

Procedure #4100
Title: STAFF SIGN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY
Category: Personnel
Date of Initial Approval: 1985 (Original procedure #6020)
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Reviewers: MSA Superintendent; MSA Directors; MSA SLPI Coordinator

I. PURPOSE

This procedure is to establish a clear and consistent procedure for ascertaining staff sign language skills at the Minnesota State Academies (MSA).

II. OVERVIEW

American Sign Language (ASL) is the primary language used for communication and instruction for MSAD students/staff and many individuals in the MSA community (parents, family members, staff members, etc.). To ensure that all our students and community members have full access to language and communication, it is necessary that the Academies maintain a staff with sufficient proficiency in ASL to support our students' language, communication, and academic development.

To determine the ASL proficiency of staff, a consistent and fair process of determining sign language skills is necessary. MSA has selected the Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI) as our assessment tool that will be used to measure ASL proficiency on our campuses.

Employees hired at MSA may provide results from the American Sign Language Proficiency Interview (ASLPI) or the SLPI, if taken at another location. (See MSA Policy #433)

III. PROCEDURE

At MSA, the SLPI involves a one-on-one SLPI interview between the interviewer and the employee. The interviews are conducted in ASL only. This principle is utilized because research and experience has shown that people demonstrate their highest sign language communication skills when using sign language alone. The interviewer will ask questions and provide prompts for the employee and each interview is recorded. The interviewer adjusts questions and speed/sign production to match the employee, ensuring the greatest possible output to create enough samples for the rating team to evaluate.

SLPI Process Schedule:

All employees hired or assigned into positions identified in MSA Policy #443 will have an SLPI interview scheduled within the 3rd month of employment. A chart identifying timelines on the steps of the process as well as responsibility is provided below. Employees will be interviewed annually until they reach the required levels for their position. Once an employee has reached their required standard, they will be re-interviewed every three (3) years to ensure maintenance

of their ASL skills, except for those who have achieved an “Advanced Plus” rating or higher. If directors/supervisors note a need or a decrease in the employee’s sign skills, they may refer the employee for a SLPI re-interview earlier than 3 years.

Within the third month of employment (unless extension granted):
Schedule Interview (SLPI Interviewer)
Send SLPI Pre-Interview information to employee (SLPI Coordinator)
Schedule Rater Meeting (SLPI Coordinator)
Conduct Interview (SLPI Interviewer)
Rate employee (SLPI rater team)
Compile Results/Write Report (SLPI Coordinator)
Within two weeks of rating:
Send Results/Report to Employee, Human Resources Office, and Immediate Supervisor (SLPI Coordinator)
Within two weeks of notification of results:
Notify SLPI Coordinator to schedule a SLPI follow-up Meeting, if desired (Staff Member)
Within two weeks of request for a review:
Schedule a review and conduct a follow-up meeting as requested. (SLPI Coordinator)

SLPI Pre-Interview Information:

Employees will receive a memo from the Human Resources Department at the time of hire or assignment, outlining the ASL skills required for their position and the timelines expected to meet those standards. Within three months, the SLPI Coordinator will follow up with the following informational items and a SLPI interviewer will schedule an interview date/time.

In cases when the new hire does not have any sign skills, the initial interview will be postponed until the end of their first year of employment at MSA.

SLPI Rating Process:

The SLPI Coordinator will select an interviewer to conduct an interview with the employee. This interview will be recorded and shared with a team of raters. The employee’s video will be rated by a minimum of two raters. The interviewer may or may not be one of the raters.

1. Raters will view the recorded interviews.
2. Independent Ratings are made based on:
 - a. Vocabulary Knowledge
 - b. Production and Fluency
 - c. Grammatical Features
 - d. Comprehension
3. The SLPI Coordinator compiles the results and writes a report outlining the results of the interview and rating. This is sent directly to the employee with copies to the Human Resources Office and to the employee’s

immediate supervisor.

Sharing and Confidentiality of SLPI Results:

After compilation of their rating results, employees receive their SLPI report directly in their MSA email. Employees may then request an SLPI follow-up meeting with the SLPI Coordinator. This must be done within two weeks of the date of notification.

Since SLPI results are part of each employee's evaluation, the SLPI Coordinator shares SLPI results with:

1. The Human Resources Office (as part of the employee's permanent record)
2. The employee's immediate supervisor(s).

Since SLPI results are confidential, results cannot be shared with any other person/program unless requested by the staff member, via signing of a release of information form. SLPI videos are automatically erased 6 months after the interview unless the video is being used to assist the employee in their ASL skills development; an appeal of the SLPI rating is in process; and/or the employee has granted permission for the video to be used for training, demonstration and/or research purposes.

