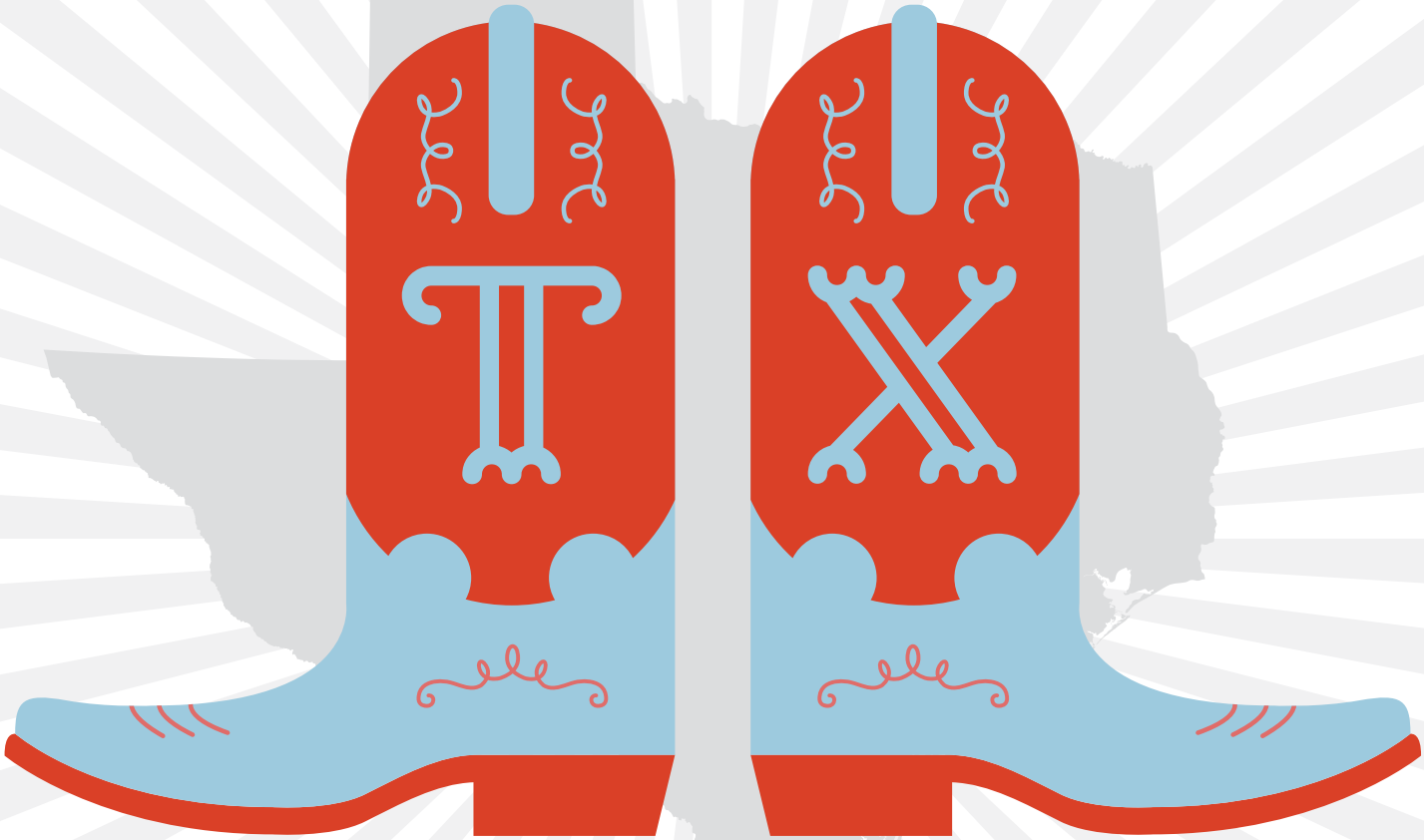
Considering Assistive Technology (AT) in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Process

INCLUSION IN TEXAS



THE TEXAS 4 STEP MODEL

Resource Guide

Revised January 2022

TEA
Texas Education Agency

The 2022 revision of the Texas 4-Step Assistive Technology Consideration Model has been adapted by Region 4 Education Service Center (ESC) as a collaborative partner of the Inclusion in Texas network and the Texas Education Agency.

