

# **Assistive Technology and the IEP**

## **Frequently Asked Questions for Parents and Educators**

All children have the right to a free, appropriate public education. Some of these children may need supplemental aids and services which allow them access to the educational benefits. Assistive technology allows these students access and alternative means of accomplishing the goals and objectives set forth in their Individual Education Program. At the present time there are over 20,000 items classified as assistive technology devices. These devices range from low tech equipment such as pencil grips for writing and calculators for developing math skills all the way up to more complex and high tech devices such as voice-output communication devices to express needs and eye-gaze systems whereby students can accomplish word processing tasks using their eyes to type. Because of the enormous number of devices available and because of the unique characteristics of the students, the issue of providing the most appropriate assistive technology becomes a complex dilemma.

Let's look at several major questions involved in determining the appropriate assistive technology for special education students and how the assistive technology can successfully become incorporated into the Individual Education Program.

### ***Who is eligible for assistive technology?***

All students with disabilities, both students who receive services under IDEA and those covered by Section 504, are to be considered for assistive technology needs. The need is determined by whether or not the student would benefit from the assistive technology devices and/or services by providing that student a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment. Infants and toddlers younger than three years of age who have developmental delays or who are at risk of developing delays are also eligible for assistive technology devices and services if the Individual Family Service Plan determines that assistive technology devices and services would help the child meet developmental needs.

### ***Who decides if Assistive Technology is needed?***

### ***When does a school district evaluate a student for Assistive Technology?***

### ***When a need is seen and Assistive Technology could help.***

### ***What kinds of assistive technology and services are to be considered by the IEP team?***

Considerations for specific Assistive Technology devices and services are based upon the needs determined in the evaluation process. Assistive technology devices are tools designed to enhance the skills of the students who use such devices. Using a single strategy (or tool) in addressing the needs and objectives could be compared to the teacher

who only gives drill and practice in order to teach a specific concept. The IEP team must recognize that assistive technology is just one strategy in a multi-modal approach in addressing the needs and strengths of students with disabilities. A single assistive technology device is not appropriate for every environment. For example, a student who uses an electronic voice output device in the classroom would be at a loss in a swim class. An alternative for this particular student might be a laminated communication board in that specific environment.

This example describes the two basic types of assistive technology. Low-Tech - Equipment and other supports readily available in schools, including off-the-shelf items to accommodate the needs of students, which can be provided by general/special education (e.g., calculators, tape recorder, pencil grip and larger pencils). High-Tech - Supports students who may need more specialized equipment and support services beyond basic assistive technology, often students with low incidence and/or significant/severe disabilities.(e.g., closed circuit television (CCTV), FM, systems, augmentative communication devices, sound field systems, alternative computer access, and specialized software).

***Who decides if Assistive Technology devices and services are needed?***

***How do you get Assistive Technology on the IEP?***

The IDEA regulations state that assistive technology can be included in an IEP for three reasons:-as part of special education, Assistive technology can be considered as part of the student's goals and objectives for special education. An example for an annual goal might be: Lisa will use an electronic portable notetaker to complete written exercises that other students complete with a pencil and paper. An example of an objective addressing a specific skill: Using a portable electronic notetaker, Lisa will type 10 words per minute with no errors on 10 consecutive days. -as a related service, This could be a related service itself (i.e. occupational or physical therapy, speech pathology and audiology) or anything which allows the student to benefit from a related service (i.e. a student may need a wheelchair lift in order to ride to schoolbus to school). Training to assist a student in the use of a device may be considered as a related service.-as a supplemental aid or service Assistive technology is considered a supplemental aid when its presence allows the student access to the least restrictive environment and the lack of this device or service requires the removal of that student into a more restrictive setting. An example of assistive technology devices or services might be: Lisa can participate in regular classroom activities using an augmentative communication device which demonstrates educational progress towards her IEP goals in this setting. Without the device she would most likely be placed into a more restrictive setting.

***Who decides if assistive technology is needed?***

The determination for assistive technology devices and services is a decision made by the IEP committee after an evaluation of needs in the student's customary environment. During this evaluation process several questions must be considered: What is it we want

the student to be able to do in the educational setting that he/she cannot do because of their disability? Can an assistive technology device or service compensate for the disability and thus help in accomplishing an IEP goal or objective.

***Who is responsible for purchasing the assistive technology devices/services?***

If the IEP determines that assistive technology is required for free, appropriate public education then the school must provide the device or services. The school district can ask the parents to seek Medicaid or private insurance funding. However, the school district cannot require the use of private funding if there will be a cost to the parents such as deductible, co-payment or increase in premiums.

***Is cost a consideration in selecting assistive technology devices?***

Cost may not be a factor if the alternative will deny the student access to a free, appropriate public education. A specific device does not have to be selected as long as an alternative device is appropriate and meets the guidelines of FAPE.

***Who is responsible for repairs and maintenance of assistive technology devices?***

The school district is responsible for repairing and maintaining assistive devices it purchases. Parents are encouraged to examine warranties for devices they have purchased for provisions that may cover these devices. In order to provide FAPE the device must be available and in working order if required and written into the IEP. The school district, therefore, has the final responsibility for repair regardless of who has purchased the device.

***Who owns the assistive technology that is purchased by the school district?***

Any equipment purchased by the school belongs to the school district. If the student moves to another school district, the equipment should remain with the district which made the purchase unless it would not be of benefit to any other student or can't be resold.

***Can a student take home equipment that is purchased by the school district?***

If the student needs the equipment in order to fully benefit from its use and if home use is specified in the student's IEP, it may then be taken home. Even though the district owns the device, it cannot limit its use to school grounds if a student needs the device at home to complete school homework or practice functional skills in non-school environments.

***What about when my child participates in a transition program?***

Transition services for students over the age of fourteen, to promote the movement from school to employment, adult and daily living skills, vocational training should be

included in that students IEP. The provision of assistive technology devices and services included in the IEP are considered as a part of that transition plan.

***Will educators/parents receive training on how to program some of the more sophisticated "high-tech" devices?***

Without information and knowledge of the assistive technology devices, successful utilization of the devices is doomed to failure. Assistive technology training is clearly a responsibility under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. There are several levels of training from basic awareness of assistive technology for staff and families. Personnel who have direct contact with students with disabilities and responsible for designing appropriate programs will require more in-depth training dependent upon the complexity of the assistive device used.