



The Assistive Technology (AT) Generic Consideration Process

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Definition of Assistive Technology

The definition of AT in the law is broad and includes almost any type of device used to support the education of a student with a disability. For all students with disabilities, it is important for IEP teams to recognize that AT encompasses a range from the low end of devices (e.g., picture boards, wide-lined paper, pencil grips, calculators) to the high end which may include computers or devices with computer components.

Assistive technology enables students with disabilities to participate more fully in all aspects of life (school, home, and community) and helps them access their right to a “free, appropriate, public education” in the least restrictive environment. Assistive technology can also allow students with disabilities to appropriately increase their independence in their educational activities rather than relying on staff related services.

Relationship of Assistive Technology to Student Strengths and Needs

Assistive technology is one aspect of a multifaceted approach to addressing the strengths and needs of a student with disabilities. The needed technology must be considered in relation to the students learning potential, motivation, chronological age, developmental level, and curriculum access needs. Assistive technology provides access to the general education curriculum. Over time it changes as the student’s needs change or as advancements are made in technology.

Consideration of the Need for Assistive Technology

IEP teams are required to consider the need for AT devices and services for every student with a disability. Assistive technology consideration must address the student’s need to access the general education curriculum and specially designed goals and objectives. IEP teams must ask the question, “What does the student need to do that he/she cannot do because of his/her disability? *Consideration does not apply a mandate for an AT assessment or for the actual provision of devices for every child with a disability.*

Approach to Assistive Technology Assessment

The need for AT should be an integral part of a comprehensive assessment for a student in all areas related to his/her disability and/or educational needs. Assistive technology considerations should be part of a collaborative school-based approach that includes service providers who are knowledgeable about the child’s disability and the aspects of AT associated with the disability.

Trial Period of Assistive Technology Use

In some cases, the IEP team consideration may lead to a recommendation for a short-term trial with new strategies or devices available at the school. In this case, the team should check the “yes” box that addresses AT in the special factors section of the IEP. Such trials should be written into an IEP goal or short-term objective with a time frame and measurable criteria to evaluate progress. The IEP team should plan a subsequent IEP meeting to review the results of the trial period or to provide other considerations for AT.

Assistance from Assistive Technology Specialists

After an AT assessment is completed at the school level and attempts to use school-based AT resources are exhausted; an IEP team may request a more in-depth AT consultation from the AEA. *Local school teams may contact the AEA AT teams before the assessment process begins for assistance in helping them to complete the AT assessment and making decisions.*

Documentation of a Student's Need for Assistive Technology

IEP teams must specify the type of device the student needs (i.e., pencil grips, word processing software, standers, bolsters, and augmentative communication systems). The IEP team should not specify brand name unless a device has particular characteristics that require the student to learn operational skills that are unique to the device provided. *The device currently used to meet the needs of the student should also be identified in the IEP. This will help especially in the transition processes.*

A Way to Think About Assistive Technology

Like any other strategy used to help educate students with disabilities, assistive technology decisions are the responsibility of the IEP or IFSP teams. Assistive Technology consideration is a collaborative student-centered process. The local school team that considers AT should be expanded as needed to serve as a resource to the local school teams. Members (e. g. occupational therapists, speech language pathologist, physical therapists, audiology, vision) who have the information or special expertise about the AT solution the team is considering should be included where appropriate. If the team does not include people who have sufficient knowledge about the child, the tasks the student needs to complete, and the environments where those tasks must happen, as well as people who know about the various types of AT that might help the student, then the team does not have enough information to really consider the need for assistive technology.

What does AT Consideration in the IEP Look Like?

Before the IEP Meeting (completed prior to the IEP meeting with parent input sought)

1. Teacher reviews information regarding the student's abilities, educational tasks that are difficult for the student and interventions that have been implemented.
2. The following questions should be asked in regards to AT services and devices and accessible formats:
 - What are the rest of the students doing that this student cannot do?
 - Is there available (AT devices, tools, software) or accessible formats that could be used to address what the student cannot do?
3. Collect information about possible AT interventions and accessible formats. This might include having the student try different devices or software to see what works or not. This information can be generated in #2 above to include appropriate device trials, the characteristics of the devices, the needs of the student, the environment in which the device(s) may be used and the specific task.
4. Implement the chosen intervention and collect sufficient data about the intervention's effectiveness. This time frame should be based on the device or format being assessed, the device complexity, the student's needs, typical use opportunities, requirements for staff support prior to a student becoming self-sustaining in its use, and the severity of the intervention problem.
5. If data (collected as stated in #4 above) shows that the AT/accessible format intervention does not work, try another intervention, if available, and collect additional data. For the purposes of transition planning, document the trial along with data in place that will be available for future teams (e. g. IEP).

At the IEP Meeting (important to address at the IEP meeting)

1. Review pre-IEP interventions and data on AT interventions.
2. Address: “does the student require AT devices and/or services?”
 - If the current interventions are working and AT is not required, discuss evidence of progress and proceed with the development of the IEP
 - If AT is already being used effectively, the AT intervention must be described in the IEP
 - If there has been a trial with an AT intervention and the IEP team determines that it is a requirement to meet the student’s needs, include specific statements of such services, including the nature and amount of such services. The inclusion of AT in the IEP requires a degree of specificity so that it is clear how and why the technology will be used to accomplish a particular goal and the anticipated frequency, location, and duration of the technology
3. Establish student-learning goals, AT devices and services, and accessible formats on the IEP form including how AT will be implemented and utilized to meet these learning goals. Also describe the textbooks and core related instructional materials to be converted to accessible formats.
4. Establish review dates of progress of AT on the IEP learning goals (this is not the annual review of the IEP).
5. Identify methods and dates to monitor progress of AT implementation.
6. Identify training needs of student, family members, necessary staff, and who will provide the training and when.
7. Discuss timely manner (when the student needs the device, who needs to be trained, how device will be ordered and installed or implemented). Iowa defines “timely manner” as the same time that all children receive their textbooks and materials.
8. Identify the LEA representative on the team who will be responsible for monitoring the provision of AT and accessible formats in a timely manner.
9. Discuss maintenance and repair issues and responsibilities.
10. The team should discuss transition issues such as course-to-course, grade-to-grade, post-secondary, and early access to school.
11. Identify backup options for times of device failure and include these options in the IEP.

After the IEP Meeting

1. Implement interventions
2. Document the effect on student performance
3. Review effectiveness of AT/accessible formats on a periodic basis using data
4. The identified LEA representative continues to monitor the provision of AT/accessible formats in a timely manner

* Adapted from the University of Vermont, Center on Disability and Community Inclusion Document

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