Copyright © 2022. Texas Education Agency. All Rights Reserved.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the right to reproduce the copyrighted work is granted to Texas public school districts, Texas charter schools, and Texas education service centers for non-profit educational use within the state of Texas, and to residents of the state of Texas for their own personal, non-profit educational use, and provided further that no charge is made for such reproduced materials other than to cover the out-of-pocket cost of reproduction and distribution. No other rights, express or implied, are granted hereby.

For more information, please contact Copyrights@tea.texas.gov.

Table of Contents

Development of the Texas 4-Step Model 3

Background & Key Terms 4

Texas 4-Step AT Consideration Model 7

Step 1 8

Step 2 9

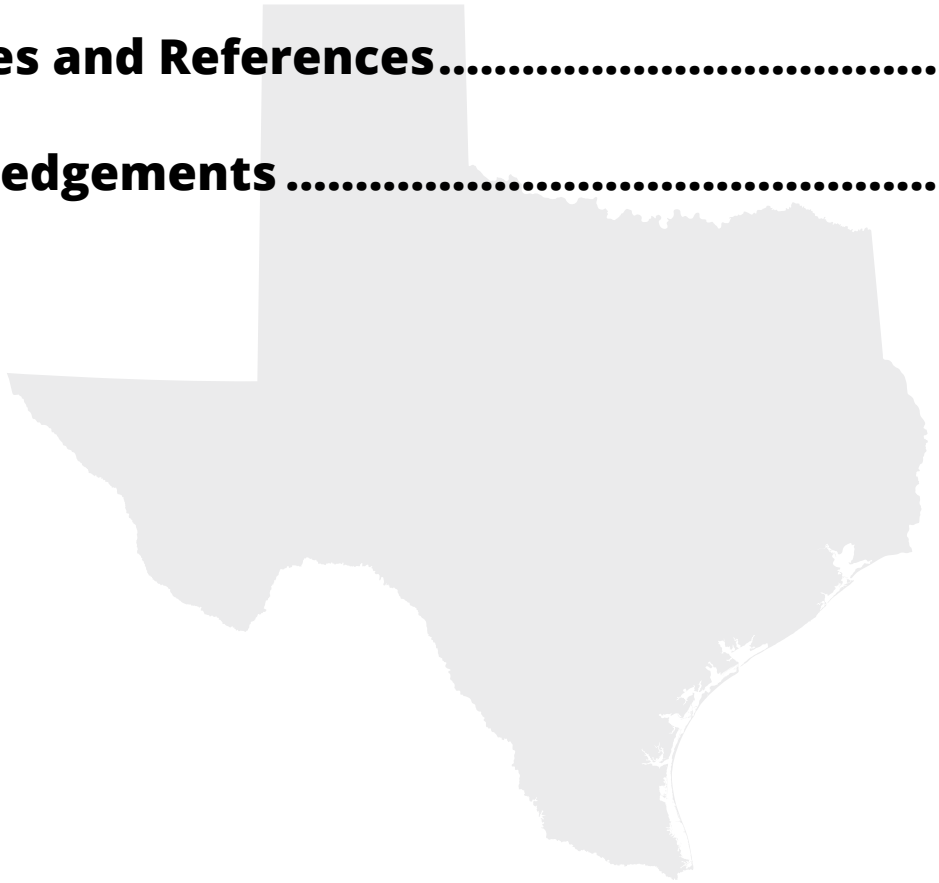
Step 3 10

Step 4 13

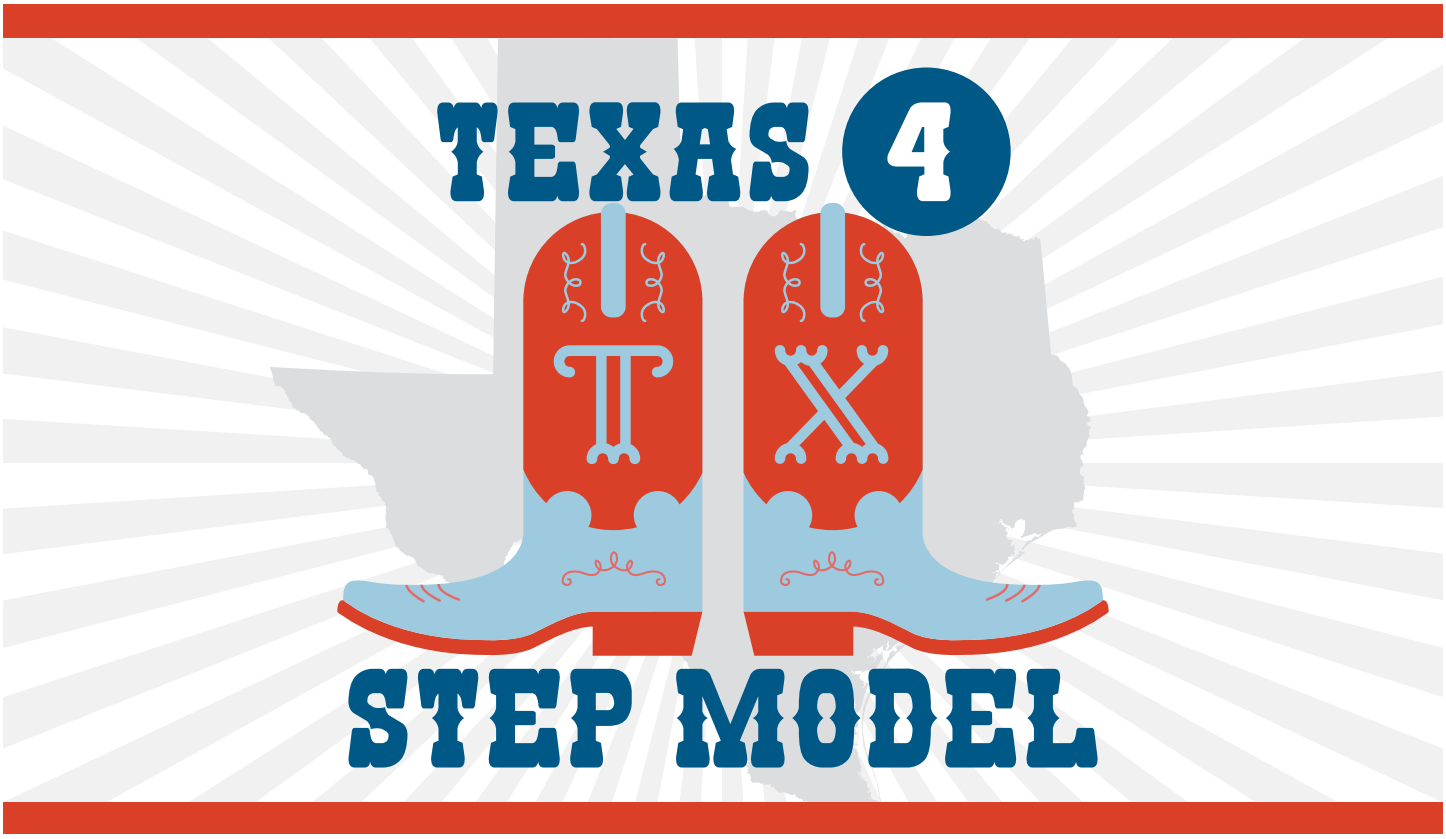
Legal References Related to Assistive Technology 14

Resources and References 15

Acknowledgements 17



Development of the Texas 4-Step Model



The Texas 4-Step Resource Guide was originally developed by the Texas Assistive Technology Network (TATN) in 2002 lead by Region 4 Education Service Center. Collaborative partners in the development of the original module in 2002 were the Texas Technology Access Project, and the University of Texas, Department of Special Education, College of Education. The module was revised by TATN in 2007. The 2022 version was adapted by Region 4 ESC as a collaborative partner of the Inclusion in Texas network and the Texas Education Agency.

