ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY & EDUCATION

Assistive Technology (AT) offers the opportunity for individual student success. It plays an important role in helping students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) and can make the school setting much less restrictive.

There are a wide range of AT devices and services available today for children in special education and a mandate to consider the AT needs of every child with a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA).

IDEA defines assistive technology devices and services. "***AT device*** means any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off-the-shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to maintain, or improve functional capabilities of a child with a disability." This could be an augmentative communication device, an FM system or specialized software. "***AT service*** means any service that directly assists a child with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device." This could be an AT assessment, consult with an orientation and mobility specialist, or training on the use of a device.

Examples of AT

The following categories of education-related technology are intended to provide a general guide of a variety of applications. These are not all inclusive, but will help you in identifying the area(s) in which AT could benefit the student.

1. COMMUNICATION AIDS: Any system that aids students who are not independent verbal communicators - augmentative and alternative communication or AAC devices, synthesized speech, picture symbols, or computers.
2. EDUCATIONAL/ADAPTED TOYS: Toys and games that are specially adapted for use by student to participate with classmates - switch toys, beeping balls, learning games, or skill games.
3. ASSISTIVE LISTENING: Any system that aids students with hearing loss to function in various activities – personal amplification devices, visual signalers or closed captioning devices.
4. COMPUTERS: Computer hardware that assists students with disabilities use a computer - adapted or alternative keyboards, keyguards, trackballs, joysticks, moisture guards, or switch interfaces.
5. COMPUTER SOFTWARE: Software installed on a computer that allows a student with a disability to learn, communicate and share information – word prediction, picture symbols, text to speech, or screen magnification.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL: To assist a student with independence - environmental control units, door openers, ramps, or reachers.
7. MOBILITY/SEATING POSITIONING: Items that will assist a student in movement - walkers, wheelchairs, standers, or seating cushions.
8. SAFETY ALERT/HEALTH: Alert systems - smoke detectors with visual signals for the hearing impaired, or verbal systems for the blind.
9. VISUAL AIDS: Devices that assist a student that is blind or visually impaired - Braille cards, talking clocks, magnifiers, or CCTV.
10. RECREATION/EXERCISE: Items that can assist a student - card holders, shufflers, three wheeled bikes, exercise equipment or switch activated video games.

AT and the IEP

The determination of need to provide AT devices and services is based upon whether the child requires these to benefit from the educational environment.

- The need for AT devices and services must be determined on an individual basis by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team. The determination of a child's need for AT devices and services must not be based upon a category, severity, or class of disability.
- AT devices and services should be written into the IEP. The IEP is the basic document that sets up all of the special education and related services that will be provided to a qualifying child under the IDEA.

- AT devices and services must be provided in accordance with an IEP. The IEP team must specify if AT devices and services are needed.
- Training for using the AT device for individuals responsible for implementing the IEP must be included if necessary.

The parent can request an AT evaluation at any time during the year. If the parents don't agree with the public agency's evaluation, they can request an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE), which may be provided at the school's expense. The IEP team must consider the results and recommendations from the IEE.

The AT evaluation process is characterized by a team approach, functional assessment techniques, and is ongoing in nature. A professional with knowledge and skill in the area of AT should be a part of the team. Although most AT evaluations are not standardized, the assessment process should be systematic and utilize a framework for effective decision making.

Funding AT

The school system is responsible for acquisition and provision of AT devices. It is important to note that when a school district purchases AT for the student, the school district is the owner of the equipment. If the parents, their private insurance, Medicaid, private/community resources, or the Department of Rehabilitation Services purchased the device, then it belongs to the student.

Taking AT Home

Whether the technology is needed for the student to do homework, for practice using the assistive equipment, or for any other educational purpose, the IEP team should address this need and document the provision for home use as necessary. As stated in the IDEA regulation, "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." 34 CFR §300.308(b)

Maintenance and Repairs of AT

Repairs for AT devices identified as part of the student's IEP should be handled through the school system, regardless of ownership. The school system is responsible for ensuring that the student receives substitute equipment while his or her device is being repaired. It may not be possible to provide the same device in the interim. Therefore, during the development of the student's IEP, consideration should be given to identifying the steps to be taken if the device needs repairs; how a substitute will be procured; and what other technology options could be utilized on a temporary basis.

Next Steps: Using assistive technology provides the opportunity for students to succeed in school.

A simple first step is to contact the **Arizona Technology Access Program**.

Visit our website
www.aztap.org

Call: 800-477-9921, 602-728-9534; 602-728-9536 (TTY)
Email: askaztap@nau.edu

AzTAP is a Phoenix-based program of the Institute for Human Development at Northern Arizona University.

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