guiding principles of professional conduct. Critical thinking aids interpreters in identifying ethical implications and the potential consequences associated with a decision.

Furthermore, applying critical thinking to the decision-making process enhances interpreters' understanding of ethical principles, enabling them to make well-informed and reasoned choices. Most importantly, critical thinking empowers interpreters to articulate their decision-making process by elucidating the values influencing their choices in any given setting. The standards of practice accompanying the ethical principles in this document are designed to engage critical thinking skills to enable interpreters to make the best available ethical decisions when faced with difficult choices.

## ***Ethical Decision-Making***

Ethical decision-making is the process of evaluating and choosing actions or courses of conduct that align with moral principles, values, and ethical standards. It involves considering the potential consequences of different choices and selecting the one that is ethically sound, just, and morally defensible. Ethical decision-making goes hand in hand with critical thinking. Interpreters are faced with countless variations of communication challenges when they interpret. It would be impossible to create a comprehensive list of every possible ethical dilemma that might arise and provide the "correct" course of action. Sometimes ethical principles conflict with each other; other times there may be several possible choices to resolve a barrier to communication. In the absence of simple "do this, don't do that" answers, interpreters must develop their critical thinking skills to make a judgment about the best course of action available to them.

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<sup>15</sup> Eoghan Ryan, "What Is Critical Thinking? Definition and Examples," Scribbr, revised May 31, 2023, <https://www.scribbr.com/working-with-sources/critical-thinking/>

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Applying critical thinking to ethical challenges can include:

- Identifying the issue
- Exploring the ethical principles involved, both personal and professional
- Evaluating options
- Making decisions (choosing the option)
- Implementing the chosen decision—putting it into action
- Monitoring and reviewing the outcome
- Reflecting and learning from the outcome

Helping professions similar to interpreting, such as nursing and counseling, have developed ethical decision-making processes which have been adapted in some interpreting specializations. For example, the California Healthcare Interpreter Standards outline a 6-step process that is still taught in many training programs.<sup>16</sup>

The standards of practice in this document are designed to aid educational interpreters in developing and implementing mature ethical decision-making skills to appropriately apply their professional ethics.

## **Advocacy**

Advocacy as an ethical principle, where the interpreter is expected to speak up on behalf of one of the parties in a session, is controversial. It is an integral part of sign language interpreting, but more often than not prohibited in spoken language interpreter codes of ethics.

Advocacy is presently included as an ethical principle in the NCIHC National Code of Ethics for Interpreters in Health Care in the United States. Many early codes of conduct for educational interpreters developed by school districts and some states were adapted from the NCIHC ethics and included advocacy by default. In addition, dual-role educational interpreters who also work as community liaisons may be expected to advocate for families and community members as part of their liaison role.

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<sup>16</sup> California Healthcare Interpreters Association, "California Standards for Healthcare Interpreters," 2002, pp. 54–61, [https://chia.wildapricot.org/Resources/Documents/CHIA%20Standards/standards\\_chia.pdf](https://chia.wildapricot.org/Resources/Documents/CHIA%20Standards/standards_chia.pdf)

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In contrast, advocacy on the behalf of a limited English proficient individual is prohibited in legal and court interpreting codes of ethics in the United States. It is also not permitted in Canada's code<sup>17</sup> of ethics for community interpreters in legal and community settings, including in healthcare.

The diametrically opposed approaches to advocacy that community and legal interpreting take in the United States is one reason that the *National Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for Interpreters in Education* takes a different approach. Whether included in a code as a stand-alone ethical principle or not, advocacy is an ethical decision that takes the interpreter out of their normally restricted role and inserts them into the encounter with a voice of their own. The decision to advocate requires critical thinking to make a personal, moral ethical decision.