Design of the Resource

The information delivered in this guide is relevant to administrators, teachers, speech-language pathologists, related service providers, assistive technology specialists, family members, and students.

Note: In Texas, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting is referred to as an Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) committee meeting. The Texas terminology will be used throughout this resource. Although this consideration process is called the Texas 4-Step Model, the process is applicable nationally and could be applied to the consideration of the need for assistive technology (AT) in Individual Family Service Plans and Section 504 meetings.

Background & Key Terms

The purpose of assistive technology (AT) is to enhance capabilities and lower barriers to participation and achievement in customary environments. AT is related to function, rather than to a specific disability category. Effective selection of AT devices requires an understanding of the functional impact of a disability on a student's ability to perform tasks needed to move toward mastery of goals. Students with disabilities may have difficulty with:

- Reading
- Written Expression
- Math
- Problem-solving
- Communication
- Recreation
- Daily organization
- Seating/Positioning
- Hearing
- Seeing
- Self-care
- Mobility
- Behavior
- Specific task-related skills

Educational agencies are charged with providing each student with a disability with a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and with ensuring that they can participate in the general education curriculum to the greatest extent possible. In today's classrooms, the use of technology and digital learning materials is expanding exponentially. The use of AT, accessible technology, and accessible materials offers unparalleled opportunities for participation and achievement of students with disabilities. Recognizing the importance of AT, Congress has mandated that the need for AT is considered as an integral part of every IEP meeting.

Key Terms in Consideration

Assistive Technology Device (ATD)

An Assistive Technology Device (ATD) is any item, piece of equipment, or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a child with a disability. The term does not include a medical device that is surgically implanted, or the replacement of such device. Section 300.5 300.5 Assistive technology device.

Although the definition of ATD is broad, "any device" refers only to items, materials and equipment. For example, a personal assistant who acts as a scribe for a student who has difficulty writing is not considered AT. Often, when people think of AT, they think only of products, such as computers and high-tech communication aids, but the range of AT devices falls in a broad continuum from no-tech, low-tech technology to very complex high-tech technology.

Pencil grips, slant boards, adapted feeding utensils, and single-message speaking devices are some examples of no-tech or low-tech devices.

Mid-tech ATD typically include electronic functioning and require a power source. Some examples of mid-tech devices include portable word processors, multiple-message communication aids, and some alternate computer access devices.

High-tech ATD are the most complex. Examples in this category include computers, academic support software, advanced communication aids, and more complex computer input systems such as those controlled by eye gaze or speech. Tools in this category generally require more training and maintenance than less complex tools. The level of training and maintenance should be considered when determining what AT services are needed.

REMEMBER:

If a student requires an item or technology feature in order to participate meaningfully in classroom activities, access the curriculum or make progress towards mastery of IEP goals, then for that student the item is AT and should be written into the IEP.

Asssistive Technology Service

Assistive technology service means any service that directly assists a child with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device.
IDEA 2004 Final Regulations 34 C.F.R. § 300.6

A wide range of services can be considered AT. AT Services mentioned in Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) include:

- Evaluating functional needs in customary environments
- Purchasing, leasing, or otherwise providing for the acquisition of AT devices
- Selecting, designing, fitting, customizing, adapting, applying, maintaining, repairing, or replacing AT devices
- Coordinating and using other therapies, interventions, or services
- Training or technical assistance for the student, family, professionals, and others

AT devices and services must be written into the IEP and directly connected to the IEP goals outlining specially designed instruction. If the AT is a part of a related service, procedures for providing the related service must include frequency, duration, and location. If the AT is a part of the student's supplementary aids and services, the AT devices and services must be provided in curricular and extracurricular settings.

