



Section 2: Assistive Technology in Schools



Assistive Technology in Schools

Assistive Technology in Public Education

Jonathan is a 5th grader with a physical disability that makes it difficult for him to write by hand. He does much better using a portable word processor that the school provides for him as part of his special education program. Jonathan uses the device to take notes in class and to complete all of his written work. He even takes it home with him to complete his homework assignments. The portable word processor has helped Jonathan keep up with his school work and maintain a B+ average.



The portable word processor is an AT device that Jonathan's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team determined was necessary for him to fulfill his educational goals. Without it he would not be able to keep up with the rest of his class and would be dependent on others to help him complete his school work.

Jonathan's story is a good example of how assistive technology at school empowers students with disabilities and encourages academic success. Unfortunately, it is not always easy to obtain the technology for school use, and parents may not know enough about AT devices and services to ask the right questions.

This section of the Family Information Guide provides resources and information about assistive technology for use in school. It discusses:

- ▶ Laws that require assistive technology to be considered for students receiving special education services
- ▶ How to work with the school to determine your child's AT needs
- ▶ Where to find information about AT devices and services for school use

There may be terms in this discussion with which you are unfamiliar, such as "least restrictive environment," "mediation," or "due process hearing." Please refer to the guide's glossary for definitions of these and other terms as they are used in the context of assistive technology.



Understanding the Law and Assistive Technology

It is important for parents to understand how laws impact their child's right to receive AT services at school. The **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** requires public schools to make available to all "eligible" children with disabilities a "free appropriate public education" (FAPE). To determine if they are eligible for special education services, students must be evaluated. A parent, teacher or related service provider, such as a therapist, can ask for a special education evaluation. The school system must provide the evaluation at no cost to the family. If the student is found to be eligible, then special education services must be made available to the student at no additional cost to families. A family should not wait until a child is ready to enter first grade to begin the evaluation process. IDEA has two parts:

Part B applies to children with disabilities from three to twenty two years old. Part C applies to infants and toddlers - from birth to three years old.

The law requires that public schools develop Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for each eligible child with a disability. The specific special education services, including assistive technology, that are outlined in the IEP should reflect the individual needs of the student. IDEA requires that particular procedures be followed in the development of the IEP. Each student's IEP must be developed by a team of knowledgeable persons and must be reviewed at least once a year. The team usually includes the child's teacher, the parents, the child,

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if appropriate, a school system representative who is qualified to provide or supervise the special education services, and other individuals at the parents' or school's request. As their child's strongest advocate, families should insist, politely but strongly, that assistive technology be considered in the IEP process and that both AT devices and services - such as teacher training on AT equipment - be included in the written IEP if needed to receive FAPE. When AT is included in an IEP it is the school's responsibility to make sure it is provided.

If parents disagree with the proposed IEP, they can request a due process hearing and a review from the state educational agency if applicable in that state. They also can appeal the state agency's decision to state or federal court. Read more about the IEP process on page 12.

You can find more information about IDEA and recent changes in the law at:

- ▶ <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/Policy/IDEA/index.html>
- ▶ http://www.cec.sped.org/law_res/doc/law/index.php
- ▶ <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/cguide.htm#anchor62335>

Department of Education
Council for Exceptional Children
Department of Justice

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act is a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities. Section 504 affects all programs that receive federal funds, including public schools. The law states that students with disabilities must be given the same opportunities to participate in educational programs and activities as students without disabilities, and the use of assistive technology may be considered as an accommodation. Therefore, even if a child does not meet special education criteria, it is sometimes possible to acquire needed devices through a 504 Plan. For example, a student with poor handwriting due to impaired fine motor skills may be given access to a computer to complete written assignments. Section 504 does not require school districts to develop an IEP for students. However, the district should document in a written 504 Plan what evaluations were performed and what decisions were made regarding the student.

You can find more information about Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act at:

- ▶ <http://www.section508.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=Content&ID=12>
- ▶ <http://www.ataporg.org/itqa.asp>

Your Child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) and Consideration of Assistive Technology

As mentioned above, IDEA requires that children with disabilities have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP is a written plan for educating a child with a disability. The IEP describes the educational program and services that the IEP team feels will meet your child's specific needs, such as school placement, services, and equipment.

A number of states have posted online guides to the IEP process. Examples include:

- ▶ Nebraska's *IEP Technical Assistance Guide*: <http://www.nde.state.ne.us/SPED/iepproj/>
- ▶ Wisconsin's *A Guide for Writing IEPs*: <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dlsea/een/pdf/iepguide.pdf>
- ▶ Massachusetts' *IEP Process Guide*: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/iep/proguide.pdf>
- ▶ North Dakota's *IEP Planning Process*: <http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/speced/guide/iep/index.shtm>
- ▶ New York's *Sample IEP & Guidance Document*: <http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/policy/iep/home.html>



Consideration of Your Child's Assistive Technology Needs

What does "consideration" of assistive technology mean? Although the process of "consideration" is not defined by the IDEA law, in general, it should be more than just checking a box on a form that states that the AT needs of your child have been considered. Although there is no single approach to considering your child's AT needs, most IEP teams will follow a process that takes the following steps:

