
Educational Interpreters Policy 5.400

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. 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.

While Tennessee Department of Education is recommending licensure for those holding the appropriate qualifications as a separate item, we also realize there is a nation-wide shortage of licensed interpreters and that we must have a policy for non-licensed interpreters to serve students when a good faith effort by the LEA does not result in a licensed interpreter.

This item presents revisions to Educational Interpreter Policy 5.400 to ensure appropriate services for students. Below is a brief summary of the proposed changes to item 5.400:

- Deletes the required screening process that is outdated and no longer being utilized.
- Deletes training requirements to align with the updated employment standards presented in a separate item.
- Adds that LEAs will make a good faith attempt to hire Educational Interpreters who hold the School Services Personnel licensure.
- Requires LEAs to employ educational interpreters that either meet the requirements for licensure or meet the employment standards set forth in State Board Rule 0520-01-02-.03 (10I) for non-licensed educational interpreters.

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. This item could potentially impact LEAs to the extent they hire licensed interpreters at higher salary levels pursuant to their local salary schedule.

The Recommendation:

The Department of Education recommends acceptance of this item on first reading. The SBE staff concurs with this recommendation.