

# ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM

The Lawrence Public Schools Assistive Technology Program includes resources and services to support students, teachers, specialists, administrators and parents working to ensure access to and success in navigating curriculum.

## What is Assistive Technology?

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004, Assistive Technology is “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 child with a disability.”

AT is a broad term that covers a wide range of tools from pencil grips to computers. Simple or low-tech AT tools include laminated communication boards, removable highlighter tapes, reading guides and Velcro. There are also more complex, “high-tech” AT tools like specialized software, talking word processors, and Alternative Augmentative Communication (AAC) devices. AT makes it possible for children with disabilities to take part in life's activities. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education identifies Assistive Technology as a way to *strengthen developmental, functional, and learning skills. It can substitute for abilities that a person may not be able to develop. For instance, AT can allow a child to communicate their thoughts, wants, and needs.* The key element of any successful AT tool is that it is the right match for the needs of the person using it.

AT is not only a tool – it also includes many services. An AT service directly assists an individual with a disability in the selection, acquisition or use of an Assistive Technology device. This may include evaluation, customization, repair, maintenance and training on how to use the device.

### What are “functional capabilities”?

Functional capabilities are the abilities to participate in tasks of learning and daily living as independently as possible. As noted above, AT is meant to address one or more areas of a person’s functional capability. Here are some of the areas that can be supported and enhanced through the use of AT:

- Activities of daily living
- Computer proficiency
- Control of the environment
- Math
- Mobility
- Study Skills
- Position and seating
- Reading
- Recreation
- Hearing
- Communication
- Vision
- Motor aspects of writing
- Composing written material

## Assistive Technology and the Law

AT is an important consideration in the Individualized Education Program planning process for students with disabilities. When appropriately considered, AT plays an essential role in a student’s

ability to access the general education curriculum with greater success and independence. In fact, this role is so important that student use of AT is addressed in both federal legislation and state regulations.

## **Federal Legislation**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 focuses on:

- Improving the academic progress of all students with disabilities.
- Aligning IEP content to the general education curriculum.
- Increasing states' accountability for the academic performance of students with disabilities by requiring their inclusion in statewide assessments.

As part of ensuring academic progress for students with disabilities, IDEA 2004 includes several provisions that specifically address the issue of AT. This important law:

- Provides that AT devices and services required for a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) be provided to students at no cost to the family and be available for use wherever needed.
- Includes definitions of AT devices and services.
- Requires that IEP teams consider the student's possible need for AT devices and services during the development of the IEP.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504 also provides for students with disabilities. This section:

- Is a national civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities.
- Ensures that a child with a disability has equal access to an education through accommodations and modifications.
- Includes fewer procedural safeguards for children with disabilities and their parents, but has a broader definition of disability. Under Section 504, individuals with disabilities are defined as persons with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. People with a history of, or who are regarded as having a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, are also covered. Major life activities include caring for one's self, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, working, performing manual tasks and learning. Although AT is not mentioned in Section 504, case law indicates that students eligible under Section 504 may have a right to Assistive Technology if the need is proven.

The following websites have useful information about the legal requirements for AT:

[National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities](#)

[The Federal Register for IDEA 2004](#) addresses all aspects of Special Education.

The following are some of the sections that specifically deal with AT:

Definition of AT: page 218

Required Contents of the IEP: page 249

AT Consideration requirement: page 252

## **AT and the Individualized Education Program (IEP)**

Determining if a student might benefit from AT is not an isolated decision made by one individual. By law, students eligible for AT under IDEA 2004 must have an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) that includes a comprehensive plan of instruction and support services needed to meet the student's unique educational needs. The IEP team, which includes general and special education teachers, family members, the student (as appropriate), and others the school or family have invited, develops the student's IEP. Together, the team members should know about:

- The student
- The general education curriculum and state proficiency assessments
- Internal and external sources of assistance
- Available services
- The IEP process itself

Several sections of the IEP relate to Assistive Technology. In addition to the Special Considerations question that specifically asks the IEP team to address the student's need for AT, questions about the

student's present level of academic achievement and functional performance, goals, and supplementary aides and services all also require that team members consider AT.

In Lawrence Public Schools, many examples of AT are found in the list of acceptable accommodations for instruction and assessment. Sometimes these readily available tools (calculators, books on tape or software to read text) are thought of only as testing accommodations. Yet to be used during testing, AT devices and services must be part of the student's daily academic program. According to federal law, they are both accommodations and AT if the student needs them to increase a functional capability.

## **Beginning the Process**

The Lawrence Public Schools have developed a process through the Speech & Language Pathologists and Speech & language Pathology Assistants. The process of identifying students who may require AT services, trialing various options from low-tech to high-tech and recommending the appropriate AT. SLPs and SLPAs gather and organize information that can be used to guide collaborative decisions about services that foster the educational success of students with disabilities.

In order to provide a system of "useable" tools, the team needs to explore the student, the environments in which the student is expected to use the tools, and the tasks which are an inherent part of communicating, participating and being productive in those environments. These must all be considered **before** attempting to identify the features or components of the tools needed. AT Referral Forms are designed to generate thoughts and discussion. They're intentionally broad in order to catch all ideas and possible solutions. The team will need to sort out the data that is pertinent and most helpful.

### AT Process Framework

Step 1: Collect Info

Step 2: Generate solutions

Step 3: Implement Plan

Step 4: Integrate AT in IEP

When students struggle to communicate effectively, Lawrence Public Schools places an emphasis on providing appropriate resources to assist those students. Data collection plays a large role in determining possible solutions and plan developments for students who may require Assistive Technology. Affording team members an opportunity to try various supports allows for the most effective plan and inclusion in an Individualized Education Program.

### HELPFUL LINKS

[Massachusetts DESE Assistive Technology Page](#)

[CDT Institute - Assistive Technology 101](#)

[CDT Institute - Assistive Technology and the IEP](#)