

Assistive Technology (AT) Handbook for Education Professionals

At-A-Glance Version

The Assistive Technology Handbook for Education Professionals was published May 2019, by the AT Guidelines Task Force, a volunteer effort of AT professionals across Michigan, based on a review of AT research literature, guidelines and current practices across the United States, with the goal of supporting improved access to AT for students with disabilities across the State of Michigan. This At-A-Glance version was published in June 2019.

AT Guidelines Task Force Members

Lead Editors

Jeff Crockett, Northville Public Schools

Laura Griffith, Calhoun ISD

Gayle Evans, Allegan RESA

Amy Baad, Livingston ESA

Susan Hardin, Macomb ISD

Kindy Segovia, Kent ISD

Phil Booth, Ingham ISD

Members

Jaclyn Nicholson, Clinton County RESA

Pam Shehabi, Calhoun ISD

Kathi Tarrant-Parks, Wayne ATRC

Heather Weaver, Plymouth-Canton Community Schools

Cathryn Kelenske, Calhoun ISD

Kent Hurst, Troy School District

Makia Alexander, Ann Arbor Public Schools

Stacey Banks, Plymouth-Canton Community Schools

Rachael Langley, Eaton RESA

Robin Pegg, Eaton RESA

Carole Grant, Troy School District

Kathleen Samulski Moordian, Wayne ATRC

Nancy Brown, Ann Arbor Public Schools

Megan Zell, Traverse Bay Area ISD

Suzanna Ruskusky, Kent ISD

Shekenia Mann, Ann Arbor Public Schools

Teresa Bitti, Oakland ISD

Marlene Cummings, Oakland ISD

Other Contributors

Penny Reed, Gayl Bowser, Joy Zabala, Jeff Diedrich (Alt+Shift), Larry Stemple, Holly Heath, Eric Bourque, Karen Currie, Dawn Jones, Jamie Mayo, Erin Broughman, Adrienne Rose, Stacey Fox, Janet Hamblin, Julie Bonanni, Theresa Augustyniak, Jim Kauppila, Derrick Graves

AT Handbook At-A-Glance for Education Professionals

This at-a-glance version of the Assistive Technology (AT) Handbook for Education Professionals contains information that AT specialists may find helpful. Members of IEP teams who are not AT specialists will benefit from more direct access to the key principles and practices that can guide them in considering, assessing and implementing AT. Stakeholders who are interested in more details are encouraged to refer to the comprehensive version of this AT Handbook.

I. AT and the Law

Three Main Laws:

- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (504)

What is IDEA?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible students with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those students.

The IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, and students.

Each public agency shall ensure that AT devices or AT services or both are made available to a student with a disability if required as a part of the student's

1. Special education,
2. Related services,
3. Supplementary aids and services

The goal is to provide the student a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).

What is Title II of ADA?

Title II of the ADA requires that schools must ensure that communication with students with hearing, vision, or speech disabilities is as effective as communication with students without disabilities.

Schools are not required to provide aids and services greater than what is needed to ensure effective communication.

What is Section 504?

Section 504 refers to a portion of the federal Rehabilitation Act (1973) that states: “No otherwise qualified individual with a disability shall, solely by reason of his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.”

To be protected under Section 504, a student must be determined to:

- have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; or
- have a record of such an impairment; or
- be regarded as having such an impairment.

Section 504 requires that school districts provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to qualified students in their jurisdictions who have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

Who is eligible for AT? Who is responsible for providing this technology?

Students may be eligible for AT devices and services if they are required for access to the general education curriculum and/or to ensure effective communication.

Student with an IEP	Student with a 504 plan
According to IDEA, it is the responsibility of the IEP team to make sure the devices and services are provided.	According to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, it is the responsibility of the school 504 coordinator and/or the general education team to make sure the devices and services are provided.

II. Definitions

1. What is AT?

AT is technology used by individuals with disabilities in order to perform functions that might otherwise be difficult or impossible.

