Technical Assistance Bulletin

Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services | Bulletin # 19-06

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**Improving Outcomes for Students with Disabilities**

**Consideration & Documentation of Assistive Technology Delivery**

The focus of this technical assistance bulletin is to provide guidance to local school systems for the use and documentation of assistive technology (AT) in the Individualized Education Program (IEP).  Information gathered by the Maryland Assistive Technology Network (MATN) members, Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), local school system leaders, higher-education, and research communities suggested the need for this guidance. The MSDE Assistive Technology Steering Committee distributed a needs survey that explicitly identified key recommendations for improving practices for considering and documenting assistive technology in the IEP.

This guidance document provides uniform guidelines on AT documentation in the IEP to support teams in the thoughtful and intentional decision making around AT as it relates to specially designed instruction (SDI). SDI is defined as “adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child, the content, methodology or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of the child that result from the child’s disability and to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children” [34 CFR 300.39(b)(3)].

For more information about specially designed instruction, please see the MSDE DEI/SES Technical Assistance Bulletin, [*Improving Outcomes for Students with Disabilities: Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment.*](http://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Documents/Special-Ed/TAB/19-01-ImprovingOutcomesforSWD.pdf)

AT devices and/or services are an essential component of SDI for many students with disabilities in order to access the curriculum and environment, mitigate the impact of the disability and demonstrate skills and knowledge. The IEP describes how the use of AT is integrated throughout the student’s program in order to accelerate student growth. Accordingly, AT is documented in all relevant sections of the IEP and not restricted to the “related services” section, though a related service provider may implement AT devices and/or services as part of the student’s SDI.

This technical assistance bulletin and changes to the form and format of the Maryland IEP support IEP teams in making thoughtful and intentional decisions about a student’s AT needs and documenting those decisions appropriately in the IEP. This technical assistance bulletin includes the legal framework for AT in the IEP, support for implementation, and frequently asked questions.

**The Law**

IDEA defines any ***assistive technology device*** 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 a student with a disability,” not including a medical device that is surgically implanted or the replacement of such a device [34 CFR §300.5 and COMAR 13A.05.01.03B (4)].

An ***assistive technology*** ***service*** means a service that directly assists a student with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device. Assistive technology services include:

* Evaluating the needs of a student with a disability, including a functional evaluation of the student in the student’s customary environment;
* Purchasing, leasing, or otherwise providing for the acquisition of assistive technology devices for students with disabilities;
* Selecting, designing, fitting, customizing, adapting, applying, maintaining, repairing, or replacing assistive technology devices;
* Coordinating and using other therapies, interventions, or services with assistive technology devices, such as those associated with existing education and rehabilitation plans and programs;
* Training or technical assistance for a student with a disability or, if appropriate, the student’s family; and
* Training or technical assistance for professionals, including individuals providing education or rehabilitation services, employers, or other individuals who provide services, employ, or are otherwise substantially involved in the major life functions of a student with a disability,

[34 CFR §300.6 and COMAR 13A.05.01.03B (5)]

IDEA requires that IEP teams consider several “special factors” that impact the development of the student’s individualized program. The need for assistive technology devices and/or services is one of these factors [34 CFR §300.324(a)(2)]. The IEP must consider whether the student requires AT devices and/or services and document that decision in the IEP. If devices and/or services are required, they are documented in the appropriate section(s) of the IEP document. Please note that consistent with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and as defined in State regulations Assistive Technology Services are not considered a Related Service [34 CFR §300.34(c) and COMAR 13A.05.01.03(65)].

**Implementation**

Assistive technology devices and/or services play a critical role in allowing many students with disabilities to access and progress in the general education curriculum as part of their SDI. The need for and use of AT is considered by the IEP team as all aspects of the IEP are developed. Documentation throughout the IEP supports integration and use of assistive technology throughout the student’s school day across academic and non-academic environments. This promotes opportunities to increase a student’s functional capabilities that support opportunities for increased access to the curriculum, active participation during instruction, and greater independence in daily life.

As the team describes the Present Levels of Academic and Functional Performance (PLAAFP), information on the student’s current use of any assistive technology should be included. The PLAAFP may also include information about barriers the student faces in receiving information, demonstrating learning, and/or engaging in the school environment with appropriate independence.