Furthermore, based on the data collected, the Committee found that advocacy as an ethical principle in educational settings is poorly understood, and often subjectively and inconsistently applied. As previously discussed, education settings have collaborative, adversarial and mixed encounters. As an ethical principle, advocacy requires the interpreter to take action or speak up on behalf of someone else, often without their full consent. It can violate the ethical principles of impartiality and professional conduct, as well as the rules and requirements for encounters that are prescribed by legal processes. Most importantly, it risks undermining the overarching value of respect and the ethical framework concept of communicative autonomy by taking away the ability of one or more parties to be in charge of their communication. Finally, existing ethical guidance for interpreters in education isn't clear about when to use advocacy, leaving this decision to the subjectivity of the interpreter.

Based on this analysis, the Committee determined that advocacy (the act of advocating) is better framed as a strategy to be used by interpreters in conjunction with other intervention techniques and critical thinking skills. In any profession, practitioners will sometimes be confronted with moral dilemmas that require them to step out of their professional roles and take action. When that happens, they are best served by analyzing the situation using an ethical decision-making process to determine whether advocacy is the best strategy to apply.

Advocacy for the profession, on the other hand, is highly encouraged. There is an ongoing need to raise awareness to avoid misconceptions and misunderstandings about the role of professional interpreters in education and to highlight the significance of the profession, outside of interpreted sessions. Advocacy efforts can also influence policies that support the profession's growth, development, and recognition. A better understanding of the profession will ultimately result in

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17 HIN. (2007). National standards guide for community interpreting services. Toronto: Healthcare Interpretation Network.

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better working conditions, fair compensation, and an enhanced overall environment in which professionals in the field can thrive.

## Concluding Remarks

As we reach this new milestone in our profession, we look both to the past and the future: remembering where we came from and what we have achieved so far, and looking to the road ahead and the work still to be done.

We are extremely grateful to all of those who have generously given their time and effort to this endeavor. It truly takes a village to bring such a project to life! We hope the *National Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for Interpreters in Education* will be a beacon that will guide the work of many in the educational field.

With the utmost gratitude,





## National Code of Ethics for Interpreters in Education

- ***Accuracy***

The educational interpreter faithfully renders the message from the source language into the target language.

- ***Confidentiality***

The educational interpreter keeps confidential all information obtained while interpreting except when required to disclose information because of organizational policies or as mandated by law.

- ***Impartiality***

The educational interpreter remains objective and unbiased and does not express personal beliefs or give advice to the parties.

- ***Professional Conduct***

The educational interpreter acts in a manner that reflects the highest standards and best practices of the profession.

- ***Professional Development***

The educational interpreter commits to consistently improving and broadening their knowledge and skills through professional development.

- ***Representation of Qualifications***

The educational interpreter provides an accurate representation of their credentials and of their relevant training and experience, along with truthful professional references.

## Standards of Practice

### ACCURACY

**The educational interpreter faithfully renders the message from the source language into the target language.**

1. The educational interpreter conveys the full meaning of what is said in the original message in the target language without adding to, omitting, summarizing, or changing the content.
  - Example: During an IEP meeting, the educational interpreter uses the correct term for “disability” when interpreting, even though the interpreter is aware that the term may have negative implications for the parents.
  - Example: During an expulsion meeting, a Board member repeatedly asks the student the same question. The educational interpreter interprets the question every time it is asked.
  - Example: During a 504 plan meeting, the educational interpreter struggles with the difference between “accommodations” and “modifications,” and therefore asks for clarification of the terms to avoid changing the meaning.
2. The educational interpreter corrects any errors made while interpreting as soon as they realize an error was made.
  - Example: While reviewing an initial evaluation, the school psychologist tells the parents that their child’s score on a standardized test was in the “low average range.” The educational interpreter hears only “average range” and interprets it as such. A moment later, the interpreter realizes their mistake and states the correction in both languages.
  - Example: The educational interpreter sight translates a school report that the parents brought from their country of origin so that the English teacher can add the information to the student’s file. The interpreter realizes that the date format was interpreted incorrectly. Instead of 10/5/2017, the interpreter should have said 5/10/2017. They immediately inform the parties and correct their mistake.

