

The Special Services Cooperative of Wamego's Assistive Technology Procedural Guidelines

Support in the Consideration and Evaluation of Assistive
Technology for Students with Disabilities

Introduction

This procedural guideline was prepared to help all types of special educators to consider the assistive technology (AT) needs of students with disabilities. Perhaps what is most important for all special educators to understand about AT is that the federal requirements are clear—assistive technology must be considered for all students with disabilities. The information contained in this guideline was developed to lead Individual Education Program (IEP) case managers and other IEP team members through this process by using a stepwise approach.

For some special educators, the information contained in this guideline will be supplementary. You may have already developed an effective method for the consideration and documentation of AT for students with disabilities. For most, this information will be new and you will find it helpful to follow each step and use the forms designed to facilitate the AT consideration and documentation process. Once planning teams have had an opportunity to use the process a few times, members will quickly find that they have added an important skill to their repertoire of services.

What is Assistive Technology?

Assistive technology is defined as both a "device" and a "service." As outlined in IDEA 04:

Assistive Technology Device—The term 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 functional capabilities of a child with a disability." (34 C.F.R. §300.5)

Assistive Technology Service—The term "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."

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This term includes:

- (A) the evaluation of the needs of such child, including a functional evaluation of the child in the child's customary environment;
- (B) purchasing, leasing, or otherwise providing for the acquisition of assistive technology devices by such child;
- (C) selecting, designing, fitting, customizing, adapting, applying, maintaining, repairing, or replacing of assistive technology devices;
- (D) coordinating and using other therapies, interventions, or services with assistive technology devices, such as those associated with existing education and rehabilitation plans and programs;
- (E) training or technical assistance for such child, or, where appropriate, the family of such child; and
- (F) training or technical assistance for professionals (including individuals providing education and rehabilitation services), employers, or other individuals who provide services to, employ, or are otherwise substantially involved in the major life functions of such child." (34 C.F.R. § 300.6)

As described above, a device refers to a specific type of "product" that is used to enhance the functional capabilities of students with disabilities, while "service" refers to the services necessary to assess needs and support use of the device (see Appendix). Assistive technology devices range in spectrum from very "low tech" (e.g. a pencil with a grip) through a range including simple switches and simple control units to far more sophisticated technologies (e.g. voice activated computer and environmental control). Although such terms as "adaptive technology" or "access technology" appear extensively in the special education literature, the definition in the federal law is intended to cover the broad range of devices and services that can be used by students with disabilities. With an emphasis on enhancing functional capabilities of students as a key part of the definition, the requirements are clearly intended to provide students with increased access to general education programs, and with that, promote their participation in student assessment programs and standards-based reforms.

Why is Assistive Technology Important?

Even though the 1991 authorization of IDEA included a definition of "assistive technology" along with provisions regarding its application and the consideration of student needs, the IDEA 04 now requires student planning teams (e.g., IEP, IFSP, ITP) to "consider" whether assistive technology devices or services are needed for all students with disabilities and also stipulates that school districts are required to provide for such devices or services to ensure a free, appropriate public education (FAPE). Given this requirement, it is imperative that special educators develop skills and knowledge in this area.

Frequently Asked Questions About Assistive Technology

The following address the most frequently asked questions about assistive technology.

Who must be considered for AT?

IDEA 04 (34 C.F.R. §300.346) mandated that all students with an IEP must be considered for assistive technology (AT). To provide a free, appropriate, public education, the IEP team must consider if AT is needed for the student to meet goals and objectives.

Are there particular groups of students with disabilities who should be considered for AT?

The federal requirements are clear — AT consideration must occur for all students who have an IEP. It is not based on any preconceived ideas about disabilities. It is also possible that a student with a disability may need several types of AT to meet their educational needs, based on their IEP goals and objectives.

What is meant by “consideration” when discussing AT?

“Consideration” is a process and it should not be confused with an “evaluation.” Simply put, consideration is a relatively short process in which IEP team members use information analysis and critical decision making to determine student needs for AT. A simple 4-step approach can be used when giving “consideration” of AT devices/services to identified students. This approach provides a research-based framework from which planning teams collect information about the: 1) student’s strengths, abilities and skills, 2) environments in which the student functions, 3) general education curriculum needs (tasks) to meet IEP goals, and 4) information about possible assistive technology services and devices to achieve these goals (tools).

