



# Instruction and Accessibility Support For Students with Disabilities: Assistive Technology (AT)

April 23, 2020

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## AT Guidance for Students with Disabilities

Assistive technology enables students with disabilities to access the curriculum, increase independence and participate actively and meaningfully in education and life activities including at home learning.

Assistive Technology provided in schools may consist of either or both AT devices and AT services. IDEA federal regulations define Assistive Technology devices 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." 34 C.F.R. § 300.5. Assistive Technology service is defined as "...any service that directly assists a child with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device." 34 C.F.R. § 300.6. A student may require assistive technology devices (e.g., pencil grip, keyboard) and may or may not require assistive technology services.

Federal Regulations require admission, review and dismissal committees to consider the child's need for AT in the development of the student's individualized education program (IEP). (§300.324(a)(2)(v)) AT devices and services must be made available if required as part of the child's specially designed instruction, related services, or supplementary aids and services. (§300.105) Schools must permit the use of school purchased AT devices at home or in other settings, if the IEP team determines that the child needs access to those devices' settings outside of school settings (e.g., to complete homework assignments). AT devices that are necessary to ensure a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) must be provided at no cost to the parents. The school owns the AT device(s) and the parents cannot be charged for normal use, wear and tear.

As LEAs continue planning at home learning supports for students, it is crucial they also determine **how they will provide AT devices and/or AT services to students at home**. Planning for a student's AT needs is an individualized process. This guidance document, and the resources embedded within, will assist local education agencies (LEAs) in developing processes and procedures for their special education staff to implement the provision and use of AT devices and services as outlined in each student's IEP. If the current at home learning model requires students with disabilities to have additional AT devices or services in order to provide FAPE, these decisions will need to be made by the ARD committee. The following information is intended to assist LEAs as they develop a clear and concise plan for providing AT devices and/or AT services to students with disabilities.

## Special Education AT LEA Activities

### 1. Analyze the current instructional delivery plan and each student's IEP to identify areas where there will be a need for assistive technology devices and services to ensure FAPE for students with disabilities.

- At this time, the LEA has likely developed an instructional delivery plan for students at each campus. This plan may or may not contain information for students receiving AT devices and/or services. Now is the time to analyze the LEA's current instructional plan and determine if there are any areas that need to be updated to address both the high-tech and low-tech needs of students. Now is the time to

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- Remote and at home learning opportunities should be developed so that they are accessible for all learners, including students who are deaf or hard of hearing and/or visually impaired. For example, instructional materials should include accessible documents, materials in braille, video captioning, signed communication, audio support, and descriptive videos to name a few.
  - Analyze each student's IEP to determine what types of AT devices and services the student needs to maintain existing skills or make progress towards goals.
    - [low tech AT checklist](#)
    - [at home learning resource for students with disabilities](#)
  - Determine how to appropriately embed AT devices and services into remote instruction.

## **2. Identify the LEA's and family's access to the AT devices and services as well as their availability to provide instructional support using AT devices. Consider what AT services the family needs to provide access to instruction using AT. Make a reasonable effort to ensure the family has that access.**

- Create a plan for [student access to internet](#) and/or electronic devices for online learning and communication. Consider the following:
  - Identify potential means to provide free internet access for those in need
  - Identify plan for device usage, [check-out of equipment](#), purchase of additional equipment, etc., as applicable
  - Identify online learning platforms available (e.g., Google Classroom, Learning Management Systems)
  - Identify acceptable means of virtual communication between staff and students (e.g., phone calls, Zoom, FaceTime, Facebook Live Closed Groups, YouTube Channel, email).
- Create a plan for student access to low-tech learning opportunities in the absence of internet or electronic device. Consider the following:
  - Organize grade-level appropriate creation of paper-based learning materials
  - Identify office supplies, textbooks, reading materials, workbooks, manipulatives, and other learning aids that can be [checked out](#) to students and create a distribution and collection plan for student activities, resources and completed work samples. Consider logistical considerations to ensure safest social distancing is implemented during the process

## **3. Communicate instructional plan using AT with the family and maintain frequent communication throughout online instruction.**

- Ensure that any communication you release to families is in alignment with LEA communication and guidance where appropriate. It is especially important to avoid conflicting information between LEA communication to families versus additional special education communication.
- Match expectations with the typical school routine. For instance, if the student does not typically complete worksheets, don't send worksheets home.

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- Sample at-home learning schedules can be found at [Phase 3: Operationalize At-Home Model](#) under the Instructional Continuity Framework
- Set up tutorials or office hours for families and students to ensure all parties understand how to use the AT. It may even be necessary for technology staff to provide this assistance to teachers as they support families. Do not assume all teachers have sufficient knowledge of the technology to independently provide support to students and families using AT during instruction.
  - Consider setting specific times during the day that you would be available using the agreed upon communication mode. Teachers should set these meeting times for parents and students separately unless training is needed for both.
- Collaborate with technology staff to troubleshoot problems the student or parent may experience.
- Provide the family with ideas for how to document and communicate how their child is progressing, AT needs, etc. This information is integral to the teacher for determining how to proceed with instruction.
- Whenever possible, provide a balance of text, image, video and audio. Instruction and resources provided in more than one format provides broader support for the greatest number of users. Remember to reach out to your teacher of the visually impaired and/or teacher of the deaf or hard of hearing for accessibility considerations for students who are blind, visually impaired, deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind.

#### 4. Monitor and adjust the student's learning plan using AT based on the previous needs assessment and student progress with the instructional plan.

- Ensure that the instructional plan using AT is revised based on the progress of the student and the changing needs of the family. Consider various strategies that can be used to adjust instruction using AT if the student or the family is struggling. Learning online can be more taxing physically and intellectually than learning in a face-to-face environment. Teachers should maintain consistent communication to determine if adjustments need to be made.
  - Decrease the length of the activity, break the assignment up into smaller parts to complete in shorter increments, or differentiate due dates for students based on individual needs
  - Provide paper-based materials for the student to write on if online learning becomes a challenge
  - Provide exemplars of correctly completed skills
  - Highlight key points in the assignment for the student to focus on
  - Provide additional supplemental aids (e.g., list of math or science formulas, graphic organizers, labelled maps, mnemonic devices) to support learning
  - Incorporate more frequent check-ins with student or parent to ensure understanding
  - Simplify directions
  - Incorporate hands-on activities
- Be flexible. Find opportunities for humor, fun, and levity. If students and/or families are not ready for online instruction or become overwhelmed with competing priorities, document your attempts to contact the family and try, at the least, to maintain the teacher/student/family relationship.



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