



Guiding Document for Including Assistive Technology in the IEP

In both developing and reviewing IEPs, the regulations for IDEA require the IEP team to consider the special factors, which includes the consideration of the need for AT. If, in considering the special factors, the IEP team determines that a child needs an AT device or service (including an intervention, accommodation, or other program modification) to receive FAPE, the IEP team documents that need in the child's IEP.

The law does not specify that AT be addressed in any other specific section of the IEP. Rather it says that it can be part of special education, related services, or supplementary aids and services (Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(1), 1412(a)(12)(B)(i)). The "job" of the IEP team is to describe the use of AT wherever it makes the most sense. There are many ways to do it well. This chapter will provide examples of the many places and ways that AT can be included in a student's IEP.

The IEP team is empowered by IDEA to make all decisions about a student's individual program, including all decisions about the need for and use of AT. Part of this responsibility is the decision about the need to use the AT device in other settings. IDEA states: "On a case-by-case basis, the use of school-purchased AT devices in a child's home or in other settings is required if the child's IEP Team determines that the child needs access to those devices in order to receive FAPE" (Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(1), 1412(a)(12)(B)(i)). As part of their deliberations about AT, IEP teams must determine whether any AT devices purchased by the school need to be sent home with the student.

AT is provided to support or “assist” the student in meeting IEP goals and making progress in the curriculum. And yet, sometimes when reviewing an IEP, it is difficult to tell how AT will be used to help meet the student’s goals. In effective IEPs the type of AT that the student requires and the manner in which it will be used is clearly described so that all participants in the IEP, including parents, have a clear understanding of the AT and how it will be used. Describing the services is a critical part of this. Focusing only on the devices and failing to document AT services or expected outcomes are common errors that can lead to very poor results for the student. The IEP is the vehicle that communicates exactly what the agency will provide and the measurable or observable results that are expected.

The IEP is the document that ensures a student will receive the services needed and must clearly describe every aspect of the planned individualized program. The Quality Indicators for Including Assistive Technology in the IEP guide the team in writing IEPs that communicate how, when, and where AT will be provided and used by the student.

1. The education agency has guidelines for documenting assistive technology needs in the IEP and requires their consistent application.

Intent: The education agency provides guidance to IEP teams about how to effectively document assistive technology needs, devices, and services as a part of specially designed instruction, related services, or supplementary aids and services.

IDEA does not describe how or specify where AT is to be included in the IEP.

Review of effective practice indicates that successful state and local education agencies

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provide specific guidance and ensure consistent application. Comprehensive agency guidelines address the inclusion of AT in development, review, and revision of the IEP. It is important to clearly document the AT devices and services that will be provided so that any team member who is implementing the IEP can clearly understand what AT is required as well as when, where, and the purpose for which it is to be used.

The rapid adoption of universal design for learning (UDL) principles has created an unanticipated situation where errors can occur. The use of UDL in developing curriculum and preparing instructional materials can make the teacher's job much easier when a student requires accessible educational materials (AEM) and/or AT due to a disability. However, it does not change the IEP team's mandate to document any needed specially designed instruction, adaptations, accommodations, or AT in the student's IEP. If a student needs to hear the text read aloud in order to comprehend the meaning of the text, it must be documented in the IEP whether readily available in a UDL environment or provided by the acquisition of new scan and read software that no other students are using. The IEP is the document that ensures that a student will receive the services needed and must clearly describe every aspect of the planned individualized program.

Example:

Simone is just starting her first year of teaching in Elderburg School District. She is preparing for the first IEP meeting for one of her students who has shown significant improvement in her writing assignments since tablet computers became available throughout the school. Simone knows that use of the tablet to complete writing assignments is AT when it is used by this student. She is not sure

how to include it in the IEP. She went to the district website and searched the district's operating guidelines, where she found this statement:

DOCUMENTATION OF A CHILD'S NEED FOR ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

IEP teams must specify the type of AT device the student needs (e.g., tablet computers, scheduling apps, word processing with spell checking, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) system). The IEP team should not include specific brand names unless a device has particular characteristics that require the child to learn operational skills that are unique to the specific device provided or the child has become accustomed to a feature or style that would make it detrimental to change to a different product.

Simone decided that stating, "tablet computer with word processing app" would be the best description to recommend and went to the IEP meeting ready to share her data.

| Key Questions |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the agency's guidelines for documenting AT in the IEP?• How do district personnel access the guidelines?• What process is used to disseminate the guidelines?• What supports are in place to ensure that the guidelines are consistently implemented? |

2. **All services that the IEP team determines are needed to support the selection, acquisition, and use of assistive technology devices are designated in the IEP.**

Intent: The provision of AT services is critical to the effective use of AT devices. It is important that the IEP describes the AT services that are needed for student success. Such services may include evaluation/assessment, customization or maintenance of devices, coordination of services, and training for the student and family and professionals, among others.