### 3. The educational interpreter conveys the same register, tone, intent, and speech style as the speaker.

- Example: During a phone call with the grandparents, the student, and the truancy officer, the student uses slang and profanity. Regardless of how uncomfortable some participants or the interpreter themselves may feel, the educational interpreter interprets everything without adjusting, modifying, or censoring the student's language.
- Example: During a meeting, a teacher is talking to a foster parent using a lot of educational jargon and specialized language. Although it is evident that the parent is not understanding everything, the teacher continues to use the same language. The educational interpreter refrains from lowering the register on their own and asks the teacher to rephrase the message in simpler words.

### 4. The educational interpreter manages the flow of communication.

- Example: Prior to and as needed during the meeting, the educational interpreter reminds the speakers to avoid side conversations and to speak at a reasonable pace.
- Example: While interpreting in the consecutive mode during a parent-teacher conference, the educational interpreter reminds the parties to pause to allow for interpreting and for the guardians to ask questions.
- Example: During an IEP meeting, the participants get into a heated discussion, talk over each other, and cut each other off. The educational interpreter intervenes because they cannot continue to interpret unless the participants take turns speaking.
- Example: Before an over-the-phone (OPI) interpreting assignment where all staff members are together in the same room and only the parents are connecting over the phone, the educational interpreter asks each person to state their name and role each time before speaking.
- Example: During their professional introduction at the beginning of a remote meeting, the educational interpreter shares the hand signals and gestures they will use to indicate that they need to intervene, or to clarify unfamiliar terminology, or that the speaker should pause to allow for interpretation.

5. The educational interpreter considers the cultural implications of terms chosen in efforts to faithfully convey the intended meaning of the source message.
    - Example: When interpreting for a parent-teacher conference, the teacher becomes increasingly frustrated by the parents' resistance to enrolling their child in the after-school homework program, even though the child is falling behind in class. The educational interpreter suspects that the student provides childcare for their younger siblings and is needed at home after school. The educational interpreter suggests to both parties that there may be a cultural misunderstanding creating a barrier to communication regarding familial responsibilities that the parties might explore.
    - Example: Several parents have asked to meet with the school counselor after receiving a letter from the school about an upcoming workshop on gender equality. When preparing for the assignment, the educational interpreter researches gender equality and culturally appropriate equivalents for describing the school's services for LGTBQI+ students.
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## CONFIDENTIALITY

**The educational interpreter keeps confidential all information obtained while interpreting except when required to disclose information because of organizational policies or as mandated by law.**

6. The educational interpreter safeguards confidential information, keeping it within the service team except as required by local regulations or by state and/or federal law.
  - Example: During a meeting, the parent threatens to severely beat their child if the child's grades don't improve. The educational interpreter conveys the message in its entirety. The school staff present at the meeting do not ask any follow-up questions and do not seem to be concerned. The educational interpreter has reason to believe that the parent might carry out their threat and decides to follow the appropriate protocol and report their concern about child abuse.
  - Example: The educational interpreter is interpreting a meeting between a foster parent and a middle school counselor regarding student misbehavior. The counselor steps out of the room for a moment to respond to something in the hallway, and the foster parent discloses to the interpreter that they feel the reason the student is misbehaving is that a relative in the home has been violent.

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The interpreter informs the foster parent that they must report this information by law. When the counselor returns, the interpreter interprets for the counselor what the foster parent told them.

- Example: The educational interpreter is working at an event where parents bring a variety of dishes from their own countries to share a meal at the school. One of the students is about to eat a food to which they are severely allergic. The substitute teacher is not familiar with the student's medical history, but the educational interpreter is aware of it from previous interpreting encounters and informs the substitute teacher.

## 7. The educational interpreter does not share or use information learned in the interpreter role and adheres to school and district policies and procedures.