1. Gather information about your child, his/her disability and abilities and ask the following questions.
 - What does your child need to do but is unable to do because of his/her disability?
 - What are your child's customary environments? These environments include the classroom, the playground, bus, music, gym, and lunch periods.
2. Share information gathered about your child. Parental input is very important and you should be actively involved in the process.
3. Remember that your child's preferences in areas such as color and style are important things to consider. Many parents tell stories of successful AT adoption that hinged on a child's sense that a particular piece of equipment was "cool." Likewise, a child may resist using a piece of equipment that he thinks is "nerdy" and sets him apart from the rest of his class. Children want to fit in with their peers, so a device that is less conspicuous than another might be preferred even if it has fewer "bells and whistles."

IDEA law and Assistive Technology

- ▶ Your child's assistive technology needs must be considered.
- ▶ If necessary, an AT evaluation must be performed
- ▶ AT devices and/or services must be provided by the school system if identified in the child's IEP.
- ▶ Training of teachers, aides, and the student may be listed in the IEP as "AT services"



4. Make a list of the child's needs, environments, and tasks, and prioritize your child's biggest educational challenges, such as communication, mobility, reading, writing, or behavior issues.

Questions to discuss with the IEP team:

- What are the biggest challenges for my child?
- Which challenge should we focus on first?

5. The IEP team brainstorms possible solutions to your child's main goals.

Questions to ask include:

- What assistive technology tools are available to help my child overcome these challenges?
- What criteria will be used to determine if the AT has been successful in reaching the agreed-upon goals?

6. After listing possible AT tools that the team thinks might help your child achieve her goal, the team needs to decide which device they will try first. Sometimes a number of different AT tools will need to be tried before an appropriate one is found for your child.

The IEP team should discuss:

- What are the specific features of the AT device that can help your child?
- What tools are readily available from the school, the district or a loan library?
- Who will need to be trained to get maximum benefit from the AT device or service? What are the sources of training?

7. After deciding upon a device to try, the IEP team needs to acquire the device for the student to experiment with. Some schools have access to libraries of technology that are shared among schools or districts.

During the trial period with the device, IEP team members need to collect data about the child's use of the device.

Questions to ask include:

- How often did the child use the device?
- Did it help him do something he could not do before?
- How was success with the device measured?

The term “assistive technology” may never appear on the IEP forms used by your child’s school. Instead, the form may use terms such as “accommodations, supports, program modifications, or supplementary aids and services.”

No matter what form is used by the IEP team in your child's school, the team is required by law to consider your child's need for assistive technology.

Sometimes a child may need to experiment with several devices before the team can decide which device has the features your child needs. After trying different devices and collecting data about which device worked best for the child, the IEP team should come to a conclusion about which device is most appropriate for the child.

- At the end of the consideration process, the IEP team should decide whether or not the assistive technology would benefit your child.
- It is important to document in writing that the IEP team considered AT and if so, what AT devices and services are most appropriate for the child. Assistive technology devices and/or services must be provided if required in the child's IEP.**

Keep in mind that even if your child does not require assistive technology at the moment, he or she may benefit from using it in the future. Therefore, the law requires that your child's AT needs be considered continually as long as your child has an IEP. More information on the general IEP process is available through the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY) at <http://www.nichcy.org/resources/iep1.asp>. The Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights (PACER Center) also has tips on making the IEP process successful at <http://www.pacer.org/parent/iep.htm>.



Obtaining a Formal Assistive Technology Evaluation for Your Child

If the IEP team is unable to determine what AT devices and services are best for your child, then a formal AT evaluation may be needed. The evaluation should be performed by a qualified professional in a timely fashion. This may present a problem, as there is a shortage of qualified AT evaluators in many areas of the country. The school system may choose to use its own personnel to conduct the evaluation, but if parents disagree with the recommendations, they have the right to an independent evaluation at district expense. Be aware, however, that parents may have to assume the cost of an independent evaluation if the results do not differ from the one provided by the school system and if the system can show that the original evaluation was appropriate.



Disagreeing with the school about assistive technology

You have the right to disagree with the school's decisions concerning assistive technology. Some situations in which parents and school personnel should meet to resolve disagreements include when:

- ▶ You disagree in writing with the IEP
- ▶ You believe your child is not receiving appropriate assistive technology devices and/or services
- ▶ You think additional devices and/or services are needed

When differences arise, try to resolve them informally first. If you can't work out a solution that is satisfactory, you can take more formal steps to reach a satisfactory resolution. The procedures for taking more formal action vary from state to state, but may include mediation, a due process hearing, or filing a formal complaint with the state.

You can get state-specific information from the Consortium for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE) at <http://www.directionservice.org/cadre/index.cfm>. You can also contact a Parent Training and Information Center, a Parent Advocacy Center, a Tech Act Center, or an Alliance for Technology Access Center (in some cases, these will be the same organization). For contact information, you can use the Family Center's searchable database. Click on your state and "information center" and/or "advocacy center."