Under federal law AT may be provided as a part of a student's special education, related services, or supplementary aids and services. As a result, AT may be documented in any of those areas. There is no "right or wrong" place to document AT needs. Each area is equally powerful. The task of the IEP team is to document AT in the places in the IEP that are the most appropriate to the device and services provided. The most important factor is that the documentation makes sense to individuals who must implement the student's individualized program. The sections of the IEP addressed below include special education, related services, supplementary aids and services, accommodations, and supports for school personnel.

A. Special Education: When AT devices and/or services are provided as part of a student's specially designed instruction, documentation is found in the annual goals. When developing annual goals, the IEP team determines whether or not the student needs AT in order to accomplish them. First the goals are developed and then the need for AT is addressed. In most cases, AT is not the goal; rather, it is the means to achieving the goal.

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Example:

Bianca will express basic wants and needs in 90% of the opportunities using single word utterances and/or a voice output AAC device when longer utterances are needed.

On occasion, if the student does not have skills to use the AT that is needed to achieve other goals, a goal may be written to address those operational skills. For example, if a student has goals in her IEP about written productivity and the team determines that she needs voice recognition software to accomplish those goals, they may include instructional goals on the operation of the voice recognition software until she was able to use it functionally.

In IDEA there is no requirement for benchmarks, and short term objectives for students with disabilities who are participating in the general education curriculum. They are only required for students participating in assessments aligned to alternate achievement standards. However, some states still require benchmarks and objectives for all students receiving special education. If short term objectives or benchmarks are required, a student may have objectives to learn to use a specific AT device. The training that the student needs is an AT service, and both will be documented in the IEP.

Example:

When provided with a digital braille notetaker and instruction on its use, Scott will demonstrate proficiency to produce and publish two or more pages of text with fewer than five errors.

When provided with braille science and social studies text books at the fifth grade level, Scott will read them with fewer than two errors per page.

B. Related Services: When AT is provided as a part of a related service, it is documented in the IEP form’s listing of related services. In this case the anticipated duration, location and frequency of the service must be documented. If AT is listed in the IEP form’s related service section, it is important to remember that additional information may need to be added in other sections of the IEP to clarify the types of AT that will be used, the environments in which the AT will be used, and the staff responsible for supporting the use of the AT.

Example:

| Related Services | Frequency | Duration | Location |
|--|---------------------------|--------------------|--|
| <i>Speech-Language Therapy (including training to use a voice output communication device)</i> | <i>1 hour weekly</i> | <i>10-5 to 6-2</i> | <i>Across multiple school environments</i> |
| <i>Occupational Therapy to increase targeting accuracy and maintain range of motion</i> | <i>1 hour weekly</i> | <i>10-5 to 6-2</i> | <i>Special education classroom</i> |
| <i>AT Specialist Support for Access to classroom computers</i> | <i>3 hours each month</i> | <i>10-5 to 6-2</i> | <i>General education classroom</i> |

Figure 4.1 Sample Related Services section of IEP

C. Supplementary Aids and Services: Assistive technology may also be addressed in the supplementary aids and services component of the IEP. AT is often provided as a supplementary aid and service when required for a student to participate in general education classes or other education-related activities among children without disabilities. While federal law does not require that the provider of supplementary aids

and services be identified specifically in the IEP, some state and local IEP forms do ask for this information. It is recommended that IEP teams identify the provider(s) during their discussions even if it is not required.

Example:

| Supplementary Aids and Services | Frequency | Duration | Location |
|---|---|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <i>Tablet computer with spell checking</i> | <i>all note-taking</i> | <i>9-15 to 5-18</i> | <i>general education classes</i> |
| <i>Acquisition of instructional materials in accessible formats by case manager</i> | <i>For all core instructional materials</i> | <i>9-15 to 5-18</i> | <i>In all core curriculum classes</i> |

Figure 4.2 Sample Supplementary Aids and Services section of IEP

D. Accommodations Needed for Participation in State and Local Assessments: The IEP team must determine the accommodations that the student requires in order to participate in state and local assessments. For some students with disabilities, AT may be a required accommodation. The key factor is that the use of AT as an accommodation cannot invalidate the construct being tested. For example, the use of text-to-speech on a test of decoding skill would invalidate the test construct. An accommodation does not change the construct being tested, but allows an alternative mode of gaining or demonstrating knowledge. For example, a student who is blind is provided with braille materials and is allowed to provide written answers with a braille notetaker.

