

Ohio K-12 Educational Interpreter Working Conditions

Report from the Task Force of the Interpreting & Sign Language Resources Advisory Committee
June 2008

Abstract

The working conditions of K-12 educational interpreters in Ohio were researched with two surveys – one completed by educational interpreters and one completed by employers of educational interpreters. Research was conducted from June 2007 to January 2008, with the majority of figures applying to the 06-07 school year. Notable results included:

- One-third of employers hire only one interpreter, which means a significant number of educational interpreters are the only interpreter in their district.
- Almost half of the interpreters reported that they are members of a union.
- The average annual starting salary for full-time interpreters was approximately \$23,000, with salaries ranging from \$11,000 to \$43,000. When looked at as an hourly rate, the average was \$17.76, ranging from \$10.34 to \$30.55.
- Over half of the interpreters reported having preparation time in their daily schedule.
- One-third of interpreters reported having additional duties beyond interpreting.
- Over 90% of employers reported they offer health, dental and life insurance.
- A number of employers commented on the difficulty finding substitute interpreters.
- Employers reported that substitute interpreters who were paid daily earned between \$50 - \$100/day. Substitute interpreters who were paid hourly earned between \$8 and \$37 per hour, the most frequent response being \$8/hour. Of the 25 hourly rates reported, 40% are equal to or less than \$12/hour.

Introduction

Over the years, interpreters — and school districts hiring educational interpreters— have contacted Interpreting & Sign Language Resources (ISLR) at the Ohio School for the Deaf with questions about wages, benefits, and working conditions. These questions prompted the ISLR Advisory Committee to develop two surveys, one for *interpreters* and one for their *employers*, to research working conditions for educational interpreters throughout Ohio. The surveys were conducted from June 2007 through January 2008. Most of the figures apply to the 2006-2007 school year.

A task force including Becky Costas, Sheryl Killen, and Sarah McKinney formed at the open ISLR Advisory Committee meeting held April 28, 2007. With input from the advisory committee and ISLR staff, the task force developed a survey for interpreters that was distributed at Summer Institute in June 2007. The survey was also posted online and advertised in the ISLR newsletter, Signals: News and Resources for Ohio Educational Interpreters. Therefore interpreters who did not attend Summer Institute also had the opportunity to participate. A total of 101 interpreters completed the survey. The ISLR mailing list consists of 454 individuals who identify themselves as educational interpreters, so 22% of those eligible who were notified about the survey participated.

For the survey of the school districts and Educational Service Centers (ESCs), the task force used a list of licensed interpreters provided by the Ohio Department of Education to identify ninety-one employers of educational interpreters. After several attempts to contact each employer, it was found that twenty-three of them no longer employ interpreters. Fifty-seven school districts and ESCs completed the survey and eleven did not respond. Of those districts who were contacted and who still employ interpreters, 84% (57 out of 68) completed the survey.

Demographics

Both surveys asked what entity employs the interpreters. The results for both were very similar with about 33% of the employers being ESCs and 66% school districts. Both surveys had a very small percentage of “other” responses, such as CCDs and SERRCs.

When asked “Do you have a **deaf education program?**” *employers* responded:

- 35.2% - yes
- 64.8% - no

Interpreters were asked, “Do you work with the **same** student all day or with **various** students?”

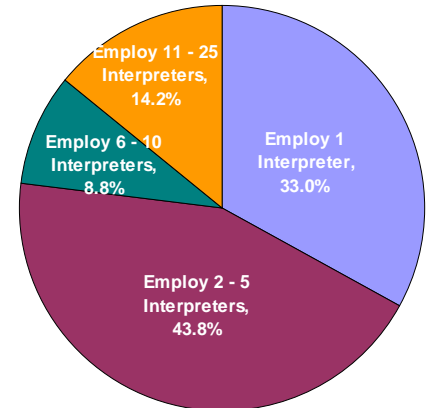
- 51% work with the same student
- 49% work with various students throughout the day

Employers were asked, “**How many interpreters** work in your organization?”

- 33% employ one
- 43.8% employ two to five
- 8.8% employ six to ten
- 14.2% employ eleven to twenty-five

Since over one-third of school districts and ESCs employ just one interpreter, there are a significant number of *interpreters* who are working alone.