Consideration of Special Factors

In the development, review, and revision of an IEP, the ARD committee must consider the need for:

i. **Positive behavioral interventions**
ii. **Language supports for English learners**
iii. **Braille instruction and use of braille**
iv **Communication supports**
v. **AT devices and/or services**

IDEA 2004 Final Regulations 34 C.F.R. § 300.324

The Texas 4-Step Model provides consistent structure for AT consideration as ARD committees consider the special factors in the development, review and revision of IEPs. Although the consideration of special factors is generally a relatively brief process, it does require significant thought. The Texas 4-Step Model provides a consistent structure for AT consideration to occur for any student.

** See page 15 for a list of legal citations related to AT.

Texas 4-Step AT Consideration Model

The Texas 4-Step AT Consideration Model is a process for ARD committees to use in the development, review, and revision of every IEP. The use of a model ensures consistency and that AT is equitably considered for all students with disabilities. The Texas 4-Step Model incorporates best practices in AT consideration as described by the Quality Indicators for Assistive Technology (QIAT).

Review current data and additional information

Develop goals and identify tasks that might be difficult or impossible for the student when working toward mastery

Determine whether AT devices and/or services are required at this time

Document the AT consideration outcome including a rationale for the decision

Review current data and additional information

The consideration of whether a student needs AT devices and/or services is integrated into the IEP process. The consideration of AT is a brief and simple process. ARD committee members determine if they have the information needed to make a decision or if more information is needed before a decision can be made. Step 1 involves discussion of current data and also includes pertinent information that may be shared by any ARD committee member, including the student and the family.

Committee members gather information from a variety of sources about the student's current functioning in the school, home, and community environments. They look at the full range of educational and community settings and think about what it means for a student to be actively involved in each of those settings. Commonly reviewed data sources include:

- Evaluation data
- Present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP)
- Additional information from committee members

Evaluation data may include information and recommendations directly or indirectly related to AT. Even if a recommendation to explore AT for the student is not included, evaluation data can provide critical information that will be of use to the ARD committee as they make determinations about the student's need for AT.

PLAAFP data should note whether the student is using AT as an accommodation or modification that has enabled reaching or maintaining the present level in any area. The PLAAFP reflects whether the student has been using educational technology and, if so, the features that the student requires to use it effectively. This consideration may help the committee to think about ways in which technology can potentially increase, improve, or maintain the student's present levels.

Additional information is contributed by all committee members based on their unique perspectives. The general education teacher is aware of the curriculum, schedule, and activities in the general education classroom and brings information about how the student participates. The special education teacher is knowledgeable about accommodations that are available for students with disabilities, strategies to support inclusion, and the special education goals. The student and family members bring knowledge about how the student currently completes tasks and successfully uses accommodations and supports outside of the school setting. The administrator is aware of services that are provided and can ensure the right participants are available to support consideration of and subsequent access to AT devices and services.

Develop goals and identify tasks that might be difficult or impossible for the student when working toward mastery

Step 2 emphasizes that ARD committee members must develop meaningful goals before they can consider whether the student needs AT to work toward mastery of the goals. This step includes identifying the tasks a student needs to learn or perform to move toward mastery of the goals. As team members prepare to consider the student's needs, they should ask themselves whether AT might enable the student to work more independently, effectively, or efficiently. The process involves:

1. Establishing goals
2. Identifying tasks the student needs to be able to perform to work toward mastery of the goals
3. Determining which tasks would be difficult for the student at the current time

Establish goals first. The IDEA requires that high expectations for student progress and student achievement are focal points of the special education process. The ARD committee is careful to develop challenging goals and objectives that are reasonably calculated to enable a student to make progress in light of the student's circumstances. The purpose of AT for a student with disabilities is to increase, improve, or maintain functional capabilities so that the student can participate, learn, and grow.