Who provides consideration for AT?

The IEP team provides consideration for students with disabilities. In the event a team concludes they do not have enough information, they are still required to seek assistance to ensure that informed consideration had occurred.

What are the conclusions an IEP team could make in regard to AT?

Penny Reed of the Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative (www.WATI.org) has stated that there are four possible decisions an IEP team can make. These are restated here:

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1.) AT is not needed. The student is making adequate progress through task modification, skill remediation or other interventions. Nothing new is needed for this student.

2.) AT is needed, and is successfully being used. In this case, it is appropriate to state in the IEP that particular AT services and devices have been found to be effective to assure that they are available to the student.

3.) AT may be needed, but the IEP team is unsure what service or device would meet the student's needs. The team may decide that new AT should be tried and additional data be collected to determine what an appropriate service or product might be.

4.) The team is unsure what AT is, and so must find resources in order to make an informed decision regarding consideration. These resources can be from within the school district or, if there are no resources available, from an outside agency or resource.

Must every student with a disability be evaluated for assistive technology?

No - but it must be considered for every student with a disability, hence the need to provide AT consideration. If the IEP team determines that there is a need for an assistive technology evaluation, that must occur as well.

What is the school's responsibility for providing assistive technology?

"Each public agency shall ensure that assistive technology devices or assistive technology services, or both, as those terms are defined in §§300.5-300.6, are made available to a child with a disability if required as a part of the child's -

- (1) Special education under 300.26;
- (2) Related services under §300.24; or
- (3) Supplementary aids and services under §§300.28 and 300.550(b)(2)."

(34C.F.R. §300.308(a))

If a child needs assistive technology to remain in the general education class or other education-related setting to enable him/her to be educated with children without exceptionalities to the maximum extent appropriate, then assistive technology must be listed as a supplementary aid or service on the IEP including the frequency, location, and duration.

Are schools required to pay for assistive technology services and products?

Not necessarily. Schools have the responsibility to provide the services and products that are included in the IEP. However, the school may utilize a variety of funding mechanisms to pay for them, including accessing medical assistance for items which are medically necessary.

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The school is required to provide the needed assistive technology in a timely manner. Other resources may be available to loan devices or to help pay for them. Medicaid, the Program for Children with Special Health Care Needs, private health insurance, service clubs, and other funding sources may be able to pay for equipment. Check the Assistive Technology for Kansans website at www.atk.lsi.ukans.edu for additional ideas, including those listed in the "Funding Manual for Assistive Technology." The Regional Access Sites may also be helpful to schools in locating evaluation and funding resources; call 800-KAN-DOIt to reach the office nearest your school.

If a child who needs an assistive technology device is covered by Medicaid insurance, the device is owned by the child and family. This ownership requirement is consistent with Medicaid rules. Likewise, if other resources (Special Health Services, civic groups, other organizations) have purchased the assistive technology device, it belongs to the child and family. Additional information is included in the KSDE publication, "Assistive Technology and the Individualized Education Program," 1998, available by calling KSDE at 800-203-9462, or through the KSDE home page: www.kansped.org.

What are schools' responsibilities for customization, repair, maintenance, or replacement of assistive technology devices included in the IEP?

Schools are responsible to provide these services in order for a student to receive FAPE (34 C.F.R. §300.308). This can include the repair, maintenance or replacement of a privately owned device that is included in the IEP. (34 C.F.R. §300.306)

Can students take school owned assistive technology devices home on school nights, over weekends, breaks or over the summer?

"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 C.F.R. §300.308.b)

An important consideration by the IEP team regarding this issue is that homework and extracurricular activities are an important component of the child's educational experiences.

What is the school's responsibility for maintenance or replacement of an AT device that is damaged or stolen while in the child's possession?

The assistive technology devices that are necessary to ensure FAPE must be provided at no cost to the parents, and the parents cannot be charged for normal use and wear and tear. However, while ownership of the device in these circumstances would remain with the public agency, state law rather than Part B of IDEA 04 generally would govern whether parents are liable for loss, theft or damage due to negligence or misuse of publicly owned equipment used at home or in other settings in accordance with a child's IEP. Kansas currently does not have state law that relates to this issue.

How is an assistive technology tool documented on the IEP if it is available to other students who do not have a disability?