The IEP team reviews the student’s current use of technology and identified barriers in order to determine if AT devices and/or services are required. Recent revisions to the Maryland IEP support teams in considering the role of assistive technology for each student with a disability. For **each student with a disability**, the team makes one of the following decisions and documents it in the special considerations section of the IEP:

* The student **does not require AT devices or services**;
* The student **requires AT devices and services**;
* The student **requires AT device(s) but does not require AT services** (the student is a proficient, independent user of the device(s) and neither the student nor the team requires additional support or training); or
* The student requires an evaluation as to whether device(s) are required and if so, which one(s). In this case the team would indicate that the student **requires AT services (i.e., evaluation)but does not require AT devices** (because a device has not yet been selected). If the evaluation reveals the need for AT device(s), the IEP will be revised accordingly. The basis for the team’s decision should be clearly described in the IEP document.

If the team determines that the student requires AT devices and/or services as part of their SDI, this decision is reflected in appropriate sections of the IEP. These may include:

* **Instructional and Testing Accommodations**. Some AT tools are “presentation accommodations” and/or “response accommodations” in this section of the IEP. Any accommodations which the student requires for equitable participation in the assessment must also be implemented during on-going instruction. Note that certain accommodations, such as the use of text-to-speech for the English-Language Arts Assessment, require additional documentation with or on the IEP.
* **Supplementary Aids and Services.** Assistive technology devices and services needed by the student may be documented in Supplementary Aids and Services. The team considers the student’s access and participation to both academic, non-academic, extra-curricular environments, and activities. Training and consultation for the members of the instructional team, including the family when appropriate to support the student’s access and progress, are documented under “Supports to Personnel”.
* **Postsecondary Transition Services**. The student’s need for AT devices and services in postsecondary environments (including educational, employment, and community settings) are considered during transition planning. The team identifies strategies to ensure that the student will have access to needed technology after leaving school.
* **Goals and Objectives**. The student’s use of AT to master content standards and/or participate actively and independently in the school environment is reflected in the IEP goals and objectives. In some cases, development of the technical skills required to operate a system and/or device may be included as a goal or objective. Maryland’s IEP goals and objectives contain five components to eliminate ambiguity and allow for and goals and objectives to be consistently implemented and measured. These components include: Conditions, Behavior, Criteria, Method of Measurement and Timeframe. Use of AT may be a “condition” for the performance of academic and/or functional skills. The following page contains an example of an IEP goal and corresponding objectives with AT embedded as a condition.

**Sample IEP Goal and Objectives**

*By (date/within a year), the student will scan and select from up to 20 core vocabulary words on his speech-generating device to answer comprehension questions regarding text at his instructional level during guided reading with no more than two verbal prompts with 90% accuracy as measured by teacher-made data collection checklists.*

*Objectives:*

1. *By the end of the first quarter, the student will scan and select from up to five core vocabulary words from his speech-generating device to answer comprehension questions about instructional level text during guiding reading with no more than three verbal prompts with 90% accuracy as measured by teacher-made data collection checklists.*
2. *By the end of the second quarter, the student will scan and select from up to 10 core vocabulary words from his speech-generating device to answer comprehension questions about instructional level text during guiding reading with no more than three verbal prompts with 90% accuracy as measured by teacher-made data collection checklists.*
3. *By the end of the third quarter, the student will scan and select from up to 15 core vocabulary words from his speech-generating device to answer comprehension questions about instructional level text during guiding reading with no more than two verbal prompts with 90% accuracy as measured by teacher-made data collection checklists.*
* **Special Education and Related Services**. “Assistive technology” is not, in and of itself, a stand-alone related service. Time spent supporting the student and team in the use of AT is considered when determining the amount of special education and/or other services (e.g., occupational therapy, speech-language service) the student needs to achieve IEP goals and access and progress in the curriculum.
* **Extended School Year (ESY) Services**. If the student requires AT devices and/or services outside of the standard school year in order to receive FAPE, these needs are documented in the IEP. Training and support on the student’s AT for instructional staff providing ESY services should be considered and documented as needed.

Following the development of the IEP, the student’s instructional team plans for the implementation of SDI, including the assistive technology required. If staff responsible for implementation require training on AT devices and/or services, these training needs are considered during the IEP team meeting, documented and subsequently provided on the needed basis.

To evaluate the impact of AT and student progress, the team may establish a schedule for data collection, analysis and decision-making. Data on the student’s use of the AT device(s) and/or services and the impact on performance is included in analysis and is used by the collaborative team which includes the family to make IEP decisions.

When the student’s AT needs are thoughtfully and intentionally considered during the IEP development process, students who require it as part of their SDI are provided with access to and progress in general education to accelerate their progress toward achieving grade-level academic standards and age-expected functional expectations. The implementation of AT devices and/or services mitigates the impact of the disability for students who require it and allows them to demonstrate skills and knowledge. The collaborative team, including the family and when appropriate, the student, are engaged in the evaluation of AT devices and/or services across multiple environments and the impact on performance and achievement.