2. What types of AT are considered by the IEP team?

AT includes strategies, supports, devices and tools that span across a continuum of low to high tech. A full range of options should be considered for each student. AT consideration may include physical, sensory, communication, cognitive, academic performance, environmental control, social competence, vocational performance, and recreation/ leisure. The objective is to establish if any functional limitations exist that will impede on student’s progress.

3. What are AT services?

AT services listed in IDEA include assessment, provision of AT selection and maintenance of devices, coordination with other therapies, training of students and families, and training of professionals.

4. What is the purpose of AT in special educational programming?

The purpose of AT is to remove/reduce a student’s barriers in order to optimize participation, access and/or engagement in his or her educational program.

III. Eligibility

Who is eligible for AT?

All individuals with disabilities who receive services under IDEA and/or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act are eligible to receive AT.

IV. Consideration

1. Should AT be considered for all students with disabilities?

The IEP team, in its consideration of special factors, is required by the IDEA to “consider whether the student requires devices and services.” IDEA does not mandate how consideration is accomplished, only that it must be done.

2. Is AT required for all students with disabilities who have an IEP?

No. IDEA requires AT be **considered** for all students with an IEP. The IEP team will determine if AT is needed based on the results of the consideration process.

3. What factors should an IEP team take into consideration to determine an individual’s need for AT?

When a need for AT is considered, team members should review the student’s goals. If the student is not making sufficient progress, the team should consider AT along with other strategies and/or supports.

4. When an outside expert recommends AT, must the education agency provide it?

When determining how to support a student, the team is required to **consider** all the available information. There is no requirement for the education agency to provide specific AT based on an outside recommendation.

5. What documentation is required when a team considers AT and determines that it is needed in a student's educational program?

If the team decides that the student needs AT, that technology should be documented in the IEP as special education, related services, and/or supplemental aids and services. While it is not required, teams may also want to document the basis for their decisions when AT is considered but is not needed.

6. What should the IEP team consider when determining whether AT is needed outside of school?

When determining AT beyond the educational environment, the IEP team should always follow the district's technology policy. The team should establish the need beyond the traditional education environment, have data that supports the need, and develop an implementation plan that aligns with the student's IEP goals.

7. What type of AT is a district required to provide for students with disabilities?

AT determination is made on an individual student basis. There are no specific laws that mandate specific technology that a district must provide for a student. It behooves districts to provide appropriate AT that enable student access to the curriculum and eliminates functional barriers.

V. AT Assessment

1. When should a team evaluate a student's needs?

When a student encounters barriers due to their disability, an AT assessment may be warranted. If any member of the team identifies a task or functional life skill for which the student may need AT, the team should examine the strategies and accommodations already in place for the student. If these strategies and accommodations are not sufficient to allow the student to overcome barriers, an AT assessment is recommended.

2. Who should be included within the team of professionals to assess a student for AT?

Those involved in assessments might include: parent(s), the student, early childhood special educator, special education teachers, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech language pathologists, audiologists, vision specialists, technology specialists, general education teachers, school nurses, paraprofessionals, or any other individuals familiar with the student and invested in his/her success. When the team requires additional information about AT, the services of an AT specialist or other knowledgeable person may be needed.

3. What information should be gathered during an AT assessment?

During an AT assessment, the team should gather information about the student's present level of educational performance, the tasks the student needs to accomplish and the environments where those tasks need to be completed. The assessment should consider AT tools, supports and strategies to help the student with the identified tasks. A trial of AT recommended solution(s) may be implemented to determine if it meets the student's needs.

4. If a family requests an independent educational evaluation for Assistive Technology, what steps should the education agency take?

Families have the right to an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) when they disagree with the results of the education agency's evaluation. If a family requests an independent educational evaluation, the agency must provide a list of qualified examiners. The evaluation is provided at the district's expense.

VI. IEP Documentation

1. Where should AT devices and services be documented and/or described in the IEP/IFSP?

If needed, AT must be documented in the IEP in one or more sections of the IEP/IFSP, such as:

- Special Factors
- PLAAFP
- Supplementary Aids and Services
- Transition
- Assessment
- Goals and Objectives
- Notice of FAPE

When documented appropriately, anyone who reads the IEP is able to understand the student's need and plan for AT devices and services.