Number of Interpreters Employed by Individual Districts/ESCs



Contracts, Unions, and Salaries

Both the *interpreters* and their *employers* were asked if the interpreters sign **contracts**.

- 79.4% of the *interpreters* responded that they do have contracts.
- 20.6% of the *interpreters* responded that they do not have contracts.

The response from the *employers* was very similar.

- 70.9% of the *employers* do have their interpreters sign contracts.
- 29.1% of the *employers* do not have their interpreters sign contracts.

When asked if they are members of a **union**,

- 44% of the *interpreters* responded yes.
- 56% of the *interpreters* responded no.

None of the ESC employees have a union. Those who are members of a union work for a school district.

During negotiations, schools tend to compare themselves with school districts of similar size. For this reason, each school district was asked how many **total students** (hearing and deaf) were in its district so a comparison could be made to determine if district size correlated with the salaries and benefits provided. After analysis of this survey data, no trend was identified linking district size with salaries and benefits.

Fifty-two districts were willing to disclose their **starting salaries**, some sharing the information as an hourly wage and others as an annual salary. When converted to **hourly rates**:

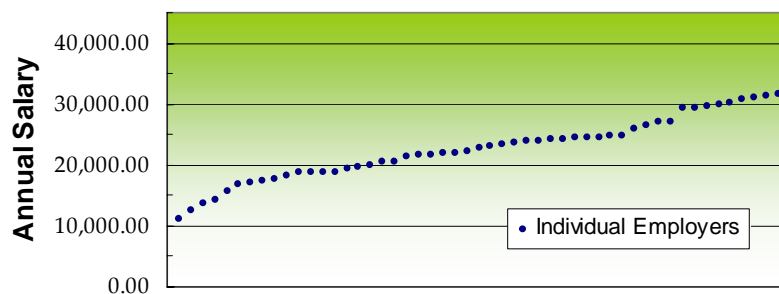
- **average starting hourly rate:** \$17.76 per hour (mean, median and mode were similar)
- **lowest:** \$10.34 per hour
- **highest:** \$30.55 per hour (equal to beginning teacher pay)

For the employers who provided an hourly rate, the rates were converted to full-time annual salaries by multiplying the hourly rate by the number of hours per day required for full-time work by that employer, and then multiplied by 185 school days. **Full-time annual starting salaries:**

- **average starting salary:** \$23,000 (mean and median being similar)
- **lowest:** \$11,000
- **highest:** \$43,000 (equal to beginning teacher pay)

Five districts pay educational interpreters the same as teachers. Of those five, four employ only one interpreter and the other employs three.

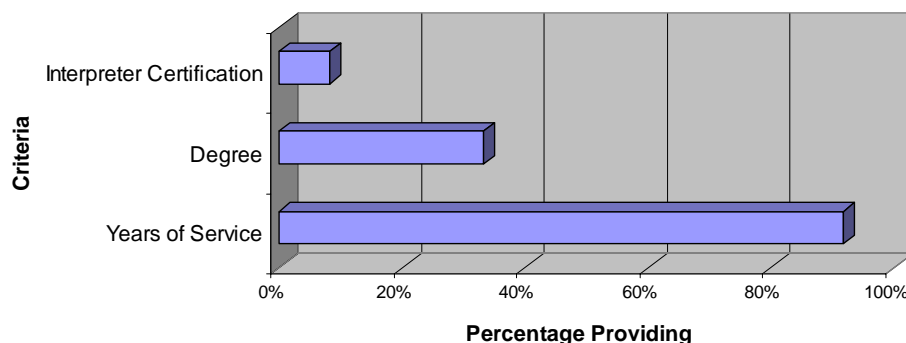
Educational Interpreter Annual Salaries



The **employers** were asked if they pay **differential** for the following:

- **Years of service** (91.7% answered yes)
 - **Degree** (33.3% answered yes)
 - **National interpreter certification** such as RID, NAD or EIPA¹ (8.3% answered yes)
- Some offered other scenarios through which they pay interpreters more than their regular rate of pay, which include various degrees (Associate, Bachelor, Bachelor + 15 hours, and Master).
 - One district pays a differential for CEUs earned. (These do not have to be college credit.)
 - One other district paid no differential at all, not even for longevity.

