

Medford Public Schools

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY PROCEDURES

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A. Definition & Purpose

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), assistive technology is 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 functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.”

The principal reason for providing assistive technology is to enable students to meet the instructional goals set forth for them. School personnel look at the tasks that the student needs to accomplish, the difficulties the student is having, and the ways that various devices might help the student better accomplish those tasks.

Within the school setting it is important to distinguish assistive technology from instructional or educational technology and software.

- *Assistive technology* provides a method to bypass or compensate for communication problems, physical challenges and/or learning difficulties and is considered when a student is unable to effectively access or participate in their curriculum.
- *Instructional software* is designed to assist students in acquiring and developing specific skills in the curricular content areas. Teachers may use instructional software or technology to teach material within a curricular/subject area.

B. Consideration of Assistive Technology Needs

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004, requires the IEP Team to *consider* a student's need for assistive technology devices and services whenever an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is written. In addition, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act require schools to provide assistive technology for students with disabilities, if needed to assure equal access to the school's programs and services.

Consideration is short, takes place during the IEP meeting, and involves thinking about and discussing what is already known about a student and their educational program. There are many factors that need to be examined when considering assistive technology for a student including educational goals, personal preferences, social needs, environmental realities, and practical concerns. The IEP team must consider the effort needed to obtain and learn to use an assistive technology device. For a device to be effective, the student should be able to use the technology in a short, reasonable period of time and feel comfortable using the technology. If a device takes months to master, the student will lose valuable instructional time.

When exploring assistive technology devices for a student, it is important to consider the full range of devices that are available, beginning with low-tech devices and considering high tech devices only after the lower tech options have been tried. High tech options are not always the best solution for a student. In fact, a low-tech option is sometimes more effective, since it is frequently readily available, easy to use, portable, inexpensive, virtually transparent and requires no training. Mid-Tech options are considered if low-tech options are not useful. Mid-tech options typically have many of the advantages of low tech devices, do not require extensive training, are lightweight and portable allowing them to be used anywhere, and tend to be relatively inexpensive. High-tech options are considered when low and mid-tech devices are not useful. High tech options are often not portable, can require extensive training, are often highly visible to others, are expensive and may be prone to breaking down.

There may be situations in which additional information is necessary in order for a Team to make a determination about a student's need for assistive technology. When this occurs, a referral for an assistive technology consultation or evaluation is generated.

II. PROCESS FOR CONSIDERING ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

The IEP Team “considers” and discusses the individual student’s need for assistive technology at the IEP meeting and comes to one of four conclusions:

1. Current interventions are working
2. Assistive technology is already in place and working
3. A trial of an assistive technology device is necessary
4. More information is needed

Teams may use the *Assistive Technology Consideration Wheel* and/or the *MPS Assistive Technology Checklist* to assist in consideration of a student’s need for assistive technology.

Conclusion #1

Current interventions (whatever they may be) are working and nothing new is needed, including assistive technology.

Next Step:

- a. On the IEP document, check off the box “The IEP Team considered the student's need for assistive technology”.

Conclusion #2

Assistive technology is already being used (or there has been a trial with AT) so that the Team knows that it does work.

Next Steps:

- a. On the IEP document, check off the box “The IEP Team considered the student's need for assistive technology”.
- b. Include the specific assistive technology in the IEP document to insure that it continues to be available for the student. [Refer to ‘*Documenting Assistive Technology in the IEP*’ section III. A. for information about how and where to document assistive technology in the IEP]

Conclusion #3

The IEP Team concludes that a new assistive technology device(s) should be tried.

Next Steps:

- a. On the IEP document, check off the box “The IEP Team considered the student's need for assistive technology”.
- b. The IEP Team will need to describe in the IEP the type of assistive technology to be tried, including the features they think may help, such as “having the computer speak the text as the student reads”. The *Assistive Technology Trial Planning* form that guides the team through this process.
- c. The team may determine that they need assistance in implementing a device trial and request this through an *Assistive Technology Consultation Request* form.

Conclusion #4

The IEP Team finds that they simply do not know enough to make a decision. In this case, they will need to gather more information. This could be a simple process of seeking out some resources to help the Team to better “consider” what AT might be useful for a particular student. It may also be an indication that the Team needs to request an Assistive Technology Consultation or an Assistive Technology Evaluation in order to guide them in determining the student’s need for assistive technology.

