Assistive Technology and Transition Planning

Introduction

Many students with disabilities require assistive technology to participate in and benefit from their educational programs. Some students may use assistive technology to increase their participation and achievement in the general education curriculum or to increase their independence and participation in grade level content and functional activities.

When an Individualized Education Program (IEP) team determines that a student requires assistive technology to achieve their goals, the devices and services that are required should be documented in the IEP and made available to the student in a timely manner. Training for the student, the school staff, and their family should be provided to support the successful use of the assistive technology.

As IEP teams begin to address the transition process for a student with a disability, it is important that the student's need for assistive technology be addressed in the Transition Plan in the IEP as well as in other sections as appropriate. If a student uses assistive technology in the school setting and requires it in post-secondary environments or if a student will require different AT support in a postsecondary setting, the Transition Plan becomes the legal document that specifies how the technology will be used to support employment, community participation, and independent living goals.

In this section, you will learn about the range and variety of assistive technology devices that are available to support student success at school and in post-secondary environments. You will also learn basic procedures for determining student assistive technology needs and for integrating technology into the student's educational program. Specific strategies to promote transition planning are also provided.

Definitions of Assistive Technology Devices and Services

Assistive technology devices and services were first defined in federal law in the Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1988 (Public Law 100-407) and was adopted with minor modifications in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-476). These definitions remained unchanged until 2004 with the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (Public Law 108-446) when an exemption to the definition of an assistive technology device was added to clarify a school system's responsibility to provide surgically implanted technology such as cochlear implants.

Assistive Technology Device

Assistive technology devices are identified in the IDEA 2004 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.*
>
> *The term does not include a medical device that is surgically implanted, or the replacement of such device. (Authority 20 U.S.C. 1401(1))*

Althou gh the IDEA uses the term "device", it is important to recognize that assistive technology devices required by students with disabilities include hardware and software as well as stand-alone devices. Almost any tool can be considered an assistive technology device except for those assistive technology devices that are surgically implanted and have been excluded from the definition of an assistive technology device as defined in IDEA.

The definition of an assistive technology device is very broad and gives IEP teams the flexibility that they need to make decisions about appropriate assistive technology devices for individual students. Assistive technology includes technology solutions that are generally considered instructional technology tools, if they have been identified as educationally necessary and documented in the student's IEP. For example, a classroom computer with text to speech software is considered assistive technology for a student who demonstrates difficulty in writing and spelling.

Assistive technology devices can be purchased online, from a local store, or a vendor that specializes in the production and sale of assistive technology devices. These devices sometimes need to be modified or customized to meet the individual needs. For example, a computer workstation may need to be assessed for proper ergonomics and outfitted with a keyboard with larger keys for someone with learning disabilities or attention issues. When determining assistive technology needs, IEP teams should consider commercially available solutions that may be used "as is" or ones that can be modified to meet the student's unique needs. In some situations, it may be necessary to construct a device to meet the student's needs.

A vast range of assistive technology devices are available today. These are identified as low tech, mid-tech and high tech solutions. For example, a pencil grip is a low-tech assistive technology solution that may be used by a student with a physical disability by assisting with grasping the pencil. Other devices, that are considered high tech, can often be more expensive. This can include a laptop computer, a dedicated communication device, power wheelchairs with multi-functions, or telepresence robotics that can enable a student to be in one location while operating the robot which is in another location such as in school and in the classroom.

Assistive technology devices are available in a variety of categories to address functional capabilities of students with disabilities. These categories include but are not limited to: academic and learning aids, aids for daily living, alternative augmentative communication (AAC) devices, computer access, environmental control, mobility aids, seating and positioning solutions, sensory solutions, robotics, mobile devices, and much more.

A particular student with a disability may require assistive technology solutions from one or more of the above categories. For example, a student with cognitive disabilities may use a communication device, adaptive switches, and a non-traditional keyboard for accessing the classroom computer.