Identify tasks. As the committee thinks about what a student needs to be able to do to move toward mastery of goals, think about which tasks would be difficult or impossible for the student to do without additional supports. These tasks may be global and embedded in almost every task such as reading, writing, or communicating. Tasks may also be targeted to specific goals such as doing experiments in chemistry class, participating in a physical education class, or writing a composition.

Determine which tasks might be difficult or impossible. Once tasks are identified, the team can determine whether assistive technology could enable the student to do those tasks more independently, effectively, or efficiently.

Determine whether AT devices and/or services are required at this time

Step 3 is the decision point to address the question, *"Does the student require ATD and services at this time to make progress on their IEP goals and in the general curriculum?"*

Sometimes ARD committees think they cannot make this decision without having an "AT expert" on the team. However, ARD committee members have broad knowledge of who the student is and what the student needs to do. The committee can describe what the student needs to be able to do and describe how AT can help support this need. Remember that AT consideration is about identification of need or lack of need for AT devices and services. The ARD committee has ***collective knowledge and skills*** and may or may not know exactly what is needed, but they can decide whether a need exists or not and ***seek assistance as needed***.

As committee members consider the student's AT needs, they should ask whether AT would enable the student to work more effectively, efficiently, or independently as they:

- Participate
- Communicate
- Make progress in the general curriculum
- Address one or more IEP goals
- Make progress on a related service goal
- Use educational materials
- Consistently use the technology available to other students
- Work on tasks more independently

If the student does not have difficulty with any of these examples or other tasks, it is likely the student does not need AT devices and services. If the student has difficulty with ONE OR MORE of these examples or any other tasks, it is likely that the student may need AT devices and services.

Assistive Technology is NOT Required

If the ARD committee anticipates that the student will be able to move toward mastery of the goals without AT devices and services, the committee can make the decision that AT is not required at this time. AT can be considered at a later time if the student does not make the anticipated progress or there are changes in the curriculum or environment.

Assistive Technology is Required

If the ARD committee determines the student will need AT to move toward mastery of the goals, the committee can make the decision that AT is required at this time. When AT is needed, a range of devices, services, and other supports are considered in determining what the student needs.

More Information is Needed

There are several reasons why the ARD committee would arrive at the decision that more information is needed before a decision can be reached about AT.

- The ARD committee is unable to reach consensus on whether the student requires AT devices and services to actively participate in the educational program and make adequate progress toward mastery of IEP goals. In this instance, the committee determines what additional information is needed and how that information can be obtained. If an AT evaluation is needed, the ARD committee creates a referral that includes the questions that need to be answered during the evaluation.
- The ARD committee knows the student needs AT, but they do not know what AT devices would effectively and efficiently meet the student's needs. In this instance, the committee makes a referral for an AT evaluation or explores devices that focus on the student's needs in consultation with an AT specialist or another person knowledgeable of AT.
- The ARD committee may also need more information about AT services that are needed to ensure the student will be able to learn about and use AT devices to accomplish the tasks for which they are intended.
- In some complex cases, the school may need to use the services of an outside agency. Although not binding, the findings of any contracted evaluation will add to the data already collected and considered by the ARD committee to assist in decision making.

Assistive Technology Usage Considerations

Special Education

If a student needs an electronic writing tool to address one or more academic goals in the IEP, an electronic writing tool would be AT that is needed as a part of his special education program.

Related service

If a student is receiving Occupational Therapy (OT) and has goals related to written productivity. The student may need an electronic writing tool to work toward OT goals related to increases in legibility, strength, and the length and complexity of written products. This writing tool as a provision of the related service would be AT.

Supplementary aids and services

If a student's disability is impacting their ability to meet the written productivity demands in the general education classroom, the use of an electronic writing tool that supports written productivity would be necessary AT. The electronic writing tool should be documented as AT and listed on the student's accommodation page.

