

MDUSD currently serves over 150 students who are deaf or hard of hearing (D/HH). To facilitate mainstreaming of those students, multiple accommodations are utilized. For students at the secondary level with very low levels of hearing, this can include the utilization of a signing interpreter (classified as an Educational Interpreter).

The district has had trouble recruiting and retaining highly qualified Educational Interpreters (EI). California's K-12 regulations require certification of 4.0 or above on the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA). According to Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, graduates of two-year Interpreter Training Programs struggle to achieve an EIPA score of 3.5. In California, there are only 1166 certified interpreters and over 13,000 DHH students. Therefore, the pool of qualified EIs is small. Qualified interpreters tend to take jobs outside of the educational system because the compensation is greater.

Additionally, due to OSHA regulations, EIs can only interpret for twenty minutes at a time. After twenty minutes of interpreting, they must take a break and rest their hands. For a typical class length, this can mean providing two interpreters per class period.

To better serve MDUSD students, the transcriber and transcription system can be used in addition to EIs. A transcription system puts the ideas presented by the teacher as well as other students right before the eyes of students. They read from a computer screen what is being said, and keep up with what is happening in class. With a meaning-for-meaning transcription system, a student can have much greater access to the same information content that is available to other students in the class.

Transcribers using a transcription system not only meet the requirements of IDEA, they potentially provide better service to students. Transcribers provide access to the English grammar spoken in the class and more exposure to the spelling of new vocabulary. Students become more comfortable reading text for communication access and academic achievement. The transcript from the class can be provided to the student to allow them to review the class after school. Transcription systems can potentially help any student that has difficulty achieving full access to communication and notes in a class. The educational notes produced by a transcriber can be made available to all students with special needs.

A focus group of DHH students at Concord High School was held to discuss the possibility of adding transcribers. The students supported the idea. Students noted the struggle to watch the interpreter and take notes. Utilizing a transcriber would allow them to focus on the content knowing they would have a copy of the notes from the class. Another student liked the idea of utilizing modern technology in the class and not to have a person in the front of the class just for them.