Assistive Technology Evaluation

Referral

In Colorado, the Assistive Technology (AT) selection process in schools begins with a referral for assessment. Referrals can be initiated by anyone (including the child) concerned about potential barriers interfering with the child's normal development, ability to participate in their natural environment, achieve their IEP goals or access the general education curriculum. The referral provides information to the SWAAAC team regarding how a student is currently functioning in the school environment including the tasks a student is expected to perform and is unable to do because of an identified disability.

A representative of the IEP or IFSP team must contact a SWAAAC team member and complete a referral that documents the concerns of the team.

Many of the students who are seen by SWAAAC teams in schools also receive private evaluations and therapy. It is beneficial to collaborate with other agencies to establish common goals for use of AT in order to ensure coordination of services for the student.

Permission from parents and releases of information must be obtained by both the private agency and the administrative unit in order for school personnel or private agency practitioners to participate in the evaluation and for information such as the evaluation report and school records to be exchanged.

Assessment

It is important to recognize from the outset that a variety of solutions should be considered. This may include low and high tech solutions as well as accommodations and modifications, or a combination of all. It is critical to remember that the number one reason for technology abandonment is "lack of consumer preference and choice" (Phillips & Zhao, 1993). It is vital that the individual who is going to be using the technology be involved in the selection and choice of the device and/or adaptation.

Careful consideration of the child's goals, needs, limitations, and abilities will guide the team to establish priorities. The team also needs to discuss the environments where the child will function and the specific tasks he/she needs to complete. It is

also helpful for the team to observe the child with her peers to determine what activities the child is/or is not engaged in. Having a comprehensive view of all of these factors can then guide the team to brainstorm potential AT devices and services that may be useful.

Once potential devices and services are discussed, the team can set up trials with these devices, if appropriate, ideally in the environment(s) where they will be used. The assistive technology services necessary for a successful trial may need to be determined, such as delegating which person will borrow the device from a loan bank, program the device, make sure the device is working correctly, train the child to use it, and so on. Once the trial(s) is complete, teams should evaluate its effectiveness. If a device is deemed necessary, the process of implementation begins. If a device is not useful in meeting the child's needs, further evaluation with the device or with different devices or strategies may be warranted.

There is no specific test for assessing the need for AT. The assessment will be tailored to the unique needs of each child to determine if the child will benefit from assistive technology devices and services, and/or to determine what type of assistive technology devices and services are needed. Determining a student's assistive technology needs is typically an ongoing process rather than a one-time event. A team meeting, in which key people participate, is often a good place to start. These people may include:

- Student

- Parents

- Special Educator

- General Educator

- Speech/Language Pathologist

- Psychologist

- Physical Therapist

- Occupational Therapist

- School Nurse

- Other professionals who are knowledgeable about the child and invested in his or her success

A typical assistive technology evaluation may include

- Collecting data and information about the student pertinent to the referral

- Discussion with all stakeholders to gather information and to generate a range of solutions focusing on the relationship of the student's abilities and the environment to the tasks

- Prioritizing tasks with the most critical chosen for solution generation

- Brainstorming all possible solutions including names of specific devices with features that will meet the student's needs, as well as those features that are important to the student, considering both high and low tech solutions

- Selecting the most appropriate of the solutions, identifying those that can be implemented immediately, during the current school year, and in the future

- Conducting trials of the identified technologies

- Planning for implementation

- Collecting data to determine the effectiveness of the potential solutions

- Making final recommendations for device and services

- Writing final report and funding request

- Documenting AT device and service needs on IEP

Resources

There are several excellent resources for referral and assessment procedures and forms and questionnaires including the Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative (WATI) and the Georgia Project for Assistive Technology.

The WATI's *Assessing Student Needs for Assistive Technology* manual is available online at http://www.wati.org/?pageLoad=content/supports/free/index.php.

Many teams use the **SETT** (**Student, Environment, Tasks, Tools**) framework developed by Joy Zabala to guide assistive technology assessments: http://www.joyzabala.com/

Human Activities, Assistive Technology (**HAAT**), developed by Cook and Hussey, is another model which helps teams assess assistive technology needs: http://www.teachingat.org/constructs/human.html.

"**GPAT** has developed numerous resources to assist educators and families in providing assistive technology services to students with disabilities. These resources are organized by various process topics" http://www.gpat.org/resources.aspx .

"The **QIAT Consortium** is a nationwide grassroots group that includes hundreds of individuals who provide input into the ongoing process of identifying, disseminating, and implementing a set of widely-applicable Quality Indicators for Assistive Technology Services in School Settings" http://natri.uky.edu/assoc_projects/qiat/about.html