Employer Pay Differentials



¹ The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) has offered various national generalist certification tests over the years but does not offer a certification specifically for Educational Interpreters. The National Association for the Deaf (NAD) used to provide a national generalist certification test, but since a new RID/NAD test was designed, the NAD no longer certifies interpreters. The Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) is offered by Boys Town and is a performance assessment for K-12 interpreters.

Job Titles

The Ohio Department of Education requires that all working educational interpreters have and maintain a state **license**. A temporary substitute interpreter license is required for those interpreters who are employed as substitute interpreters or are working toward achieving an interpreter license.

Renewal of the five-year license requires documentation of earned CEUs to the interpreter's Local Professional Development Committee (LPDC) of a total of 6 semester hours or 180 completed contact hours. Interpreters that do not have an LPDC must submit documentation of 6 semester hours of college course work directly to the State of Ohio, Department of Education.

The *Ohio Guidelines for Educational Interpreters*, published by ODE in October, 2000, states: "The job title for educational interpreters must correspond as closely as possible to the actual job responsibilities, such as 'educational interpreter/transliterator.'" (page 19)

The Ohio Department of Education license for interpreters is titled:

"Associate: Interpreter for the Hearing Impaired"

Employers were asked "What is the **job title** for an interpreter?" Their responses are as follows:

- 52.6% "Interpreter"
- 22.8% "Educational Interpreter"
- 7% "Interpreter/Aide"
- 7% "Paraprofessional"
- 14% Other
 - *Some other titles misrepresent the interpreter's hearing status, such as:*
 - “Deaf Interpreter”
 - “Hearing Handicapped Interpreter”
 - “Hearing Impaired Interpreter” and
 - “Hearing Facilitator”
 - *Other job titles show the various roles the interpreter is expected to perform, e.g.:*
 - “Interpreter/Tutor”
 - “Small Group Instructor/Hearing Interpreter”

Interpreters were also surveyed about their own job titles. They reported the information below:

- 45.3% “Interpreter”
- 30.5% “Educational Interpreter”
- 9.5% “Interpreter/Aide”
- 0% “Paraprofessional”
- 14.7% Other
 - *Other job titles reported reflect both the ambiguity of the interpreter's position and the multiple roles required of the interpreter, such as:*
 - “Hearing Impaired Interpreter”; “Interpreter/Tutor”; “Speech Facilitator/Interpreter”
 - “Aide”; “Certified Hearing Facilitator”; “Sub Interpreter/Autism Aide”

Scheduled Preparation Time

The *Ohio Guidelines for Educational Interpreters* states, “The work schedule of the educational interpreter should include preparation time,” (page 10). Examples of how prep time would be used include (but are not limited to) meeting with other team members and reviewing and previewing instructional materials.

Interpreters were asked “Do you have **prep time**/planning time during your daily schedule?” They reported the following:

- 54.5% have scheduled preparation time during the day.
- 45.5% do not have prep time.

Interpreters were also asked about situations when they are asked to interpret during their prep time:

- 7.7% are compensated in addition to their salary.
- 92.3% do not receive additional compensation.

Additional Duties

Interpreters were asked, “Are you assigned duties in addition to interpreting?”:

- 69.3% do not perform additional duties.
- 30.7% are performing various activities (such as playground duty, cafeteria duty, hall monitor duty and bulletin boards) in addition to interpreting.

Interpreters were not surveyed about whether these activities conflict with interpreting duties.

Teaming

According to the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf *Standard Practice Paper on Team Interpreting* (2007), “The decision to use a team rather than an individual interpreter is based on a number of factors, including, but not limited to:

- length and/or complexity of the assignment,
- unique needs of the persons being served,
- physical and emotional dynamics of the setting,
- avoidance of repetitive stress injuries (RSIs) for interpreters.”

Interpreters were surveyed to find out if any classes were scheduled with two interpreters to work together as a team. While it seems that teaming is a rare event within educational interpreting, it does occur.