Students who use AT in their daily educational program may need the same technology in order to participate in state and local assessments. If a team determines that a student needs AT for participation in an assessment, it is important to review

state and local guidelines for testing accommodations to determine if the use of the student's AT device is an allowable accommodation in testing.

The IEP should never indicate that a student will use AT to complete a state assessment if the student does not use the same AT regularly for participation in educational activities. At the same time, if the AT device is needed for access to the curriculum, the student should have it provided, even if it cannot be used in state assessments.

Examples:

- *Marcus' team has determined that he needs his auditory trainer to optimize his ability to listen to verbal directions. There are verbal directions provided by the examiner during state assessments. This is an allowable accommodation in his state. Marcus will use his auditory trainer during state assessments.*
- *Due to her severe visual impairment, Shantae requires that all testing materials including directions, and answer sheets, if appropriate, be provided to her in braille. This is an allowable accommodation in her state.*
- *In order to complete classroom written work longer than one paragraph, Stephen uses his portable word processor. The team planned to explore whether this was an allowable accommodation on his state's writing assessment. If not, Stephen's team has determined that he will receive instruction on the use of a scribe and dictate his writing assessment to a qualified scribe.*

E. Supports for School Personnel: The IEP team should address the supports that the school staff needs in order for them to effectively provide AT devices and services to the student.

Examples:

- *The AT resource person will work with Paul and his teachers in the special education classroom for one hour weekly for six weeks. Training will include programming, operation, and implementation of his augmentative communication device. All team members will participate in ongoing identification of needed vocabulary.*
- *Kelly's special education and general education teachers will be provided with follow-up training and technical assistance to aid them in integrating the use of her AT (word prediction software) into her school curriculum. Training will occur in the classroom during three one-hour sessions before November.*
- *The paraprofessional for the fourth grade pod will scan daily worksheets from the social studies workbook into the computer for use with Dyson's scan and read program.*

| Key Questions |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How is AT use documented when a student needs it for specially designed instruction (e.g., existing goal, a new goal, an objective or benchmark under a goal)?• How are AT devices or services documented when the student needs them as part of related services in order to receive FAPE or to benefit from special education? |

- How are AT supports and services documented when the student need them in order to participate and achieve in the general education classroom and other educational settings?
- How do the IEPs communicate how, when, where, and by whom the aids and services be provided?
- How is AT documented when the student needs it to participate in state and local assessments?
- What is the process for checking which AT devices are allowable accommodations under state guidelines?
- How does the IEP document the training, technical assistance or support school personnel need to implement the students' AT programs?

3. **The IEP illustrates that assistive technology is a tool to support achievement of goals and progress in the general curriculum by establishing a clear relationship between the student's needs, assistive technology devices and services, and the student's goals and objectives.**

Intent: Most goals are developed before decisions about AT are made. However, this does not preclude the development of additional goals, especially those related specifically to the appropriate use of AT.

AT is one of the special factors that must be considered in the development, review, and revision of each student's IEP. The team's primary responsibility during consideration is to think about whether the student needs AT devices and/or services to

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participate and make progress in the general education curriculum or to benefit from specially designed instruction.

Although minimal compliance for considering AT may be simply checking "yes" or "no" to the consideration question, best practice is for IEP teams to use a systematic process for considering a student's AT needs and to document the outcomes of the consideration in the IEP. In most instances, it is just as important to document when a student does not require AT as when a student does require it. Documentation of the issues that were addressed during AT consideration can be especially helpful to future IEP teams.

There are many places in the IEP where tools to support achievement of goals may be documented (e.g., consideration, accommodations, present levels of academic achievement, minutes).

Examples:

- *Does the student require assistive technology devices or services? Yes*

No

Describe: Paula needs to use assistive technology (prone stander, wedge) for seating and positioning in her classes in order to access educational materials and participate in her educational program.

- *Does the student require assistive technology devices or services? Yes*

No

Describe: Karen uses an eight location augmentative communication device with speech output to supplement her current communication skills. See present

levels of academic achievement and functional performance and annual goals and objectives for additional information.

- *Does the student require assistive technology devices or services? ____ Yes
__X__ No*

Describe: Eduardo is struggling with completing writing assignments. We discussed the need for assistive technology but decided his problem relates more to attention. Positive behavior supports are being used to address the issues at this time.

Key Questions

- How would a person reading the IEP be able to determine what AT devices and services were considered and the basis of the decisions that were made?
- How does the AT discussed in the process of consideration relate to the student's identified educational needs?
- Does the student's use of AT assist in the achievement of individualized goals?

4. **IEP content regarding assistive technology use is written in language that describes how assistive technology contributes to achievement of measurable and observable outcomes.**

Intent: Content which describes measurable and observable outcomes for AT use enables the IEP team to review the student's progress and determine whether the AT has had the expected impact on student participation and achievement.