Next Steps:

- a. On the IEP document, check off the box “The IEP Team considered the student's need for assistive technology”.
- b. The IEP Team determines what additional information is needed and does one or more of the following:
 - Designate a team member to research or gather additional information about the student, the student’s performance, or potential assistive technology options for the student. This information is brought back to the team and a determination of need for assistive technology is then made.
 - Request an assistive technology consultation (*Assistive Technology Consultation Request* form) - this is appropriate when the team has a sense of the student’s need for a particular device under consideration and would like the opinion of someone with expertise in assistive technology.
 - Request an assistive technology evaluation (*Assistive Technology Evaluation Referral* form) - this is appropriate if the team requires more comprehensive information, has identified multiple areas of student need, or feels that a student has assistive technology needs and the team needs assistance in identifying those needs.

III. ADDITIONAL PROCEDURES & RESOURCES

A. Documenting Assistive Technology in the IEP

Once the Team 'considers' a student's need for assistive technology, the box located in the *Narratives* section on Easy IEP is checked: *The IEP Team considered the student's need for assistive technology.*

If the Team determines the need for assistive technology, the student's IEP should include information about the recommended assistive technology device(s) and service(s). Assistive technology can be included in the IEP in a number of ways. Here are some examples:

- AT can be included under as an accommodation on page 2 or 3 of the IEP form.
Example: The student uses specially lined paper when there is written work that is not done on the computer.
- AT can be included as a goal when the student needs to develop technology skills in order to reach curriculum goals.
Example: The student will learn to use a word processing program with spelling, grammar, and punctuation checklist.
- AT can be part of a goal statement when assistive technology is needed to carry out specific goal(s).
Example: The student will complete assignments using a digital recorder for oral language responses.
- AT can be included in the Service Delivery Grid in section A, B, or C.
Example 1:
Section A: Consultation
Type of Service: Training for classroom staff and service providers on use of student's augmentative communication device
Type of Personnel: Speech Language Pathologist
Frequency and Duration: 4 sessions over a two-week period at 30 minutes per session
Start date: November 7, 2008 End date: November 21, 2008

Example 2: Section C: Direct Service
Type of Service: Training for student in use of talking word processing and word prediction software
Frequency and Duration: 30 minutes, twice weekly for 3 weeks
Start date: November 3, 2008 - November 24, 2008

B. Assistive Technology Trial Period

An assistive technology trial period refers to a trial period with one or more assistive technology tools in the child's customary environments in order to determine the effectiveness of an assistive technology device. Trial periods are extremely effective for determining what, if any, assistive technology might be necessary for a struggling student.

Completing an assistive technology trial provides the IEP team with time to make rational decisions based on actual data. It helps avoid making false assumptions such as "if the device worked for one child, it will work just as well for another with the same disability." It can also help in dealing with team members who have read or heard about new assistive technology, but have incomplete or inaccurate information about it and want to write it in the IEP. Several technology solutions may be tried and data may be collected on each of them to determine which one is the most effective. The data collection opportunity provided by a trial period helps the IEP team to consider the need for assistive technology based on actual performance of the student.

A trial period of any reasonable length may be written into the IEP to allow for appropriate, well-planned, well-documented trials with a range of potential solutions. To help plan and manage a trial, use the *Assistive Technology Trial Planning Form*.

Resources

The Assistive Technology Checklist

The *Assistive Technology Checklist* is a list of devices and techniques designed to help guide the IEP Team in the process and discussion of considering the need for assistive technology. When referring for AT Consultation, this checklist must be completed (or partially completed to the best of the Team's ability) and included with the request for consultation.

The Assistive Technology Consideration Wheel

The *Assistive Technology Consideration Wheel* is a tool developed by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). This tool provides categorized listing of potential assistive technology devices and techniques to assist the IEP team in the process of considering the need for assistive technology.

The Massachusetts Department of Education - *Assistive Technology Guide for Massachusetts Schools* describes examples of low tech, mid tech and high tech devices as well as a list of Internet resources.

Appendix A of this document also provides a list of resources.

MPS Procedures, forms and other resources are available on the Medford Public Schools website under the Technology Department.