The need for assistive technology devices is determined by the student's IEP committee. Typically, assistive technology solutions are identified through consideration of assistive technology to help the student successfully complete classroom activities and achieve their IEP goals. The IEP team can ask for assistance by requesting an assistive technology assessment. This assessment can be conducted by the districts AT team or by a person outside the district

with AT expertise. Once an assistive technology device has been determined educationally necessary, the student's IEP team should document the required device(s) in the IEP. Information on considering and assessing the need for assistive technology devices and documenting assistive technology devices is included in subsequent sections of this manual.

Assistive Technology Service

As defined in IDEA as adapted from the 1988 Tech Act federal law, an assistive technology service is

> *Any service that directly assists a child with a disability in the selection, acquisition, and use of an assistive technology device. The definition includes:*
>
> *(a) The evaluation of the needs of a child with a disability, 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 children with disabilities;*
>
> *(c) Selecting, designing, fitting, customizing, adapting, applying, retaining, repairing, or replacing 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 a child with a disability or, if appropriate, that child's family; and*
>
> *(f) Training or technical assistance for professionals (including individuals or rehabilitation services), employers, or other individuals who provide services to employ, or are otherwise substantially involved in the major life functions of children with disabilities.*
>
> *(Authority 20 U.S.C. 1401(2))*

As stated in the IDEA, assistive technology services are provided to assist in the selection, acquisition, and use of an assistive technology device. It can be easy for an IEP team to focus on the device itself and forget that the assistive technology services, as described in this document, are critical to the student's use of the device. For some students, appropriate assistive technology devices are identified through an AT assessment which the IDEA specifies must be conducted in the student's customary environment. After, a device has been selected to meet the student's needs, the next step or "service" is to actually provide the assistive technology device for the student's use. After the device has been obtained, and if necessary modified, all appropriate individuals, including the student, teachers, parents, and therapists, should be trained in the use of the device and the device should be made available for the student's use across instructional settings as needed.

Prior to IDEA 2004, there was some discussion as to whether a school system was responsible for the maintenance, programming, and replacement of surgically implanted assistive technology devices such as cochlear implants and whether or not these would be considered assistive technology. The following excerpt from IDEA addresses this issue:

> *For a child with a surgically implanted medical device who is receiving special education and related services under this part, a public agency is not responsible for the maintenance, programming, or replacement of the medical device that has been surgically implanted (or of an external component of the surgically implanted medical device)*

> *(Authority 20 U.S.C. 1401(1), 1401(26)(B))*

Although the school system, under the present legislation, is not responsible for maintaining, programming, and replacing surgically implanted assistive technology devices, the IDEA states that the system does have a responsibility to ensure that the external components of these devices are functioning properly.

> *Each public agency must ensure that the external components of surgically implanted medical devices are functioning properly.*

> *(Authority 20 U.S.C. 1401(1), 1401(26)(B))*

In summary, the definitions of assistive technology devices and services are clearly defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004. These definitions have also been included in the State Rules for Special Education. Each student's IEP team should consider the student's need for assistive technology devices and services and any required assistive technology should be addressed in the student's IEP and provided to a student in a timely manner.

Determining Student Assistive Technology Needs

Each student's IEP team is required to consider assistive technology devices and services as a special factor in the development, review, and revision of the student's IEP. In order to effectively consider assistive technology, the IEP team must be knowledgeable about the types of assistive technology devices that are available to address the students' needs and they should use a defined decision making process to determine if assistive technology is required. If technology is required, The Georgia Project for Assistive Technology has developed a series of guiding questions that the team can use to assist them in considering a student's assistive technology needs. These questions are as follows:

- *What do we want the student to be able to do (standards, relevant instructional tasks, functional tasks, vocational tasks, and goals)?*
- *Can the student accomplish these tasks or achieve these goals independently using standard classroom tools?*

- *If not, can the student accomplish the tasks or achieve the goals when provided with accommodations or modifications?*
- *If not, can the student accomplish the tasks or achieve the goals when provided with currently available assistive technology?*
- *If not, what additional supports, including assistive technology, need to be provided?*

If the IEP team determines that the student requires assistive technology through this consideration process in order to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE), the needed technology should be documented in the IEP and made available to the student.