The team writes a clear description of the change in student performance that is expected as a result of the student's use of AT. This statement will include a description of success, how it will be measured, and the criterion that will indicate mastery.

Criteria will vary with;

- type of task (e.g., crossing the street which of course must be 100%, versus requesting a snack),
- student's abilities (e.g., has never completed the task versus currently completes the task 50% of the time), and
- situation (e.g., being asked to choose food items when known to be hungry vs. when state of hunger isn't known).

Examples:

- *John will compose a paragraph of three or more sentences with less than two spelling errors on 90% of assignments, when using a spellchecker.*
- *Yadira has two interrelated goals. The first includes her functional use of speech recognition software. In the second goal, her ability to operate the AT is addressed. The use of her speech recognition software may also be described in other areas of the IEP, (most commonly in supplementary aids and services).*
 - *Based on the general education grading rubric, Yadira will satisfactorily complete 100% of written assignments of more than one paragraph when using speech recognition software.*

- *Yadira will demonstrate competency using speech recognition software to create, edit, and revise three paragraphs of 90 words with fewer than five errors.*

Key Questions

- How do the IEPs describe the expected changes in achievement?
- What objective ways to measure changes in student achievement related to a goal have been defined?
- How are meaningful criteria for success determined?

5. Assistive Technology is included in the IEP in a manner that provides a clear and complete description of the devices and services to be provided and used to address student needs and achieve expected results.

Intent: IEPs are written so that participants in the IEP meeting and others who use the information to implement the student’s program understand what AT is to be available, how it is to be used, and under what circumstances. “Jargon” and acronyms should be avoided.

When IEPs are well written everyone who uses the information to implement the student’s program understands what AT is to be available, how it is to be used, and under what circumstances. There is no need to be redundant or repetitive when including AT in the IEP. If a device or service is clearly described in one place, the identical information does not need to be repeated in other sections. However, the IEP as a whole should provide a full, clear description of the AT devices and services that a

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student is receiving. When including AT in the IEP, it is generally preferable to describe the necessary features of the AT rather than naming a specific product. This is important for several reasons, multiple products may offer the needed features, specific products change over time, and new products are created.

Present level of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP), goals and objectives, notes or minutes of an IEP and transition planning are places where clear and complete description is critical. State or local education agencies may specify additional places where AT can be described.

A. Documenting assistive technology in PLAAFP: In this section, the IEP team addresses the student's strengths and weaknesses in academic and functional areas. It provides a natural place to document AT that is currently being used and how it is used to compensate for barriers to achievement, participation, and independence. When documenting AT in the present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, the specific type(s) of technology provided, as well as the manner in which it is used, should be described.

Examples:

- *Jeff has been successfully using an "XYZ Communicator" to communicate his wants, needs and information. For the last two years, Jeff has been creating novel utterances of 5-7 words as well as retrieving pre-stored familiar messages frequently and spontaneously throughout the day and across environments and listeners.*

- *Due to her significant visual impairment, Taylor is not able to access standard print instructional materials such as textbooks, worksheets, and written tests. She requires that all print copies be enlarged to 24 point font, whether they are obtained through the Accessible Educational Materials (AEM) process, enlarged with a photocopier or computer, or viewed using a closed circuit television system.*

B. Documenting AT in the minutes of the IEP Meeting: Some states and/or districts include minutes of the IEP meeting as part of the IEP document. The need for AT devices and services may also be addressed in these minutes. This provides a place to clearly describe information that may be important not only now but also in the future when planning and implementing a student's IEP. It is required to include the AT in the actual IEP document if the team has determined that AT is needed. The minutes serve to clarify and expand on the information about AT that is included in the IEP document.

Example:

The team considered Tim's need for AT in the area of reading. It was determined that due to significant gains in the last semester, Tim was making adequate educational progress without the need for any additional accommodations or modifications, including AT.

C. Documenting AT in Transition Services: Another place where a clear description is important is in the section describing planned transitions. When addressing transition services for a student who needs AT, it is important to address the AT devices and

services currently used by the student and those that may be required in the new environment.

Example:

The case manager from the Department of Human Services will contact public and private agencies to assist in obtaining funding for the AAC device for Colin before the team's November meeting. By January the speech and language pathologist will identify potential sources of technical support after he leaves high school.

| Key Questions |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How does the IEP communicate what AT the student is currently using to increase participation or make progress in the general education curriculum?• How does the IEP show how AT helps in completing required tasks?• Where in the IEP are the current AT services described?• How are the activities of the transition planning team documented in transition IEPs? |