2. Should specific AT devices be named in the IEP/IFSP?

In most cases, the features of an AT device rather than the specified device name should be described in the IEP/IFSP. This allows for more flexibility if the student moves to another district or if the IEP team discovers that a device similar to the one initially considered better meets the student's needs. In rare cases, a specific AT device may be named within the IEP when the student is required to learn unique ways to operate the device that cannot be generalized to other similar devices.¹

¹ Source: AT Model Operating Guidelines. Retrieved from chrome-extension://feepmdlhmhplaojaboeocaobfmibooaid/https://douglasesd.k12.or.us/sites/douglasesd.k12.or.us/files/File/at-resources/at-model-operating-guidelines.pdf

3. When listed in the IEP, under what conditions should AT be available?

Students generally use AT to perform specific tasks that are difficult or impossible to accomplish without it. The IEP team should describe the conditions under which the student needs AT. The AT should be available to the student as described in the IEP.

4. Can students use AT on state and district performance assessments?

Each IEP team must determine how a student will participate in district and/or statewide assessments and what accommodations that the student will need in order to participate. AT may only be used in state and district assessments if it is listed in the assessment section of the student's IEP. The Assessment Coordinator should consult the test administration manual for accommodations and deadlines when a student utilizes AT.

5. What is the education agency's responsibility when a transfer student with an IEP requires AT that the receiving agency does not own?

Any AT devices or services included in the IEP must be reviewed to determine whether they are still appropriate in the new educational environment. If the AT is still appropriate, the education agency has a responsibility to provide the AT devices and services listed in the IEP.

If a change in the AT portion of the IEP is warranted, the district must convene the IEP team to document changes in the student's educational program.

6. Is an educational agency responsible for providing medical devices (e.g., wheelchairs, hearing aids, eyeglasses)?

A medical device is surgically implanted or primarily used to serve a medical purpose. Educational agencies are not responsible for providing students with medical devices.

VII. IEP Implementation

1. How can effective implementation and continuity be achieved in the student's program with regard to AT devices and services from classroom to classroom, teacher to teacher, school to school, year to year?

The IEP team needs to discuss how the AT devices will be used by the student and how they will be integrated into the curriculum and used by the student in the classroom. All members of the team who work with the student and are impacted by the AT device should participate in this discussion. Each student's IEP must be reviewed at least annually. The IEP team should discuss and identify personnel and family training needs as they relate to the student's progression through the school program.

2. Who is responsible for damage to an AT device that occurs outside of the school? What if an AT device is sent home and damaged?

Families cannot be charged for use and normal wear and tear of devices. Local Education Agencies (LEAs) should make their own policies regarding the parent's responsibility for equipment damaged due to misuse or neglect.

3. If a team decides that a student needs AT, who is responsible for purchasing it?

The LEA has final responsibility to provide all parts of a student's educational program as listed on the IEP. In some cases LEAs make agreements with other programs (e.g., Area Education Agencies, State Resource Programs) to help provide the AT that a student needs. LEAs may also look to other sources of funding such as insurance, charitable organizations and grants to help provide the AT a student needs.

4. Once AT is included in a student's educational program, what actions should be taken to make sure that AT use is successful?

Once a student receives AT, appropriate educational team members should receive training on the specific technology. Data collection with fidelity should also take place. The team may consider collecting data on the following:

1. The amount of time the student is using the AT
2. The students comfort level with AT
3. Progress towards IEP goals

5. If an education agency purchases AT for a specific student, who does the technology belong to?

If an education agency purchases AT, the technology is the property of that agency.

6. Who is responsible for maintaining AT devices? What if the device belongs to the student?

If AT is included on a student's IEP, the education agency must assure that it is available to the student. If AT requires repair or maintenance, the LEA must ensure that an alternative device is made available to the student as described in the IEP. This is true even when the device belongs to the student.

