

*Procedural Manual Teacher Edition*

## **SECTION 6**

# **Assistive Technology**

## **ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY (AT)**

### **What is Assistive Technology?**

Assistive technology is any tool or device that a student with a disability uses to perform a task that he or she could not otherwise perform without it, or any tool the student uses to perform a task more easily, faster, or in a better way. It can be a commercial product or something someone makes. It can be a simple “low tech” device such as a pencil grip or an expensive “high tech” device such as a computer.

The legal definition of assistive technology is, “.. any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a child with a disability.”

Assistive technology service is defined as: any service that directly assists a child with a disability in the selection, acquisition or use of an assistive technology device.

### **Why is it important for all educators to be aware of assistive technology?**

The school district is mandated by state and federal law (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) to provide assistive technology to all students with disabilities if it is required for them to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE). Each IEP team must determine if assistive technology is needed by that student and document this discussion on the IEP. If assistive technology is deemed necessary, it will be written into the student’s IEP.

### **What are some of the things assistive technology can do for students?**

- Help a student learn
- Make things easier to turn on
- Hold things steady or in place
- Help a student get dressed or eat
- Make playing or recreational activities possible
- Allow communication or improve communication
- Help a student see or hear better
- Help a student control things such as a television, radio, computer or lights

### **Who benefits from assistive technology?**

Any student with a disability, from mild to severe, may benefit from the use of assistive technology. There is assistive technology to help an individual with reading, writing, remembering, walking, sitting, seeing, hearing, and communicating. It is the IEP team’s responsibility to determine if assistive technology is required for the child to make educational progress.

### **What kinds of assistive technology are there?**

There are thousands of items that can be classified as assistive technology and many ways to think about assistive technology. The one we find the most helpful is to categorize the assistive technology according to the task for which it is helpful.

**Note: It is important to understand that Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) is part of Assistive Technology. IEP teams should be cautious to ensure they are addressing student AT needs in all categories and not just communication.**

- Computer Access
- Motor Aspects of Writing
- Composing Written Material
- Communication (including Alternative and Augmentative Communication Devices AAC)
- Reading
- Learning/Studying
- Math
- Recreation
- Mobility
- Activities for Daily Living
- Control of the Environment
- Positioning and Seating
- Vision
- Hearing

See the attached list of AT consideration items, listed from lowest to highest technology.

#### **How does a student receive assistive technology?**

The need for assistive technology must be considered at every student's IEP meeting. That means that at least one person on the IEP team needs to know something about assistive technology. Ideally, all members of the team would have at least general knowledge about assistive technology and how it can benefit a student with a disability. IEP teams should consider the following:

1. Current interventions are working, and AT is not required for student to access curriculum.
2. AT is being used effectively either regularly or on a trial basis and should be documented in the IEP.
3. AT should be tried and this exploration and features of such should be documented in the IEP.
4. IEP team does not have enough information and evaluation may be required.

Generally, when an AT assessment is deemed necessary, the procedure is to assess the student's abilities and needs, determine goals, identify assistive technology devices to try, obtain AT items, and document the effectiveness of the trial use. All AT assessments should be completed by a team, not an individual. The team should include individuals from different disciplines with different perspectives and should always include the parent. When the student is able to understand and contribute to the assessment, he or she should also be an active participant in the decision-making. Consideration of AT needs is a dynamic and ongoing process, requiring an interdisciplinary team. Collaboration of all members during assessment and implementation is critical for success.

The Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative (WATI) has created forms to guide a team successfully through all of these assessment and implementation steps. They are available at no charge and can be downloaded from the WATI website at [www.wati.org](http://www.wati.org) (click on Products, scroll to Free downloads).

Questions to be answered within the WATI assessment process include:

1. What task is it that we want this student to do, that s/he is unable to do at a level that reflects her/his skills/abilities (ie writing, reading, communicating, etc)?
2. Is the student currently able to complete tasks with special strategies or accommodations?
3. Is the student currently using Assistive technology (devices, tools, hardware or software) to address this task?
4. Would the use of assistive technology help the student perform this skill easily or more efficiently, in the least restrictive environment, or perform successfully with less personal assistance?

#### **Does the school district have to buy the assistive technology?**

The school district is required to “provide” the assistive technology if the IEP team has determined it is necessary for educational benefit. If the IEP team decides to try assistive technology with a student, they might consider borrowing it first to make sure that the assistive technology is effective before they purchase it. Assistive technology may already be available in the classroom or on the school site. Larger districts may have a pool of assistive technology for trial purposes. Smaller districts may need to borrow assistive technology from other classes, schools, regional/state lending libraries, rent items from the company, seek donated funds or use district funds to purchase. Some children may receive Medical Assistance (MA) and MA may approve the purchase of some assistive technology. When MA purchases the technology, it is the property of the family. Parents can never be required to use private insurance to purchase assistive technology for the school.

#### **Does the district have to send the assistive technology home?**

The IEP team must decide if the assistive technology is needed at home. The law states: “On a case-by-case basis, the use of school-purchased assistive technology devices in a child's home or in other settings is required if the child's IEP team determines that the child needs access to those devices in order to receive FAPE.”

#### **Where could I find out more about assistive technology?**

A very thorough listing of assistive technology devices is available at [www.abledata.org](http://www.abledata.org). This website is a searchable database of over 23,000 devices.

If you are specifically interested in computer related assistive devices, try the searchable database found at [www.closingthegap.com](http://www.closingthegap.com).

For information on assistive technology services, check out [www.qiat.org](http://www.qiat.org). In addition to useful archives and links, you can sign up for a list serv about providing effective assistive technology services.

Council for Exceptional Children has a portable “quick wheel” resource called Assistive Technology Consideration with AT examples and definitions.

SETT Framework offers questions to ask about AT.

Finally for information about best practices and a free, downloadable set of forms to be used in assistive technology assessment, visit the WATI website at [www.wati.org](http://www.wati.org).