- Example: The school office secretary works as an educational interpreter when needed. The secretary recently interpreted at an IEP meeting. The day after the meeting, a teacher asks the office secretary to share details about the updated accommodations discussed at that IEP meeting. The secretary replies that, as the interpreter in the meeting, they are required to keep all information confidential and suggests that the teacher contact the case manager with any questions.
- Example: The educational interpreter runs into a parent at the grocery store, and the parent casually asks how the meeting with their nephew went. The educational interpreter kindly reminds the parent that they cannot share information gained during an interpreting assignment.
- Example: The educational interpreter has interpreted repeatedly for the same family. During a meeting with the school counselor, the parents say something that contradicts what they had mentioned in a previous meeting. The educational interpreter continues to interpret without revealing any previous knowledge, interrupting, or correcting.

## 8. The educational interpreter effectively sets up their remote workspace and connectivity to ensure confidentiality.

- Example: The educational interpreter is interpreting remotely for a parent-teacher conference. The educational interpreter makes sure they are in a private space where others cannot hear the conversation or see their screen and notes. The educational interpreter also uses a sign on the door to their workspace to let others know not to interrupt.
- Example: The educational interpreter has been assigned by the school administration to work remotely. The interpreter talks to their supervisor about the equipment they need to ensure confidentiality in their workspace (e.g., password-protected desktop/laptop, headset, private account for video remote interpreting).

9. The educational interpreter safeguards all materials pertaining to the interpreting encounter.

- Example: After an IEP meeting, the case manager asks the educational interpreter for their notes so the case manager can create the meeting report. The educational interpreter informs the case manager that interpreter notes cannot be surrendered and must be destroyed to maintain confidentiality.

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## IMPARTIALITY

**The educational interpreter remains objective and unbiased and does not express personal beliefs or give advice to the parties.**

10. The educational interpreter refrains from taking sides, and from speaking or behaving in a manner that implies favoritism or bias.

- Example: A special education teacher asks the interpreter for a personal favor. The teacher did not schedule an interpreter for an upcoming assessment meeting and wants the interpreter to cancel a confirmed evaluation. The educational interpreter refers the teacher to the established protocol that outlines the steps for requesting interpreting services, even for last-minute assignments.
- Example: During a school board meeting, a family requests that a gender-neutral restroom be designated in the school, as their child does not identify with the gender assigned to them at birth. The head of the school board replies that they cannot accommodate this request, and the parties engage in a heated discussion. Although the educational interpreter may have personal opinions on this topic, they interpret everything without interfering, maintaining the register and intent of the speakers and being aware of their own body language and gestures.

11. The educational interpreter refrains from using body language or facial expressions that could affect their work.

- Example: The educational interpreter interprets what the superintendent tells the parents at the Board meeting without showing whether they agree or disagree with the sentiment and tone of the message.



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- Example: During an interpreting encounter, the educational interpreter is caught off guard when one party reveals unexpected information. The interpreter proceeds to render the message without letting their emotions influence the message.

## 12. The educational interpreter does not allow their personal judgments or cultural values to influence their work.

- Example: During a meeting with the principal, a parent raises concerns about a female student's desire to join the wrestling team. Setting aside any personal opinions the educational interpreter may have regarding a female student joining the wrestling team, they interpret the conversation without letting their personal beliefs affect the way they interpret.

## 13. The educational interpreter discloses potential conflicts of interest and withdraws from assignments if necessary.

- Example: Upon arriving at the scheduled IEP meeting, the educational interpreter sees their neighbors waiting in the classroom and realizes they will have to interpret for their neighbors. In a professional manner, the educational interpreter discloses this relationship to the meeting attendees, who discuss the situation and agree that the interpreter should withdraw from the assignment.
- Example: When the educational interpreter arrives at their assignment, they find out that they are about to interpret for their second cousin. The interpreter promptly discloses the family tie to the school staff. The school staff ask whether the interpreter is comfortable proceeding with the interpretation. Even though the interpreter feels confident regarding their ability to remain impartial, they recommend that another interpreter be called to make the parents feel more at ease. However, the parents express that they would prefer to have the current interpreter stay and interpret.