7. Is an educational agency responsible for providing AT in a private school setting?

When a student with a disability has been placed in a private school setting by an IEP team and the IEP indicates that AT equipment and/or services are needed, it should be provided at the expense of the sending district and available at the private school.

When a student with a disability has been placed in a private school by the parent/guardian they may not be able to get access to AT that would be provided under a public school IEP. Depending on how the district where the private school is located decides to allocate the proportionate share of IDEA-B funds, it might not fund AT. The services provided to the student under the proportionate share process must be in accordance with the district's consultation process for determining how to allocate the funds.

8. Is an educational agency responsible for providing AT if a student is receiving homebound services?

If the student has an IEP and the team has determined AT is needed, it must be provided at the expense of the district.

VIII. AT and Transition

If a student moves to a different school district and an AT device indicated in the IEP is not available, what can be done to ensure that the tools that have worked for the student at the previous school continue to be implemented in the new school?

The AT needs must be clearly documented in at least one section of the IEP so that any district who receives the student can obtain the needed AT supports for the student. If AT appears on the current IEP from the sending school, the receiving school district must convene an IEP meeting and discuss implementation of the IEP. If it is a new referral, the school has 30 days from the date of consent for an evaluation to review the results of referral testing and determine if the supports are appropriate for the new school environment.

IX. AT Resources

[Alt + Shift: Michigan AT Resource site \(https://www.altshift.education/\)](https://www.altshift.education/)

[Assistive Technology Assessment Made Easy \(http://bit.ly/2BVqRY8\)](http://bit.ly/2BVqRY8)

[AT Consideration Checklist \(http://bit.ly/2EhAgMd\)](http://bit.ly/2EhAgMd)

[AT Consideration/Assessment Flowchart \(http://bit.ly/2rs1cR2\)](http://bit.ly/2rs1cR2)

[AT Transition Checklist \(http://bit.ly/2RIxAtV\)](http://bit.ly/2RIxAtV)

[Bookshare \(https://www.bookshare.org\)](https://www.bookshare.org)

[CAST: Universal Design for Learning Resources \(http://www.cast.org/\)](http://www.cast.org/)

[Georgia Project for AT \(http://www.gpat.org/\)](http://www.gpat.org/)

[Interactive AT Checklist-Student with a 504 Plan \(http://bit.ly/2Sx2Jk7\)](http://bit.ly/2Sx2Jk7)

[Interactive AT Checklist-Student with an IEP \(http://bit.ly/2BVZE7V\)](http://bit.ly/2BVZE7V)

[National Assistive Technology in Education Network](https://www.natenetwork.org/)

[\(https://www.natenetwork.org/\)](https://www.natenetwork.org/)

[National Center on Accessible Educational Materials \(http://aem.cast.org/\)](http://aem.cast.org/)

[Quality Indicators of Assistive Technology \(http://www.qiat.org/\)](http://www.qiat.org/)

[SETT Framework \(http://www.joyzabala.com/\)](http://www.joyzabala.com/)

[Tech Matrix \(https://techmatrix.org/\)](https://techmatrix.org/)

[WATI: AT Consideration to Achievement \(http://bit.ly/WATI_ATAssessment\)](http://bit.ly/WATI_ATAssessment)

X. References

Colorado AT Guidelines. Retrieved from <https://www.cde.state.co.us/early/atech>

Connecticut AT Guidelines (2013). Frequently Asked Questions. Retrieved from <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Publications/Assistive-Technology-Guidelines-Section-1-For-Ages-3-21>

Keystone Area Education Agency, IA (2011). AT Operating Guidelines. P.48-53
Retrieved from <https://www.pdfFiller.com/jsfiller-desk6/?projectId=214212961&expId=3726&expBranch=1#eb10aa94fd044e04adc6577258d07d57>

North Dakota Department of Public Instruction. (2015) Guidelines for the Provision of AT to Students with Disabilities under IDEA Part B. P.36-45 Retrieved from <https://www.nd.gov/dpi/uploads/60/ATGuidelines.pdf>