SLPI Re-Interviews and Re-Ratings:

1. Requests for Re-Interviews:
 - a. If a staff member objects to an interview or interviewer, another interview will be scheduled (the second interviewer will be different than the one who conducted the first interview).
 - b. The employee must request a re-interview before receiving their rating.
 - c. The video of the first interview will be erased within one month from the date that the re-interview was requested.
2. Requests for Re-Ratings:
 - a. After a SLPI follow-up meeting, if an employee believes their rating is not correct, the employee must inform the SLPI Coordinator within 10 working days and request a re-rating of their interview video.
 - b. Upon receipt of this request, the SLPI Coordinator will schedule a second rating conducted by raters who were not involved in the first rating. The second rating team will not be told that they are conducting a second rating. If the scores from the second team match the rating from the initial raters, the rating is final. If the ratings differ, a third team of raters will be scheduled to do a third rating. As outlined above, the third team will not be told that they are conducting a third rating. If the scores from the third team match either one of the first two ratings, that score will be selected as the final rating.
 - c. If the third rating does not match either of the first two ratings, the SLPI Coordinator will schedule a re-interview with a new interviewer and start the process again.

TIMELINES AND EXPECTATIONS

1. ALL employees are required to reach the ASL skill standards established for their position as documented in MSA Policy #443.
2. Employees who have not reached their ASL skill standards are required to attend sign language classes if scheduled during their workday. Exceptions must be granted in writing by their immediate supervisor based on extenuating circumstances. Employees must also seek out alternate ways to improve their ASL skills. Lack of ASL classes is not an acceptable excuse for failure to achieve required ASL skill standards. Current employees who have not achieved proficiency levels for their position must demonstrate efforts to improve their ASL skills, sharing documentation with their supervisors.
3. MSA will make efforts to support employees in reaching the standards specified for their position, as resources permit. If a new employee does not achieve the ASL level standards required for their position, the consequence may be dismissal from their position (unless extenuating circumstances prevail). Employees may request an exception in writing to the superintendent, along with supporting documentation showing their activities taken towards achievement of their required ASL skill level.
4. Employees who have successfully achieved the required ASL standards for their position are encouraged to continue development of sign language skills beyond required levels. Some positions at MSA have minimum standards and a “preferred” standard. It is encouraged that employees strive to meet the “preferred” standard.
5. As part of the hiring/assignment process, all job announcements shall include information about requirements for ASL skills. When individuals are hired and/or assigned to positions, they shall receive a letter from the MSA Human Resources Office that specifies the required ASL skill level standards for their position.
6. Employees should receive an SLPI interview date/time within the first three months of employment, unless that employee has no sign language skills at that date. In such situations, the SLPI interview will be postponed to the end of the first year of employment. Employees who are hired with no ASL skills are required to attend MSA-provided ASL classes, if provided.
7. Employees will be evaluated annually until they reach the required standard for their position. Employees who have reached their required standard will be re-evaluated every 3 years to ensure maintenance of their skills.
8. Employees who have successfully achieved an “Advanced Plus” rating or higher will not be required to be re-evaluated. If directors/supervisors note a need or a decrease in the employee’s sign skills, they may refer the employee for a SLPI re-interview earlier than 3 years.
9. Whenever possible, MSA provides ASL classes and other appropriate ASL skill development opportunities during regular work hours for employees. It is the employee’s responsibility to attend classes or participate in other activities

to improve their ASL skills until they achieve the standards required for their position. MSA directors/supervisors will, when possible, adjust work schedules and tasks to allow employees to participate in ASL classes.

10. In classes and other activities, MSA will incorporate opportunities for employees to develop their ASL expressive and receptive skills; knowledge about the linguistic foundations of language and the difference between English and American Sign Language; and (especially for instructional staff) knowledge/skills regarding how to use ASL in assisting students in developing their language, communication, and academic skills.

DOCUMENTATION OF PROGRESS

Employees are encouraged to keep documentation of all classes and/or activities that they have participated in for the improvement of their ASL skills. As a general rule, employees are expected to participate in a minimum of 12 continuing education units (CEU) each year to make progress towards achieving the standards required for their position. (1 hour of workshops/class/events = 1 CEU) This documentation will also support requests for extension of timelines, as needed. Some examples of activities that employees may participate in are:

- a. Attendance at MSA-provided ASL classes.
- b. Participation in special workshops related to ASL.
- c. Participation in MSAD and/or deaf community events (simple attendance – i.e., sitting and watching a basketball game is not enough – it is encouraged that active participation be considered – participating in conversations in ASL or volunteering at a booth to interact with individuals using ASL, etc.) Some examples of events are:
 - i. MSAD Homecoming/related events
 - ii. MSAD Literacy Night events
 - iii. Faribault Deaf Club/community events
 - iv. Thompson Hall events (St. Paul)
 - v. Deaf Expo
 - vi. MSAD Alumni gatherings
 - vii. MSAD sports, activities, and events
- d. Participation in volunteer opportunities with individuals who use ASL (i.e., senior citizen activities, group home outings, etc.)
- e. Working with an ASL mentor and/or one-on-one tutoring with an ASL instructor
- f. Taking an ASL class at a community college or community center

With supervisory permission, MSA may cover the costs of admission or registration for employees who wish to attend events outside of their workday to earn CEUs, but they will not be paid for their attendance.