

Cultural Mediators, Translators, and Interpreters

A cultural mediator/interpreter/translator plays a critical role in facilitating successful communication with students and families who speak a language other than English. They function as an oral link between the culture of the school and the culture of the child's family. Their work requires two separate functions: 1) translating test questions and student responses accurately and impartially; and 2) interpreting school information and program recommendations to the family, as well as family history, family dynamics, and concerns to the school.

A **cultural mediator** is an individual who helps "translate between the culture of the school environment and the child's family" in order to enhance understanding, share information, and create a relationship that supports families as full participants in the assessment process and delivering education services. An **interpreter** is an individual who translates spoken language from one language to another. A **translator** is an individual who translates written documents from one language to another.

Please note that a student should never be used as a cultural mediator or interpreter.

Who can be a cultural mediator? A cultural mediator should have a background in the field of education; be knowledgeable about child development and SPED policy/procedures; be available on a regular basis; and should not be a member of the child's family. A cultural mediator is an individual who is:

- A valued member of the community, with an understanding of the language and culture of the target family;
- Proficient in oral and written English and proficient in the child's language;
- Open to learning their role;
- Willing to take direction;
- Able to maintain confidentiality;
- Accepted by the family; and
- Skilled in interpersonal relations.

Where might you find a cultural mediator? Cultural mediators can be found in **public organizations** such as hospitals, health clinics, school districts, Head Start programs, county agencies, migrant health, interpreter registry colleges, and universities to name a few. They also can be found in **community organizations** such as churches, local gathering places for the community, and service organizations.

What are some specific tasks requiring a cultural mediator? Specific tasks requiring cultural mediators in school settings are meetings, observations, instruction, testing, psychological services, health services, social services and support services. Translation should be provided for all written communication between the school and family.

This CDE guidance document is meant for clarification, is not legally binding, and is not to be confused with legal advice. This guidance reflects CDE's recommendations, but Administrative Units (AUs) may have developed their own policies or procedures that differ from those described herein. Be sure to refer to your local AU's policies and procedures through the Director of Special Education. If you are seeking legal advice, please contact your legal counsel.

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Colorado Department of Education, Exceptional Student Services Unit
(303) 866-6694 / www.cde.state.co.us/offices/exceptionalstudentservicesunit

For further information, please contact Fran Herbert: herbert_f@cde.state.co.us