When the IEP Team does not have enough information to address the student's assistive technology needs through the consideration, the Team should seek assistance from a person knowledgeable about the types of assistive technology needed by the student. If this consultation does not yield the information needed to determine the technology that is required, the student should be referred for an assistive technology evaluation. This evaluation should be conducted by a multidisciplinary team in the student's customary environment. A written report should be developed that includes a summary of the information considered in the evaluation, a summary of the student's performance during the evaluation and recommendations for assistive technology devices and services.

Documenting Assistive Technology in the IEP

When an IEP team determines that a student requires assistive technology, the types of devices and services that are required by the student should be clearly specified in the IEP. When assistive technology is required by a student for whom a Transition Plan is being developed, the technology can be addressed in the Transition Plan as well as in other sections of the IEP. In the Transition Plan, it is important to address assistive technology in the transition activities and services that are required for the student to achieve employment, community, and independent living goals. It may also be necessary to address assistive technology as a related service.

Please refer to the sample transition plans found in this manual for sample transition plans that include assistive technology.

Integrating Assistive Technology into the Curriculum

Once the required assistive technology has been identified and documented in the IEP, it should be made available to the student. The student, school staff, and the student's family, if appropriate, should receive training in the use of the device(s). Students should know how to use the device, when to use the device, and how to trouble-shoot basic technical problems. Data should be collected on the use of the device to document use and make modifications in assistive technology programming.

Planning for Post-Secondary Success

As the student approaches graduation from high school, the Transition Plan should include information about the types of assistive technology devices that are required in the post-secondary environment. The plan should also address any assistive technology services such as

training and supports that are needed for the student's continued use of assistive technology. The team will need to explore options for funding the needed technology and identify agencies that can support the student's continued use for assistive technology.

Tools for Life, Georgia's Assistive Technology Act Program, at AMAC Accessibility Solutions and Georgia Tech, not only provides access to and acquisition of assistive technology devices and services, but also comprehensive funding education and resources for assistive technology. Additionally, the Tools for Life (TFL) Network includes Assistive Technology Resource Centers (ATRCs) and Outreach Centers that can provide AT demonstrations, AT training, lending libraries, AT assessments, AT and computer reuse, AT funding education, and more. Each center has certified staff that has received training and are knowledgeable on the variety of technologies and services available to benefit students.

Other agencies such as the Board of Regents' AMAC Accessibility Solutions at Georgia Tech, and the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Program have resources to support students who use assistive technology. Transition teams should assist students in locating the available resources and in contacting the resources as appropriate.

The Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Program supports Georgia's High School HighTech (HSHT) Program which operates transition services in collaboration with many high schools across Georgia. HSHT offers resources for field trips to career and post-secondary education organizations, internships and other career-development and leadership opportunities for participating high schools. Enrolled students can participate in annual competitions to receive new laptops and assistive technologies.

A critical part of the transition process for assistive technology is making sure that the student develops the self-advocacy skills to clearly communicate his or her assistive technology needs upon graduation from high school. Students who have access to appropriate assistive technology devices and supports are more likely to participate, succeed, and achieve in their post-secondary environments.

Resources

Tools for Life, Georgia's Assistive Technology Act Program
AMAC Accessibility Solutions | Georgia Institute of Technology
512 Means Street, Suite 250
Atlanta, GA 30318
404-894-0541
1-800-497-8665
www.gatfl.gatech.edu

Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency
200 Piedmont Ave.
West Tower, 10th Floor
Atlanta, GA 30334
1-866-489-0001
404-232-1998
Fax 404-232-1800

www.gvra.georgia.gov

Georgia High School High Tech Program
Karen Royston
Executive Director
GA Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, Inc.
P.O. Box 1090
Fortson, GA 31808
706-353-7987
www.gacomm-hsht.org

Georgia Project for Assistive Technology
Georgia Department of Education
Division for Special Education Supports
1870 Twin Towers East
Atlanta, GA 30334
(404) 463-5288
(404) 651- 6457 (fax)
www.doe.k12.ga.us
www.gpat.org