- 16.2% of interpreters reported that teamed classes are scheduled.
- 83.8% do not have the opportunity to team.

Benefits and Leaves

School districts and ESCs were asked which of the following **benefits** were offered to the educational interpreters they employ. Their responses are as follows:

- Health Insurance: 96.4%
- Dental Insurance: 92.7%
- Life Insurance: 92.7%
- Vision Insurance: 72.7%
- Disability Insurance: 14.5%
- Other: 14.5%

While a large number of employers do make various types of insurance available, they reported a wide range of requirements for employee eligibility. For example, in one district an interpreter working for 20 hours/week would be eligible for benefits, while in another district a work week of less than 35 hours would not qualify an interpreter for benefits. The *employers* also reported a wide range of the percentage of the premium they pay. Districts and ESCs pay anywhere from 40% to 90% of insurance premiums for the interpreters they employ.

All but two *employers* reported providing some kind of retirement system to interpreters. When asked which state **retirement system** the interpreters contribute to, *employers* reported the following:

- SERS: 78.2%
- STRS: 14.5%

Other benefits mentioned by various *employers* that may be offered to interpreters include the following:

- Liability insurance
- Flexible spending accounts
- Free tuition for employee's children if the interpreter lives out of district
- Mileage reimbursement
- Severance pay
- On-site professional development opportunities

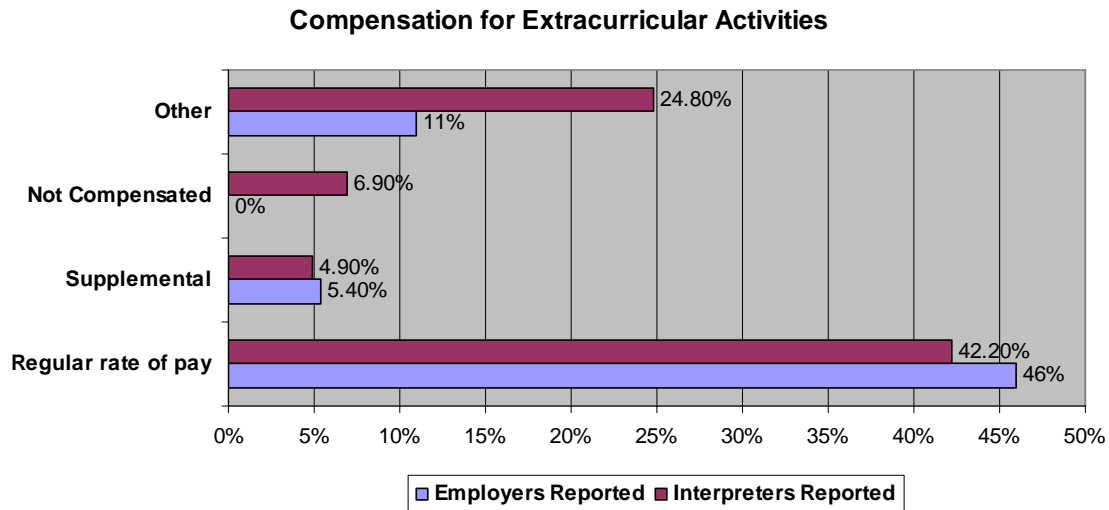
Interpreters may not be aware that extra benefits such as these may be available from their employers. Further information may be obtained from school district or ESC board offices.

When *employers* were asked what types of **leaves** they offer to their educational interpreters, their responses showed:

- Personal Leave: 100%
- Sick Leave: 100%
- Paid Professional Leave: 85.7%
- Paid Holidays: 67.9%

Compensation for Extracurricular Activities

Interpreters and *employers* were both asked about how employees are compensated for interpreting extracurricular activities². Their responses were as follows:



Note that there is no relationship between the employers and the particular interpreters who responded to the survey. The interpreters likely represent some employers who did not complete the survey.

A portion of the *interpreters* indicated rates of pay in addition to those listed above. Some interpreters, 6.9%, are paid time and a half once 40 hours have been worked in one week (or 8 hours in one day). Two interpreters reported job-specific flat rates for different assignments (e.g., sports or overnight field trips.) Two other interpreters reported that they receive comp time, while two more stated that they have “extended time available.”

