

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY OVERVIEW

What is Assistive Technology (AT)?

The potential of assistive technology for children with disabilities has been recognized by the Federal government in the reauthorization of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), which mandates that assistive technology be considered for *each child* with a disability. AT services and devices are included with an “assistive technology device” defined as
“...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.”

What are some examples?

AT can facilitate access to standard curriculum and increase participation. For instance, a non-verbal Kindergarten student can be the “caller” for a game of Red Light/Green Light by using a talking switch. A student who can comprehend history at the 9th grade level but can only read at the 3rd grade level finds access to the textbook with the help of a computer that scans and reads text. A child with extreme dyslexia can use an AlphaSmart keyboard device to take notes. A similar child could alternatively get copies of notes from other students, using NCR paper. AT can be a bookstand, a talking calculator, or a larger computer monitor. A teacher with vocal cord strain might use a voice amplifier. A one-handed typist could use a reconfigured keyboard. Augmentative & Alternative Communication is a subset of Assistive Technology related to communication.

How do you know what will work?

Information about the existence of AT is not widespread. While information is now available, a person often needs to try something to determine if it’s effective. Every school district will need to establish a means of providing competent AT assessments and services. Schools may build internal expertise by offering training, modifying job descriptions to include AT skills, or creating new positions. They may contract with outside providers if there is a source of external expertise, especially to cover highly specialized areas such as AAC (augmentative and alternative communication).

When Is AT Required?

IDEA 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. IEP teams in school districts across the country are struggling to appropriately consider each student's need for assistive technology. Assistive Technology should be considered if its use will help the student perform a skill (read, write, communicate, etc.) more easily or efficiently, in the least restrictive environment or with less personal assistance.

Who Pays for AT?

A number of programs are required to pay for AT depending on circumstances. Medicare, Medicaid, vocational rehabilitation, developmental services, the school district, social security, children’s services, and private insurance are all potential sources. Each of these is described in detail at the California Protection and Advocacy website. (<http://www.pai-ca.org/pubs/401801.htm>)