## 14. The educational interpreter does not express personal beliefs.

- Example: Prior to a parent-teacher conference, the teacher asks the educational interpreter whether they believe that saying a prayer with the parents before starting the meeting would be appropriate. The educational interpreter politely offers to interpret the question for the parents without expressing their personal take on the matter.

15. The educational interpreter does not offer opinions or advice, even when asked to do so.

- Example: At the end of the interpreting assignment and after the parents have left the meeting room, the principal asks the educational interpreter why newly arrived foreign parents do not seem to learn English fast enough to function in school settings like native speakers. The educational interpreter respectfully reminds the principal that it's not within their role to offer personal opinions and suggests the principal speak with a cultural liaison about how to support newly arrived parents.
- Example: During a disciplinary hearing, the school officer gives the parents two options for their child's future educational program. The parents ask the educational interpreter, who is also a family liaison at the school, which option would be better. The educational interpreter interprets the question to maintain transparency and then respectfully reminds the parties that they cannot provide advice when in the interpreter role. If it's appropriate, they can provide that assistance directly when meeting with the parents as the school family liaison.
- Example: A counselor is talking to a student with the assistance of the educational interpreter. The counselor mentions that the student has been disrespectful to a teacher in one of their classes and that the counselor will be calling the parents to inform them. The student asks the counselor not to call the parents because of the severe consequences the student will face at home. The counselor then asks the educational interpreter what they think will happen to the student if the counselor actually does call the parents. The educational interpreter refrains from responding or providing advice and redirects the counselor to ask the student.

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## PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

**The educational interpreter acts in a manner that reflects the highest standards and best practices of the profession.**

16. The educational interpreter discloses any limitations regarding their ability to do their work.

- Example: At the beginning of a scheduled 2-hour session, the educational interpreter informs the parties that they have to interpret at another meeting that immediately follows the current one. If necessary, the educational interpreter reminds the parties 15 minutes before the scheduled time is over that they will need to leave.

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- Example: The educational interpreter is asked to interpret simultaneously for a group of 30 people. Given that no equipment is provided, the interpreter informs the presenter that they will have to interpret consecutively.

## 17. The educational interpreter keeps their role as interpreter separate from any of their other duties to avoid interference with their interpreting responsibilities.

- Example: The educational interpreter is asked to provide interpretation services at a 504 plan meeting for a family they've been assisting as a family liaison. The interpreter respectfully declines the assignment, recognizing that their advocacy role for the family could compromise the impartiality required for accurate interpretation.
- Example: In a last-minute assignment, the educational interpreter is tasked with interpreting at a back-to-school night for a family that is new to the school. Upon arriving, the interpreter recognizes the parent, having previously assisted them in securing a job through a non-profit organization where the interpreter serves as a community organizer. Realizing it's too late to secure another interpreter, they transparently disclose that they know the parent, affirm their commitment to impartiality, and seek the parent's consent before proceeding.

## 18. The educational interpreter does not assume that they are more knowledgeable than the parties in the encounter and refrains from making decisions for them.

- Example: During an IEP meeting, a family is given two different service placement options for their child with a disability, and the family selects one of the options. Although the educational interpreter is convinced, based on previous experience, that the family chose the wrong option, the interpreter continues to interpret everything so that the parents can make an informed decision independently.

## 19. The educational interpreter refrains from educating the parties, giving opinions, and answering questions directed at them during the encounter.

- Example: During a parent-teacher conference, a teacher mentions accelerated learning to a parent. The parent asks the educational interpreter what accelerated learning is. The educational interpreter interprets the question so that the teacher can respond directly to the parent instead of answering the question themselves.

