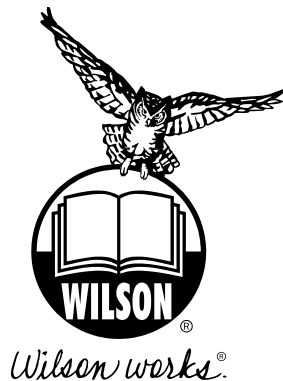


Assistive Technology

*An Overview for Parents of
Students with Learning Disabilities*



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Assistive Technology: An Overview for Parents of Students with Learning Disabilities

Navigating the educational journey of a student with learning challenges can be daunting and exhausting. The never-ending acronyms, paperwork, and meetings can feel like trying to get a drink of water from an open fire hydrant. Parents frequently ask, “What kind of accommodations are available for my student, and how do I obtain these services?” “With technology changing by the day, how do I help my child keep up with it all?”

In the last decade, great advances have been made in the area of Assistive Technology (AT) to support students with a documented need. Below is an overview of what AT is, how it can be used, and how to obtain it. Additionally, some guidelines to facilitate the process of obtaining assistive technology services for each student are provided.

What is Assistive Technology (AT)?

According to the Assistive Technology Industry Association (ATIA), assistive technology is defined as “products, equipment, and systems that enhance learning, working, and daily living for persons with disabilities” (<https://www.atia.org>).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) defines AT devices 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 (IDEA, 2004).

In simpler terms, it is a tool or tools that provide(s) access to an activity that is either difficult or impossible for the student to do independently. Assistive technology can be as complex and sophisticated as eye gaze software that allows a person to use his/her eyes to navigate a computer, or as simple as an erasable highlighter to color code information read in a textbook.

When is it used?

Assistive technologies can be used anywhere, although they are most often seen in schools or while a learner is completing an educational task. For example, if a student requires a tool that reads text aloud, this tool is used when access to the text reader is available. Regardless of the type of tool, it is used when the student requires support in achieving his/her educational goals.

How do I know if my child needs AT?

Assistive technologies should be considered once it has been determined by your student’s educational team that either a 504 plan or an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) needs to be created.

How do you obtain AT devices through your school district?

In order to obtain assistive technology support, the parent must request that an assistive technology assessment be done by a qualified professional.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) requires that the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team consider AT needs in the development of every IEP (IDEA, 2004). Once the IEP team has reviewed assessment results and determined that AT is needed for provision of a free,

appropriate, public education (FAPE), it is important that the IEP document reflects the team's determination in as clear a fashion as possible (<http://qiat.org>).

This assessment is usually done in conjunction with the IEP or 504 process. An IEP is a legal federal document that identifies specific learning disabilities and then outlines the plan for remediating the disabilities. In the state of Massachusetts, page 3 of the IEP document has a section titled **Present Levels of Educational Performance**. This section includes a box for **Assistive tech devices/services**.

Present Levels of Educational Performance

B: Other Educational Needs

Check all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/> Adapted physical education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Assistive tech devices/services	<input type="checkbox"/> Behavior
<input type="checkbox"/> Braille needs (blind/visually impaired)	<input type="checkbox"/> Communication (all students)	<input type="checkbox"/> Communication (deaf/hard of hearing students)
<input type="checkbox"/> Extra curriculum activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Language needs (LEP students)	<input type="checkbox"/> Nonacademic activities
<input type="checkbox"/> Social/emotional needs	<input type="checkbox"/> Travel training	<input type="checkbox"/> Skill development related to vocational preparation or experience
<input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="text"/>		

(Retrieved from: http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/iep/eng_toc.html)

This is an example of another state's form:

Assistive Technology: The student needs does not need assistive technology.

(Retrieved from: http://www.sped.sbcsc.k12.in.us/PDF%20Files/Blank_IEP.pdf)

Each state, and even different towns/cities within the same state may have different forms. What is most important to remember is to request an assistive technology evaluation during the 504 or IEP process in order to determine if there is a need for AT, and if so, what tools should be provided for your student.