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

# Why isn’t assistive technology considered a related service?

Assistive technology devices and services are tools and associated supports that “increase, maintain, or improve the functional capacity of a child with a disability” in any aspect of the educational program. As such, AT is integrated throughout a student’s individualized education program. AT devices and/or services are documented in multiple sections of the IEP as appropriate and not listed as a stand-alone “related service” delivered by an individual specialist. As noted above, consistent with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and as defined by State law, Assistive Technology Services are not considered a Related Service [34 CFR §300.34(c) and COMAR 13A.05.01.03(65)].

# Is assistive technology only for students with physical disabilities?

# No. Assistive technology must be considered for ALL students with IEPs. Assistive technology is any device and/or system that increases a student’s functional capabilities by reducing barriers related to the impact of the disability. AT is essential for students with a wide range of disabilities and supports access and independence for a wide variety of academic and non-academic skills, including, but not limited to, reading, writing, mathematics calculation and problem-solving, organization, self-management, communication, self-care, and others.

# How does assistive technology fit into the collaborative development, implementation and evaluation processes of specially designed instruction?

Assistive technology can increase the functional capabilities of students with disabilities, thereby increasing access to the curriculum, accelerating growth, and narrowing the achievement gap. In order for students to realize these benefits, IEP teams must thoughtfully select devices and services that align with student needs and the demands of the curriculum and the school environment, integrate the use of these tools into ongoing instruction and intervention, and assess their impact in order to make adjustments to further accelerate progress. As with other components of the student’s SDI, effective use of AT requires the collaboration of all members of the student’s team, including the family.

1. **How do you document AT trials for several devices on the IEP?**

When considering AT solutions, a continuum of assistive technology devices may be evaluated. IEP teams consider any technology solutions that may benefit the student’s instructional program and take data on each device or tool considered. For each trial period, the IEP team should discuss and identify any training needed by providers and families, the timeline required for a reasonable trial, and criteria for data collection for each AT device or tool. Once each device or tool is trialed, the IEP team should analyze the data collected on each device or tool to determine the best fit for the student’s needs.

1. **How do you provide AT for a student who has a degenerative or progressive condition?**

IEP teams must consider AT devices and/or services for all students with disabilities. IEP teams should proactively consider AT devices and/or services for students with conditions such as muscular dystrophy, or progressive hearing or vision impairments in order to provide opportunities to learn to use the AT device and provide intensive AT services before degeneration of motor, vision, or hearing ability occurs. Practical, real-life instruction in low pressure, highly motivating, and/or non-academic settings using the AT device may provide a safe environment for the student to comfortably learn the operational features of the AT device. Introducing the student to the device while the student has the stamina and ability to learn and use the device will prove to be important, especially if the degenerative or progressive condition begins to significantly affect the student’s ability to engage at school and home.   As the student begins to learn and becomes more comfortable using the device, the transition to utilizing the device for completing academic demands can be seamless.  Examples include, but are not limited to, students with progressive hearing or vision impairments who will lose their hearing or sight and become reliant on AT, students with muscular dystrophy who will gradually lose motor control and will need AT for mobility and written work, and students who may have degenerative conditions that affect their speech and who will depend on speech generating devices.  Appropriately matching an AT device and/or service to the needs of a student with a degenerative or progressive condition can have a positive life-altering impact.

1. **Do students with intellectual disabilities need assistive technology?**

IEP teams must consider AT devices and/or services for allstudents with disabilities. Too often, students with intellectual disabilities are not provided access to AT devices and/or services or have only basic AT devices and/or services due to the assumption that the student cannot benefit or does not “need” more services.   For example, in the instance of communicative competence, IEP team members may hold lower expectations and assume that individuals with intellectual disabilities or complex communication needs, may not or cannot use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices, communication books with pictures or photos and assistive technologies to communicate.  All students who require AT should be given every opportunity to trial and utilize those devices.

1. **Is assistive technology considered for every student with a disability?**

Yes, IDEA and COMAR state that public education agencies must make assistive technology devices and/or services available to children and youth who require them in order to receive FAPE.  AT is a required consideration when developing an IEP for a student with a disability.  Therefore, since every student has unique needs, the IEP team should thoughtfully consider the need for AT devices and/or services to help the student access and accelerate progress in the curriculum, and mitigate any barriers that would impede learning. Generic use of AT devices across a whole classroom, such as iPads with a specific program for alternative communication loaded on the devices that are given to all children does not reflect an individualized approach to decision making around SDI. Even if several students have a particular disability (i.e., autism, intellectual disability, etc.) or just because students may be placed in the same classroom together does not mean they all should use the same type of AT with the same software.

For more information, call 410-767-0249

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