Search Member Organizations

States: Check all that Apply

- All States
- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- Washington, DC
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming
- American Samoa
- Federated States of Micronesia
- Guam
- Marshall Islands
- Northern Mariana Islands
- Palau
- Puerto Rico
- U.S. Virgin Islands
- International

Organization Types: Check all that Apply

- All Organization Types
- Advocacy and Law
- Assistive Technology
- Disability/Disorder Specific
- Federal Agencies
- General
- Independent and Community Living
- Information Centers
- National Organizations and Associations
- Parent/Family Support
- Private Sector Companies
- Schools and School Districts
- State and Local Agencies
- State and Local Organizations
- United Cerebral Palsy Affiliates
- University-Affiliated Programs

Disability Categories: Check all that Apply

- All Disabilities
- ADHD/ADD
- Apraxia of Speech
- Autism
- Bipolar Disorder
- Brain Injury and Stroke
- Cerebral Palsy
- Communication and Speech
- Cystic Fibrosis
- Deaf / Blind
- Developmental Disabilities
- Dyslexia
- Epilepsy
- General / Non-disability Specific
- Health Impairments
- Hearing Impairments / Deaf
- Learning Disabilities
- Leukemia
- Mental Health Impairments
- Mental Retardation
- Mobility Impaired
- Multiple Disabilities
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Muscular Dystrophy
- Neurological Disorders
- Orthopedically Impaired
- Spina Bifida
- Tourette Syndrome
- Visual Impairment / Blind

Submit Search Reset

Search Results

Your search returned 43 results

- AbleNet, Inc.
- AbleProject
- Access Ingenuity
- Adaptive Computer Empowerment Services
- Alliance for Technology Access (ATA)
- American Thermofom Corporation (ATC)
- Assistive Technology of Minnesota
- A.T. KBATTER and Company, Technology and Service for People with Disabilities
- AT Netted
- California Department of Rehabilitation-Sacramento District
- California State University Northridge, Center on Disabilities
- Center for Accessible Technology
- Closing the Gap
- Community Research for Assistive Technology
- ComputerMentor
- Computer Access Center
- Courage Center
- Disabled Resources Center, Inc.
- Discapitados Abriendo Caminos
- DRAIL (The Disability Resource Agency for Independent Living)
- Equal Access to Software and Information (EASI)
- Family Resource Library and Assistive Technology Center
- Heads up...The Flexible Head Support System
- Loving Your Disabled Child
- Midwest Center for Postsecondary Outreach
- Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning, Special Education
- Minnesota Special Education Mediation Services
- Minnesota Star Program
- Northeast Regional Resource Center
- Pacific Americans with Disabilities Act and Accessible Information Technology Center
- People Achieving Change Through Technology (an Ability Building Center Program)
- Project LIT (Literacy Instruction Through Technology)
- SACCC Assistive Technology
- Sacramento Center for Assistive Technology
- Sensory Access Foundation
- Shere's Inspiration
- STAR (System of Technology to Achieve Results)
- Sweetwater Union High School District, Student Support Services
- Technical Assistance Alliance for Parent Centers
- The Rehabilitation Engineering Program at Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center
- Tripod Captioned Films
- Western Region Outreach Center & Consortia
- Willow Tree Teaching Tools



Family Resource Library and Assistive Technology Center

1000 South Fremont Ave.; Suite 6050, Unit 35
 Alhambra, CA 91803
 Phone: (626) 300-9171 (562) 906-1141
 Fax: (626) 300-9164
<http://www.eiafrc.org/>
 For more information, contact Juanita at info@eiafrc.org

The Family Resource Library and Assistive Technology Center is committed to empowering individuals with developmental disabilities and their families by providing support, information and training in a way that is family centered and culturally sensitive. It is the vision of the center to give individuals the tools necessary for the challenge of life long learning, growth and personal development. The center will provide leadership and education to foster inclusion and acceptance of individuals with disabilities.

A Parent's Perspective

"I thought my son Jared, who is blind, would benefit from a computer at school equipped with a screen reader so he could go to the computer lab to do Web-based assignments and other homework with his classmates. I called the school to set up an IEP meeting to discuss the idea with the team. When we met, Jared's teachers agreed that a screen reader could help Jared access online curricula and participate in group projects, but they weren't sure which one was the best. As a team, we decided that Jared should have an assistive technology evaluation to identify the most appropriate AT for his needs.

The evaluation was performed a month later by a vision specialist within the school district. The specialist suggested that Jared try two different programs over a two-month period to find out which one worked best for him. I was very glad to see that the specialist wanted Jared's input in the decision. Jared was trained by the vision specialist to use both of the programs over the next few months.

At the end of the trial period it was clear which program worked best for Jared. The IEP team agreed and the school purchased the software and made it available to Jared in the computer lab. Jared also received additional training from the vision specialist on the software until he could use it independently.

The process took a lot longer than I hoped it would, but in the end, I was very happy that Jared had the assistive technology he needed and would no longer be left out of computer activities at school."