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- Example: During a meeting, the teacher says to the educational interpreter, “Do you think Mom is understanding what I am saying?” The interpreter tells the teacher that they cannot answer for the mother and suggests that the teacher ask her directly. To maintain transparency, the interpreter interprets the exchange that just took place to the mother.

## 20. The educational interpreter educates the school district and staff about how to work with interpreters successfully while advocating for appropriate working conditions.

- Example: The educational interpreter informs the requester that interpreting equipment will be needed for the interpreter to provide simultaneous interpreting at the graduation ceremony.
- Example: The educational interpreter suggests to the district that a glossary be created and provided to all interpreters to maintain consistency in terminology during interpreting encounters.
- Example: The superintendent’s secretary requests one interpreter for a 3-hour school event with simultaneous interpreting. The educational interpreter informs the requester about industry standards and about interpreting fatigue and its impact on message accuracy to explain why the interpreter will need a team interpreter.
- Example: The educational interpreter asks that all parties participating in the virtual meeting use a headset instead of the built-in computer microphone. This approach will enable the interpreter to hear all statements clearly without difficulty.
- Example: While reviewing a behavioral evaluation, the school psychologist shares the report in the language the family speaks. The school staff tells the educational interpreter to take a break. The educational interpreter politely declines, as they know that they must remain present in case questions arise.

## 21. The educational interpreter respects, encourages, and supports their colleagues.

- Example: The educational interpreter disagrees with terminology used in a glossary provided by a colleague. They reach out to their colleague prior to the team interpreting assignment to discuss the terminology in a cooperative, constructive, and professional manner.
- Example: The educational interpreter supports and mentors a new colleague by sharing glossaries and resources and by conferring with them. The senior colleague also invites the new colleague to shadow them.

- Example: During a team interpreting assignment, one of the educational interpreters struggles with the speed and accent of a presenter. The co-interpreter offers to take over because they are familiar with this speaker, and after the session they offer additional strategies for how to better prepare.

## 22. The educational interpreter adequately prepares for their interpreting assignments.

- Example: The educational interpreter is scheduled to interpret at an IEP review meeting. The interpreter asks to review previous IEPs or other student-related information to prepare for the assignment.
- Example: The educational interpreter continuously reviews their specialized terminology glossaries for their assignments and keeps them up to date, adding new terms as needed.
- Example: The educational interpreter is asked to interpret for an expulsion hearing arising from gang activity at the school. To prepare, they do general research on the gang and related slang, possibly talk to the security officers in the district, and read the educational code related to expulsions. They prepare a glossary of key terms and concepts.
- Example: The educational interpreter prepares to interpret an upcoming speech to be given by the school superintendent by listening to publicly available material, such as YouTube videos of past speeches.

## 23. The educational interpreter takes all the necessary steps to arrive or log in virtually on time for their assignments.

- Example: The educational interpreter researches the best route and parking options for their upcoming assignment and makes sure they arrive before the scheduled meeting time to get situated.
- Example: The educational interpreter makes sure to exchange phone numbers with their assignment contact in case anything unexpected arises, such as having trouble connecting to the virtual platform or running late.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**The educational interpreter commits to consistently improving and broadening their knowledge and skills through professional development.**

24. The educational interpreter seeks and welcomes constructive feedback to improve their work.

- Example: While interpreting at a 504 meeting, the educational interpreter struggles with specialized terminology. The interpreter notes the challenging words and afterwards consults with a senior colleague to review more effective interpretations to be prepared for future 504 meetings.
- Example: After a school presentation, the educational interpreter asks the principal whether the audience could adequately hear the interpretation in the auditorium.

25. The educational interpreter continuously seeks opportunities to further improve their knowledge of specialized terminology and interpreting skills in all interpreting modes.

- Example: The educational interpreter is a member of a professional interpreter association and regularly attends professional development events.
- Example: The educational interpreter participates in a mentoring program for novice interpreters.