Assistive technology at home or other settings

If the intent of homework is to practice and become fluent with what is being taught in the classroom and the student uses an electronic writing tool at school, the tool should be provided at home, or whenever working on that skill, to allow them to generalize usage across multiple settings.

While consideration of a student's possible need for AT devices and services requires serious effort on the part of all members of the ARD committee, the Texas 4 Step Model, when imbedded in the IEP development process, will support committees in reaching informed decisions. Generally, teams will reach one of three possible conclusions.

1. AT is not required because it is anticipated the student will be able to access the curriculum and make reasonable progress on his educational program without AT devices and services.
2. AT is required for the student to access the curriculum and make reasonable progress in the educational program.
3. More information is needed before such a decision can be made.

Document the AT consideration outcome including a rationale for the decision

Step 4 includes information on ways to document each of the three possible outcomes included in Step 3. A check box on an IEP form may indicate the ARD committee has made the legally required decision, however, a check box alone is not sufficient to communicate that the consideration of AT was thoughtful and based on the unique educational needs of the student. It is important to document both the decision and how the decision was reached.

When the ARD committee determines that AT is NOT required, document the data that indicates the student will make progress without AT. The ARD committee is anticipating the student will be able to participate in the educational program and make reasonable progress toward mastery of IEP goals and objectives WITHOUT assistive technology devices and services. Documenting the AT decision that has been reached and including a rationale for that decision culminates the AT consideration process. The rationale is important because it informs all individuals involved in the student's education and is useful to future ARD Committees as they consider the further needs for AT.

When the ARD committee determines that AT is required, they are anticipating the student will need AT to be able to participate in the educational program or make reasonable progress toward mastery of IEP goals, and that they know what AT devices and services are needed. The specifics of the AT devices and services needed must be documented in the IEP in a way that clearly connects to the goals, activities, and functions for which it is intended to be used.

When documenting that more information is needed, include the type of assistance needed and a time frame for coming back to an ARD meeting to consider the additional information. Once the ARD committee's decision is made, included in the IEP. If more information is needed about the student's functional needs in the educational environment, the ARD committee makes a referral for an AT evaluation and documents the evaluation in the IEP as an AT service to be provided to the student.

If the ARD committee knows what the student needs to be able to do and the characteristics of an effective system, they may need help identifying appropriate AT tools and services. Committee members may arrange to consult with others who have more experience with AT tools. If device trials are needed to determine which tools are most effective for the student, the ARD committee documents when and by whom the trials will be conducted.

Legal References Related to AT

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004), Public Law 108-446 and Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulations

34 C.F.R. § 300.5 Assistive technology device

34 C.F.R. § 300.6 Assistive technology service

34 C.F.R. § 300.14 Equipment

34 C.F.R. § 300.34 Related services

34 C.F.R. § 300.39 Special education

34 C.F.R. § 300.42 Supplementary aids and services

34 C.F.R.§300.43 Transition services

34 C.F.R. § 300.44 Universal design

34 C.F.R § 300.105 Assistive technology

34 C.F.R. § 300.113 Routine checking of hearing aids and external components of surgically implanted medical devices.

34 C.F.R. § 300.172 Access to instructional materials

34 C.F.R. § 300.210 Purchase of instructional materials

34 C.F.R. §300.320 Definition of Individualized Education Program

34 C.F.R. § 300.324 Development, review, and revision of IEP

34 C.F.R. § 300.704 State-level activities
Appendix C to Part 300—National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS)

Definitions from Other Statutes Referred to in IDEA 2004

An Act to Provide Books for the Adult Blind (March 3, 1931,
2 U.S.C. 135a) and Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations

36 C.F.R. § 701.6 Loans of library materials for blind and other physically handicapped persons

Legislative Branch Appropriations Act, Public Law 104-197 1996 Chafee Amendment to the Copyright Law

Resources and References

Guides

Assistive Technology Consideration Resource Guide

This resource guide, developed by the Georgia Project for Assistive Technology (GPAT), provides a framework for thinking about the specific tasks within an instructional area and the types of strategies and devices that can help students. This page also contains other AT consideration resources.

