
Educator Licensure Rule 0520-02-03.04

The Background:

For deaf, deaf-blind, or hard-of-hearing students, access to effective communication is critical to obtain the benefits of an education, including but not limited to further education, employment, and independent living. It is imperative that well-trained personnel provide this visual and/or tactile communication access. Certification and professional licensure make this possible. Currently in Tennessee, there is not licensure for educational interpreters as provided in surrounding states. Therefore, qualified interpreters are leaving Tennessee to seek employment in other states or the private sector, leaving our students at a loss for this critical service. In early 2015, a 19-member task force representing advocates from the deaf community, higher education, and the Department of Education convened to address this critical issue. Research from this group indicated that not only does Tennessee lack professional licensure for qualified educational interpreters, who must hold a bachelor's degree and national certification, but that many interpreters currently serving students have limited training which results in poor communication skills and limited access to general education curriculum for students.

The proposed addition of an educational interpreter license under the category of School Services Personnel, found on page 6, will provide professional recognition for those holding a bachelor's degree and national certification including professional salary. This professional licensure will offer competitive compensation for those currently graduating from higher education preparatory programs and encourage them to remain in Tennessee and serve Tennessee students. There have been no changes since first reading.

The Fiscal Analysis Impact:

Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-1-212 requires that the Department prepare a fiscal analysis of any policy, rule or regulation proposed to the State Board of Education. Under the proposed rule LEAs must compensate licensed educational interpreters as School Services Personnel, which could result in higher salaries for those individuals based on the LEA's salary schedule and compensation plan.

The Recommendation:

The Department of Education recommends adoption of this item on final reading. The SBE staff concurs with this recommendation.