26. The educational interpreter stays up to date with new developments pertaining to the profession.

- Example: The educational interpreter signs up for several newsletters related to the interpreting profession.

27. The educational interpreter builds, updates, and shares terminology glossaries as needed and appropriate.

- Example: The educational interpreter requests documents such as written district policies and templates for legal notices so that they can prepare a glossary and study the necessary terms for an upcoming disciplinary hearing.

# NATIONAL CODE OF ETHICS AND STANDARDS OF PRACTICE FOR INTERPRETERS IN EDUCATION

American Association of Interpreters and Translators in Education

- Example: The educational interpreter brainstorms, develops, and reviews terminology updates with colleagues.

28. The educational interpreter stays up to date with changes and developments in the use of language, customs, traditions, and cultural beliefs of the communities they serve.

- Example: The educational interpreter participates in an informative session on the cultural background of an Indigenous group they serve in the school district.
- Example: The educational interpreter watches a teen TV show that is currently relevant to staying up to date with teen language.
- Example: At the beginning of a meeting, one of the participants states that their preferred pronouns are they/them. The educational interpreter does their best to convey the preferred pronouns in the target language.

29. The educational interpreter stays up to date with federal, state, and local legislation pertaining to the job.

- Example: Upon relocating to a different state, the educational interpreter researches mandated reporting obligations for interpreters concerning incidents of child abuse.

30. The educational interpreter participates in organizations and activities that contribute to the development of the profession.

- Example: The educational interpreter takes the opportunity to volunteer for their professional association and helps with the organization of events.

31. The educational interpreter seeks to be current in their knowledge of, and ability to use, technologies and software that are frequently used in the profession.

- Example: Being unfamiliar with the use of remote interpreting platforms, the educational interpreter seeks to better understand them by taking a workshop offered by their local professional association.



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- Example: The educational interpreter reads a research paper on how low-quality headsets contribute to interpreter fatigue and hearing loss in remote interpreting settings.
- Example: The educational interpreter learns how to use transcription software and closed captions to support their work.
- Example: The educational interpreter participates in a training on digital note-taking.

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## REPRESENTATION OF QUALIFICATIONS

**The educational interpreter provides an accurate representation of their credentials and of their relevant training and experience, along with truthful professional references.**

32. The educational interpreter accepts only assignments for which they are qualified.

- Example: For a meeting with the school nurse, the client requests a medically certified interpreter in a language pair for which no certification exam is available. The educational interpreter shows their expertise in the field by submitting language proficiency certificates and proof of language-neutral training in both working languages.
- Example: The educational interpreter receives an assignment offer via text message that provides only the date, time, and location of the encounter. Before accepting, the interpreter seeks additional information from the interpreter coordinator to make sure they are qualified.

33. The educational interpreter declines assignments that are beyond their scope of expertise, or discloses if they cannot be effective for some other reason.

- Example: A school district has requested an interpreter for a last-minute expulsion hearing. The educational interpreter has not interpreted for expulsion hearings before, and they decline the assignment because of the anticipated complexity of the assignment coupled with their lack of experience or specific knowledge of this type of assignment.
- Example: The educational interpreter is asked to interpret for a close friend. The interpreter requests to be excused from the assignment because they believe that they will not be able to remain impartial.

The *National Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for Interpreters in Education*, developed by the American Association of Interpreters and Translators in Education (AAITE), is the outcome of a national, research-based, and consensus-driven process rooted in a systematic, deliberate, and reflective approach. AAITE is confident that this document represents the values that working interpreters need to practice their profession. This document is designed to guide interpreters and the educational systems in which they work; it is written in alignment with current federal and state language access and disability policies and with regulations pertinent to the provision of competent interpreting services. Although this document is meant to guide interpreters of all languages, it is not meant to address the role of the Sign Language classroom interpreter.



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