Assistive Technology Consideration Process Guide

This process guide, developed by the GPAT, provides a framework for considering AT and the critical elements to be addressed.

Minnesota Department of Education Assistive Technology Manual Update (2019)

This manual, developed by the Division of Special Education, Minnesota Department of Education, includes supports and scaffolds to support the process of AT consideration by multiple team members, including educators, parents, and students.

Forms

Assistive Technology Consideration to Assessment

Many valuable resources from the Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative (WATI) are available on this site.

Considering Assistive Technology

This checklist, from the Center for Parent Information and Resources, is designed to help ARD committees consider the needs of students with disabilities.

SETT Scaffold for Consideration of AT Needs

This form, developed by Joy Zabala, Ed.D., outlines an AT consideration process that begins with decisions about functional areas of concern and gathers information about a student's abilities and needs in those areas. Other resources and forms can also be found at http://www.joyzabala.com.

Professional Development Training

AT Consideration in the IEP Process

This module is a part of the Assistive Technology Internet Modules (ATIM) developed by the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALI) and partners including the Texas Assistive

Technology Network. It is available through the AT Internet Modules website. This module provides information to IEP teams as they consider AT in the IEP process.

The IRIS Center Considering Assistive Technology

This section of the IRIS Center's module on AT discusses the school's responsibilities regarding AT.

References

CAST. 2015. Quality Indicators for Assistive Technology: A Comprehensive Guide to Assistive Technology Services. Wakefield, MA: CAST Professional Publishing. https://www.cast.org/news/2015/cast-professional-publishing-quality-indicators-assistive-technology

The chapter on Consideration contains the quality indicators, intent statements, common errors, support materials, research-based information, detailed scenarios, and resources.

Acknowledgements

The collaborative partners acknowledge, with deep appreciation, the outstanding work of the primary authors. Considering Assistive Technology in the IEP Process Resources Guide Module Project Consultant/Writers:

- Diana Foster Carl, MA
- Joy Smiley Zabala, Ed.D.

Diana Foster Carl, M.A., has more than 35 years of experience in various capacities in public education and in leadership roles in national, statewide, and regional organizations and boards. Carl, whose background is a Licensed Specialist in School Psychology, is a former Director of Special Education Services at Region 4 Education Service Center in Houston, and was lead facilitator of the Texas Assistive Technology Network (TATN) for twelve years.

For the last ten years, she contracted with CAST as the Special Projects Coordinator for the National Center on Accessible Educational Materials (AEM Center) and the previous national centers at CAST related to accessible materials. Carl is a founding member of the Quality Indicators for Assistive Technology (QIAT) and a co-author of Quality Indicators for Assistive Technology: A Comprehensive Guide to Assistive Technology Services and The QIAT Companion: A Just in Time Resource for Implementing the Quality Indicators for Assistive Technology.

Joy Smiley Zabala, Ed.D., was a leader in the use of assistive technology (AT) to improve education and life for people with disabilities for more than three decades as a general educator, special educator, teacher trainer, and conference speaker. Dr. Zabala developed the Student, Environments, Tasks, and Tools (SETT) Framework, a model that is widely used by families and educators for collaborative decision-making in all phases of assistive technology service design and delivery.

Dr. Zabala was the Director of Technical Assistance at CAST, where she previously co-directed the National Center on Accessible Educational Materials (AEM Center) and served as the Principal Investigator for the Center on Inclusive Technology & Education Systems (CITES). She has earned international recognition for her work on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Assistive and Accessible Technologies, and Accessible Educational Materials (AEM). Dr. Zabala was a founding member of the Quality Indicators for Assistive Technology (QIAT) and a co-author of Quality Indicators for Assistive Technology: A Comprehensive Guide to Assistive Technology Services and The QIAT Companion: A Just in Time Resource for Implementing the Quality Indicators for Assistive Technology.

TEA
Texas Education Agency

INCLUSION