

# **School-Aged Children Q & A**

## ***A.C.T.S. PROVIDING ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SERVICES FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS***

### **1. What is assistive technology (AT)?**

- AT is “...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 children with disabilities.” Low tech items include slant boards, pencil grips, calculators, and adapted paper. High tech items include talking word processors, portable keyboarding devices such as the AlphaSmart, and augmentative communication systems.

### **2. What are AT services?**

- AT services are “any service that directly assists the individual with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an AT device.” This includes consultation, assessment, selection, customization, application, and maintenance of a device. It also includes training and technical assistance. AT services can be considered to be a Designated Instruction and Services (DIS).

### **3. What is augmentative/ Alternative communication (AAC)?**

- Augmentative/alternative communication is a subset of assistive technology. AAC is related to devices and services that compensate (either temporarily or permanently) for severe expressive communication disorders (i.e. the severely speech-language and writing impaired). It is appropriate for:
  - anyone who is not able to communicate effectively with speech.
  - anyone who is partially able to communicate with speech (has speech but is not understood by most listeners).
  - anyone who is having difficulty understanding and using oral language.

- Augmentative communication systems are an “integrated group of components, including the symbols, aids, strategies, and techniques used by individuals to enhance communication.” These include communication boards, PECS (Picture Exchange Communication Systems), speech generating devices such *TechTalk*, *Springboard*, and *Dynavox 4100/MTV*.

#### 4. Is AT a new requirement?

- No. IDEA 1997 states that “assistive technology devices and services” must be provided by school districts to eligible children if necessary to ensure the provision of a free appropriate public education. Individualized Education Plan (IEP) teams **must** consider each student’s need for assistive technology. The use of AT may be required in order for the student to perform a skill (read, write, communicate, etc.) more easily or efficiently in the least restrictive environment or with less personal assistance.

#### 5. When is AT considered?

- AT/AAC should be considered at **every IEP** meeting. The IEP team may determine that:
  - AT/AAC is not needed
  - continued use of existing AT/AAC systems and services is appropriate.
  - additional AT/AAC solutions are needed.
  - a consultation or assessment by the AT/AAC Specialist is needed.

#### 6. Where do we document the use of AT devices? services on the IEP?

- AT should be documented on the IEP face.
- Use categorical descriptions instead of product names, e.g., speech generating device vs. *Dynavox*; alternative keyboards vs. *IntelliKeys*; portable writing tools vs. *AlphaSmart*; talking word processor vs. *Write:OutLoud*.

**7. How do we obtain AT or AAC Services**

- If the IEP team determines that AT/AAC is needed, the district will refer students to their own specialists. If the district lacks an AT/AAC specialist, they will refer the student to a licensed non-public agency such as A.C.T.S.

**8. How do we refer a student to ACTS?**

- Download an ACTS Student Referral form for AAC or AT consultations or assessments. Complete the referral form and submit the form with current records on the student such as an IEP, Vision examination, Hearing Examination, Speech/Language Evaluations/Progress Summaries, Occupational and Physical Therapy Reports and any current medical summary. Submit the documents with a signed release of information (from the student's parent/guardian) and send to the ACTS office.
- Send a copy of the IEP service page that specifies the requested service (e.g. AAC Assessment, AT Assessment, AT consultation).
- ACTS will send the IEP service page to the district special education administrator to request a Master contract and Individual Service Agreement (ISA) for the recommended services.
- Once a Master Contract and Individual Service Agreement is signed and received in the ACTS office, an ACTS associate will be assigned to serve the student. For AAC/AT Evaluations, the parent must sign a district Assessment Plan by the first actual date of the evaluation. The associate has 50 days to complete the assessment and schedule an IEP.