Assistive Technology in the IEP: A Guide for IEP Teams

Appropriate assistive technology (AT) devices and services can allow students with disabilities to participate in and benefit from the general education curriculum and to meet **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** goals. For every student with an IEP, federal and state regulations require that the team consider the student's need for assistive technology devices and services.

IEPs should clearly reflect the AT needed and describe the manner in which it will be used, as well as the supports required. Because AT devices and services can take various forms and are appropriate for students with a broad range of academic and functional needs, team members need to understand the various options for thoughtfully considering and including AT in the IEP document.

How is AT defined in IDEA and in Pennsylvania special education regulations?

IDEA 2004 and PA Chapters 14 and 711 define AT as both devices and services. The law makes it clear that the purpose of AT is to improve *the functional capabilities of the child with a disability*.

Assistive technology device *means 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. The term does not include a medical device that is surgically implanted, or the replacement of such device* (34 CFR 300.5). The term AT device may refer to complex devices or software, as well as simple "low-tech" devices and solutions that may be available to many learners, but which the team decides are required by the student with an IEP as part of a free, appropriate public education (FAPE).

Assistive technology service *means any service that directly assists a child with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device* (34 CFR 300.6). AT services may include:

- Evaluation of AT needs
- Purchasing, leasing, or providing for acquisition of AT
- Selecting, designing, fitting, customizing, or adapting AT devices
- Coordinating and using other therapies, interventions, or services with AT devices
- Training or technical assistance in use or operation of AT for child, family, or team members

Assistive technology services are those that are necessary to enable the student and/or IEP team to use any AT devices specified in the IEP.

What does it mean to consider AT?

Consideration of AT, in the context of IEP development, review, or revision, is intended to be a collaborative process in which team members determine whether AT devices or services are needed for the student to access the general education curriculum or meet IEP goals. Consideration may be brief or extended, and may necessitate that the IEP team include (or have access to) someone who has knowledge about AT or who can guide the team in considering AT in the context of what they know about the student. (*See resources for more information on AT technical assistance.*)

What questions might the IEP team ask when considering AT?

Team members who are considering AT should examine available data and observations about the student, and ask whether the student may need assistive technology:

- to be in the least restrictive environment (LRE)
- to meaningfully participate in the general curriculum
- to participate in activities
- to access educational/print materials, including textbooks
- to access auditory information
- for written communication/computer access
- for augmentative communication
- to participate in state and local assessments

What are possible outcomes to AT consideration?

- When the team agrees that AT is not a necessary part of the IEP for the student, it is appropriate for the team to check "no" on the IEP document.
- When AT that is already in place is considered effective or sufficient for the student (as specified in IEP), it is appropriate for the team to check "yes" on the IEP document.
- When it is determined that the team needs more information, particularly if they are not certain if a student needs AT, or how AT may benefit the student, it is appropriate to check "yes" and further specify steps to be taken in the IEP. The team may decide to obtain AT consultation or conduct targeted AT assessment. These steps may introduce well-planned trials of AT for identified curricular tasks, including data collection to determine effectiveness.

In all cases in which the team determines that the student is in need of AT, and checks "yes" on the special considerations portion of the IEP, AT must be addressed in the IEP document.

How might AT devices and services be documented in the IEP?

In addition to the consideration of special factors, described above, AT devices and services can be appropriately documented in the IEP in a number of areas. The following sections of the IEP are appropriate locations for documenting AT:

- Special Considerations
- Present Levels
- Participation in State and Local Assessments
- Transition Services
- Annual Goals
- Program Modifications and Specially Designed Instruction
- Related Services
- Supports for Personnel

Regardless of where in the IEP AT appears, the IEP document should clearly reflect the AT needed, describe the manner in which it will be used, and the supports required.

Should a specific AT product be named in the IEP document?

When describing the AT needed by the student, it is considered best practice to describe the features rather than brand name, because most devices and software have multiple features, not all of which may be required by the student to have FAPE. Listing the features may provide a more accurate description of what is needed by the student, and may be particularly helpful in providing back-up or temporary replacement for the AT in the event of breakdown. However, it is also acceptable to name a device in the IEP, when the IEP team determines that it is necessary.

Whose responsibility is it to provide AT for students who need it as part of their IEPs?

It is the responsibility of the local educational agency (LEA) to provide AT as identified within the IEP. IDEA states that, "Each public agency must ensure that assistive technology devices or assistive technology services, or both, as those terms are defined in §§ 300.5 and 300.6, respectively, are made available to a child with a disability if required as a part of the child's special education, related services, or supplementary aids and services."

State and federal law do not require that the LEA purchase AT as needed in the IEP. It is appropriate for LEAs to purchase, rent or borrow AT, or to utilize AT that is acquired through the student's insurance. However, the LEA may not require the family to utilize insurance or any other funding source. In the event that no alternative funding is available, the LEA remains responsible for the timely provision of AT needed as specified in the IEP.

When AT is provided for a student through a funding source other than the LEA, the LEA remains responsible for any costs related to repair, maintenance, or replacement of AT that is specified in the IEP.

Is it the responsibility of the LEA to provide AT for use at home or other locations?

On a case-by-case basis, the use of school-purchased AT 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 300.105). This may include providing AT devices or software when needed for homework, or for functional skills that are necessary across environments, such as communication using an augmentative/alternative communication (AAC) device.

What resources are available for IEP teams?

PaTTAN and IU Assistance:
Technical assistance and training in AT is available from Assistive Technology consultants through intermediate units (IUs). Most IUs have local procedures for requesting technical assistance or training; teams are encouraged to contact the IU for more information. PaTTAN AT consultants may also provide assistance, in collaboration with IU staff.
www.pattan.net

PaTTAN AT Expo:
An Assistive Technology Expo takes place in late fall each year at multiple locations across the state. Staff and families can try AT devices and ask questions of manufacturers and vendors at the expo.
www.pattan.net

PaTTAN Short Term Loan:
PaTTAN maintains a short-term loan library, which offers a broad array of AT devices. These AT devices are borrowed by LEAs and are used to determine the appropriateness of a particular device for an individual student, prior to the LEA or parent purchasing the equipment.
www.pattan.net

PIAT:
Pennsylvania's Initiative on Assistive Technology (PIAT) provides information on AT to all Pennsylvanians who may need it. PIAT also operates the Pennsylvania AT Lending Collection, which can serve as another source for borrowing AT devices.
www.temple.edu/instituteondisabilities/programs/assistive/piat

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2/11