

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY AND TRANSITION TO ADULT LIFE



Transition planning and use of assistive technology (AT) play an important role in helping individuals with disabilities achieve success in adult life. There are a wide range of AT devices and services available for individuals with disabilities leaving the high school setting, but understanding them takes time and planning. It is for this purpose that the mandates within the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) specific to transition were enacted.

Transition & the IEP

Under IDEA, transition services for all students on an Individual Education Plan (IEP) begin at age 16, and a statement of transition service needs is required at age 14.

The transition process must ensure that every student with a disability receives:

- Appropriate services in school which prepare them for adult life in the community;
- Planning and referral to adult service agencies prior to leaving school; and
- Access to appropriate assistive technology devices and services upon exiting school.

In addition, every transition plan should address; employment,

education and/or training after high school, and living independently. Assistive technology needs to be considered as part of the transition planning process, and can be identified within the transition plan as potential job accommodations, adaptive equipment for education and/or independent living, and/or AT support services.

Transition after the IEP

High school graduation marks the beginning of adult life, and the end of an entitlement to public education. For the student with disabilities, this translates to no longer being eligible for services under IDEA, including the development of an IEP. In the post-secondary world, the laws and the process of obtaining assistive technology is completely different. In order to use and benefit from these laws, individuals with disabilities leaving high school must first understand them.

Supporting Legislation

In adult life, individuals with disabilities and their right to obtain assistive technology devices and services is supported by two federal civil rights laws. Becoming familiar with the protections and rights under these laws is imperative for adults with disabilities.

- **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973** - is a national law that protects *qualified* individuals from discrimination based on their disability. The nondiscrimination requirements of the law apply to employers and organizations that receive financial assistance from any Federal department or agency.

- **Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act** - is a national law that prohibits private employers, state, and local governments, employment agencies and labor unions from discriminating against qualified individuals with disabilities in job application procedures, hiring, firing, advancement, compensation, job training, and other terms, conditions, and privileges of employment.

The AT Fit

Both of these laws require the provision of *reasonable accommodation* to a qualified employee, applicant, or individual with a disability who, with or without reasonable accommodation, can perform the essential functions of the job or task in question.

Reasonable accommodation may include, but is not limited to:

- Making existing facilities readily accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities;
- Job restructuring, modifying work/class schedules, reassignment to a vacant position;
- Acquiring or modifying equipment or devices, adjusting, modifying examinations, training materials, or policies, and providing qualified readers or interpreters.

These laws also use the term *auxiliary aids and services* to refer to devices and services that make employment, programs, and materials available to individuals with disabilities.

The term *auxiliary aids and services* include:

- Qualified interpreters or other effective methods of making aurally delivered materials available to individuals with hearing impairments;
- Qualified readers, taped texts, or other effective methods of making visually delivered materials available to individuals with visual impairments;
- Acquisition or modification of equipment or devices; and
- Other similar services and actions.

In many cases, providing an effective assistive technology device and/or service can be considered a reasonable accommodation and/or an auxiliary aid and service.

Obtaining AT after High School

In a higher education setting or in the work place, the responsibility for documenting a disability and requesting accommodations and/or auxiliary aids and services falls directly on the individual with a disability. Institutions of higher learning and places of employment are not required to find or assess individuals who have disabilities. If an individual with a disability chooses not to disclose a disability, which is their prerogative, no one is required to provide any accommodation.

What is particularly important to note, is that an individual with a disability must specifically request a piece of assistive technology as an accommodation if they believe

it will: 1) provide access to the curriculum/job site; 2) provide the ability to perform essential class/job functions; and/or 3) provide an equal opportunity to demonstrate their abilities and knowledge. The accommodation must be clearly linked to the individual with disabilities particular needs.

Who Can Help with AT Transition?

Planning an effective AT transition can involve many different individuals and agencies, including but not limited to:

Vocational Rehabilitation

Agency: assists persons with cognitive, sensory, physical, or emotional disabilities to attain employment and increased independence.

Mental Health & Developmental

Disabilities Agencies: provide a comprehensive system of services responsive to the needs of individuals with mental illness or mental retardation.

Independent Living Centers:

help people with disabilities to achieve and maintain self-sufficient lives within the community.

Social Security Administration:

operates the federally funded program that provides benefits for people of any age who are unable to do substantial work and have a severe mental or physical disability.

Transition plans for exiting high school students with disabilities need to include the teaching of appropriate assistive technology skills and self-advocacy skills. These skills will allow students to assume the increased responsibilities associated with accessing

accommodations under the civil rights laws that now protect them.

Next Steps: The use of assistive technology (AT) plays an important role in helping individuals with disabilities achieve success in adult life. A simple first step is to contact the **Arizona Technology Access Program**.

Visit our website www.aztap.org



Website QR Code

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

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The 56 statewide Assistive Technology (AT) Programs form a national network of statewide assistive technology (AT) programs. Information contained in this document represents the accumulation of knowledge of this national network. In Arizona this program is known as the Arizona Technology Access Program (AzTAP).

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