If the assistive technology is necessary for a student with a disability to complete educational goals, it should be included on his IEP. Even if it is available to other students as a useful tool, if it is an essential tool for that student, it should be documented as such on the IEP.

Why do some students refuse to use technology after it is obtained for them?

Frequently, assistive technology products are obtained for an individual and not used. This is product abandonment. There are some reasons frequently given for abandonment listed below. These are not the only reasons, nor are they relevant just for students. However, it would be wise to take them into consideration and try to find ways to help limit the incidences of abandonment among our students.

1. Student was not involved in decision-making.
2. It didn't do what it was supposed to do.
3. It worked, but it was inconvenient or impractical to use.
4. It inhibited some other important function.
5. It couldn't be modified or upgraded to meet changing needs.
6. It was too cumbersome or unattractive.
7. Functional needs of user changed.
8. Medical intervention (surgery, medications) made it unusable.
9. Use of the technology increased medical or safety risk.

Who is considered to be an assistive technology specialist?

There is no required licensure as an assistive technology specialist. There are certifications and degrees issued by several professional organizations and educational institutions, including RESNA (rehabilitation and assistive technology association of North America), RIATT @

NASDSE(Institute For Assistive And Training Technologies @ National Association of State Directors of Special Education), University of Kentucky, State University of New York and others. In many cases, Special Education Teachers, Occupational Therapists, Speech-Language Pathologists, Physical Therapist and other professionals have become local experts on AT issues. Until there is a licensure or certification required, professionals are encouraged to examine their own skills and knowledge, perhaps through a self-examination using the NASDSE and QIAT competencies. Professionals are also encouraged to engage in ongoing learning through conferences, workshops and other opportunities to maintain a current knowledge base.

The Department of Children, Families & Learning sponsors regular opportunities to enhance AT skills.

Guidelines for Consideration of Assistive Technology

Every IEP Team is now required to "consider" the need for Assistive Technology for every child in special education, as part of the "Special Factors" requirement in IDEA '04. In the federal requirements, Special Factors requires that IEP teams "consider whether the child requires assistive technology devices and services" (34 C.F.R. §300.346).

This requirement leaves us with several questions, such as: What does it mean to "consider?" How will IEP teams demonstrate that consideration occurred? What process can be used to ensure that AT consideration was provided by the team? What is the difference between "consideration" and "evaluation?" All of these questions are addressed in this section.

In thinking about "consideration" it is important to remember that consideration is by nature a brief process, one that can take place within every IEP meeting. Secondly, in order to consider the need for assistive technology, at least one person on the IEP team should have some knowledge about assistive technology. Thoughtful consideration of anything can only occur if one knows something about it. Therefore, to facilitate knowledge about AT consideration, a procedure involving a series of steps has been developed to lead teams through this process. Each step is built upon a conceptual framework that involves team collaboration in determining what services and devices best meet a student's needs.

The steps presented in this section are accompanied by a set of forms that can be used at critical points in the consideration process. This process, including all of the forms, was adapted from a variety of sources including Rees (1998), Bowser and Reed (1998) and SETT (1999). The forms contained in this guideline are suggestions for how to effectively provide both consideration and

extended consideration of assistive technology. IEP team members should note that these forms are not required—they are only used to help teams with the AT consideration process. Some teams will find that they prefer some forms to others, or find that some parts are not necessary, depending on their skills and team dynamics. Teams with little experience in the consideration of AT are encouraged to try the forms as they are presented, then modify them based on team needs and increased experiences.

IEP Team Members for Considering Assistive Technology Needs

In most cases, IEP team members engaged in the AT consideration process will be comprised of those individuals required by IDEA 04 (parent, general education teacher, etc). The forms provided in the Appendix were designed to facilitate the consideration and solutions selection process, even for team members who have had little experience with AT devices and strategies. There may be times when additional personnel will be called on because of their expertise or specialized knowledge in the field of AT. However, a wide range of individual perspective may contribute to the consideration process, ranging from highly trained consultants to the student's peers. Additional members who can provide input into the AT consideration may include any of the following:

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| Advocate | • Peer |
| Audiologist | • Teachers |
| Augmentative Communication Specialist | • Psychologist |
| Interagency Personnel | • Social Worker |
| Medical/Health Professionals | • Teacher of Deaf/Hard of Hearing |
| Occupational Therapist | • Vision Specialist |
| Paraprofessionals | • Others as needed |