Some comments by *employers* (11%) for the “other” category mention the following:

- “Home districts determine [rate of pay]” (4 employers reported this)
- “[If a] student is involved [in extracurricular activities], no interpreter provided”
- “[For] dances and football games, parents contract with an agency”

Some “other” comments on the survey of *interpreters* (24.8%) included the following:

- “We are not required to interpret extracurricular activities”
- “[We are paid our] regular rate plus travel expenses”
- “\$16/hour”
- “District decided contracted rate”
- “We aren’t allowed to interpret, must call [local interpreting agency]”
- “It depends...sometimes full pay...sometimes stipend”
- “There is a specific amount of money for OT, after the money is gone, the kids go without interpreters”
- “Yes, if emergencies”

² 30% of the employers responded that their deaf and hard of hearing student(s) do not participate in extracurricular activities.

Substitutes

Interpreters were asked, “When you take a day off, is a substitute hired to cover for you?” They responded:

- 60% said yes
- 40% said no

Employers were asked, “What do you do when an interpreter is absent?”³

- 50 employers reported that they provide a substitute.
- 7 replied that they do not provide a substitute, with one of those adding that they are “not authorized to call subs.”
- 1 district did not respond to this question.

Of those **ESCs and school districts** that responded “We provide a substitute”:

- 14 employers hire a substitute through an **agency**
- 28 employers maintain a **sub list**
 - 6 employers stated that it was difficult to find substitutes even though they have a sub list
- 13 employers use staff interpreters to **cover within**
 - 5 employers who re-assign interpreters stated that they do so because they cannot find subs
 - 1 employer stated that interpreters who cover within are paid time and a half
- 4 employers replied that **another entity** hires the subs, so they are unsure of how coverage is provided
 - 3 ESCs who hire interpreters let the school district manage finding subs
- 13 employers reported **alternative coverage**
 - 4 of these employers use the teacher for the deaf students to cover
 - 9 of these reported that a non-interpreter, non-teacher is used to substitute

Below are their comments/responses to the question “What do you do when an interpreter is absent?”:

- “Pray”
- “[It is] difficult to find subs; [we] try to find someone who understands sign language”
- “We use a substitute aide to assist the student”
- “We work with an [unpaid] parent who is an interpreter”
- “Hire a paraprofessional because [the] agency charges extra for last minute”
- “For short term, hire a substitute assistant”
- “Don’t hire subs, might use other staff who know sign language”
- “If a student leaves the school district during the year, we keep the interpreter on staff to cover for absent interpreters”
- “Don’t hire a sub for one day absence, but for long term like maternity leave, hire a substitute interpreter”⁴

³ The total of responses are more than the number of employers surveyed because one school district stated they do or do not provide a substitute, depending on the situation.

⁴ This is the district counted twice (see above footnote.)

Substitute Rate of Pay

A total of 37 school districts and ESCs responded to the question “What is a substitute interpreter’s rate of pay?” Twelve employers reported daily rates, while 25 reported hourly rates.

Of the 12 *employers* who reported **daily** rates:

- The average rate was \$74.42 /day
- The highest rate was \$100 /day
- The lowest rate was \$50 /day
- There were two modes (most frequent responses): \$70 /day and \$75 /day

Of the 25 *employers* who reported **hourly** rates:

- The average rate was \$16.15 /hour
- The highest rate was \$37.14 /hour
- The lowest rate was \$8.00 /hour
- The mode (most frequent response) was \$8.00 /hour

It is relevant to note that, of the 25 hourly rates reported, 40% are equal to or less than \$12/hour, and 28% are equal to or less than \$10 /hour.

Conclusion

The task force to investigate working conditions was implemented to gather information from school districts, ESCs, and interpreters around the state of Ohio. The survey data was analyzed and grouped into meaningful statistics. We expected to find similarities between districts of comparable size and other patterns in the data. However, the results indicate that each school district and ESC is unique in each of the categories surveyed. We also noted that a number of districts commented on the difficulty of finding substitutes, yet a significant number of districts offer pay for substitutes that is well below community interpreting rates.