In some instances, there is a misunderstanding about AT. Some professionals believe it is only for students with moderate to severe disabilities. However, "Consideration of assistive technology need is required by IDEA and is based on the unique educational needs of the student. Students are not excluded from consideration of AT for any reason (e.g., type of disability, age, administrative concerns)" (<http://www.qiat.org>).

What is most important to consider?

Once it has been determined that a student requires assistive technology support, the team should consider the following framework:

S:	student
E:	environment
T:	task
T:	tool

In using this framework, the first dynamic to consider is the student. Who is this person? What are his/her strengths and challenges? Second, where is the student expected to do the assignment? Is it in a library, a science lab, or a room with a one-to-one aid? Third, what are we asking this student to do? Is he/she being asked to compute a math problem or to write a lab report? Last, once the first three factors have been considered, then, and only then, can a tool be suggested.

The SETT framework should be used whenever the right tool for the right student needs to be determined. Potential misfits happen when a tool is chosen because it happens to be easily accessible. If a student is provided an iPad® because it is available, but not actually the right tool for the task the student needs to accomplish, this can potentially lead to frustration and missed learning opportunities.

In addition to using the SETT framework, the tools chosen must “support achievement of goals and progress in the general curriculum.” Each tool must take into consideration the unique needs of the student and the results of the use of the AT device must be measurable and observable (<http://www.qiat.org>).

What if your child attends an independent school?

Independent schools who do not receive funding from the sending school districts are not required to fund and/or provide assistive technologies. If a student with an identified learning disability attends an independent school, an IEP can still be generated from the student’s assigned public school at the parent’s request. Independent schools do not create IEPs, but some do choose to follow an IEP written by the student’s local public school system.

Who is responsible for providing it?

Funding the tools varies depending on the person, the tool, and the task. For technological tools that are required as part of the IEP process, the student’s local school district pays for tools that are specified in the IEP document (<https://atia.org>).

The IDEA law states in Section 300.105: ... the school system is responsible for addressing assistive technology when it is required as a part of the student’s special education services, related services, or supplementary aids and services. Use of school-provided assistive technology is not limited to the school setting (IDEA, 2004).

Section 300.105 clearly specifies that school-purchased assistive technology may be made available in the child’s home or in other settings if the IEP team determines that the child requires assistive technology to receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) (<http://www.gpat.org>).

How do you measure a tool's effectiveness?

Progress benchmarks should be determined once a tool is chosen. Regular check-ins should be scheduled to determine if the benchmarks are being met, and if not, what changes needed to be implemented. Data collection is essential and must be collected across multiple locations.

General guidelines:

- ✓ Determining the AT needs of a student should be made as a collaborative process that includes the student and the caregiver(s).
- ✓ If the school system does not have a trained and experienced assistive technology professional, outside support should be secured.
- ✓ Make sure to consider a range of tools.
- ✓ Document the reason(s) why a particular tool has been chosen in the IEP. Include any information from the AT assessment in the IEP. "Develop a written action plan that provides detailed information about how AT will be used in specific educational settings, what will be done and who will do it" (<http://www.qiat.org>).
- ✓ Do not introduce too many tools at once. This will make it difficult to determine what is working and what is not.
- ✓ Reassess whenever the environment is altered, the student changes, or the educational tasks have been modified (<http://www.qiat.org>).

Navigating the AT journey doesn't have to be an arduous process. Knowing that AT is a legal right, that the best plans are based on excellent communication and collaboration, and that the process should remain fluid as the learner develops will support a productive relationship with the student's school district.

References

Assistive Technology Industry Association

<https://www.atia.org/>

GA Department of Education, Georgia Project for Assistive Technology

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Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1401 (2004)

<http://idea.ed.gov/download/statute.html>

Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education

http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/iep/eng_toc.html

Quality Indicators for Assistive Technology

<http://www.qiat.org/>

<http://www.qiat.org/indicators.html>

South Bend Community School Corporation

http://www.sped.sbcsc.k12.in.us/PDF%20Files/Blank_IEP.pdf

Our mission
is to provide quality professional learning
and ongoing support so that educators
have the skills and tools they need
to help their students become fluent,
independent readers.