Steps for Considering Assistive Technology

Step 1: Prior to the meeting, to aid in practical consideration of assistive technology, a team may choose to observe the student in his customary environment to gain information on current activities and supports, and determine how well they work. This observation may assist the team in making an informed decision regarding whether assistive technology is already in place, what is working well, and potentially give some guidance regarding areas where any additional options may be needed. A form which may be useful is the Assistive Technology Status Log. The Student, Environments, and Tasks Worksheet, Family and Student's Worksheets in Section 3 can also be used to gather input from team members. Team members should make a point of reporting both successes and accomplishments in addition to areas of difficulty. The Worksheets are brought to the team meeting.

Step 2: At the team meeting, members conduct a group planning process to review information obtained from the Worksheets. It is recommended that a flip chart or overhead be used so everyone can see all the topics from the worksheet that need to be discussed. A template that can be used for this activity is the Assistive Technology Group Planning Process provided in Section 3. Note that the topics on this template directly relate to the information on the Worksheets. The primary objective of this group process is to identify tasks the student needs to be able to do in relation to "student" factors (e.g., skills, abilities, functional competencies) and environmental circumstances that impact performance. It is recommended that teams quickly move through the information on the *Student, Family, and Environments*, portions of the worksheet, spending only a few minutes per topic if the team is in general agreement with the data that has been gathered. Generally, more attention is paid to the Tasks section (i.e., the naturally occurring activities that take place in the environment that are critical to the student), since the team cannot generate AT solutions until those tasks have been identified. The team should choose from 1 to 3 critical tasks for solution generation.

Team members gather information prior to meeting. Use *Assistive Technology Status Log* and *Student, Environments and Tasks, Family and Student Worksheets*.

Team meets and conducts group planning process, using information gathered through worksheets.

Step 3: Once all aspects of the Student, Family, Environments, and Tasks Worksheet have been addressed, the team needs to generate solutions through brainstorming. The details of the solutions will vary, based on the knowledge and experience of the team members. Some team members may be able to name a specific product that they think may assist the student. Others will only be able to list features; for example “says everything while it is typed” or “needs to be portable” or “has only 2 messages.” Teams can use the Assistive Technology Checklist in Section 3 to review a wide range of AT devices and strategies that can be used to address student needs in such areas as writing, reading, daily living skills and transition. Also, other resources that can be used include that teams can seek the advice of an AT consultant or any one of the number of state and regional resource persons. (e.g. OCCK Inc. at 785-827-9383 in Salina, KS.)

Step 4: This step involves “solution selection.” The team discusses solutions listed, thinking about which ones might be the most effective for the student. Team members may want to identify solutions that can be implemented either immediately, in the next few months, or in the future. At this point, the Planning and Implementation Summary can be used to list specific devices, hardware and software. Consisting of two sections, “Planning” and “Implementation,” the Planning and Implementation Summary is used to help team members consider a wide range of factors (e.g., training, cost, storage) involved in selecting and using assistive technology. It is important to note that in some cases, a strategy rather than a device or product may be identified.

Step 5: Develop implementation plan, which could include extended consideration with any identified devices or products or evaluation. Use the Planning and Implementation Summary to assign names, dates and follow-up plan and meeting. Implement the plan, collect relevant data and conduct follow-up on the planned date.

Team generates possible solutions through brainstorming. Possible solutions can be specific or more generic. May use AT Checklist to identify solutions.

Specific tools or strategies are selected for implementation. Use *Planning and Implementation Summary*.

Initiate the Implementation Plan.

Extended Consideration

Extended consideration refers to a trial period with one or more assistive technology devices in the child's customary environments. Extended consideration (also known as equipment trials) is an extremely effective tool for determining what, if any, assistive technology might help the child achieve goals as developed by an IEP team.

Completing an extended consideration can provide members of the team with time to make rational decisions based on actual data. It can help with team members who have read or heard about new assistive technology, but who lack information on how use of the device would impact the performance of the student. More than one technology solution may be tried to determine which one is the most effective. The opportunity to collect additional data in the extended consideration process helps the team to consider the need for assistive technology, based on actual performance of specified tasks by the student in the chosen environments. An extended consideration period of any reasonable length can be written into the educational plan to allow for appropriate, well planned and documented trials with a range of potential solutions.