

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About Assistive Technology

Assessment

1. Who is eligible to receive an assistive technology assessment?

Any child can be referred for an Assistive Technology (AT) assessment by any member of their 504 or IEP team including their caregivers. The assessment must be tailored to the unique needs of the child and provided in an environment where the child will perform at his/her potential. There is no specific test for evaluating the need for assistive technology. Therefore, prior to conducting the evaluation, the team needs to have a well planned evaluation process.

2. Who should be included within the team of professionals to assess children for assistive technology?

Those involved in assessments might include: parents, child, early childhood special educator, special education teacher, occupational therapist, physical therapist, speech-language pathologist, audiologist, vision specialist, technology specialist, general education teachers, school nurse, paraprofessionals, or any other individuals familiar with the child and invested in his/her success.

3. Can an independent evaluation be requested to address assistive technology?

If school or district does not have appropriately trained personnel, it must obtain such persons to perform the evaluation. If parents disagree with the results of the evaluation performed by the school, they can request an independent evaluation.

4. When is it appropriate for a child to use assistive technology when participating in educational evaluations?

Children may use assistive technology to participate in assessments, such as for special education assessment, classroom-based assessments, state and local district assessments, etc. The use of assistive technology devices during assessment of children with identified AT needs ensures their performance accurately reflects their aptitude or achievement level or whatever the test purports to measure.

Funding responsibilities and resources

1. Are schools required to pay for assistive technology devices and services?

For children ages 3 to 21 who need assistive technology, it is the responsibility of the school or district to provide the equipment, services or programs identified in the IEP. The school may pay for the equipment, services, or programs itself, utilize other resources, or cooperatively fund the device(s) and/or services.

2. Can schools require parents to pay for an assistive device(s) or service(s) identified in the child's IEP, or require the parents to use their own private health insurance to pay for the device and/or services?

As stated in IDEA and its regulations, special education and related services identified in the child's IEP must be provided at no cost to the parents.

3. Can Medicaid funds be used to purchase assistive technology devices?

Medicaid funds or private insurance can be accessed only if the parents agree. Parents are not obligated to use private insurance or Medicaid.

4. What other resources can be considered in lieu of purchasing assistive technology devices?

CCBs, schools or districts might consider rental or long-term lease options of equipment or devices. Computers can often be leased, but many devices do not have long term lease options. Advantages to leasing include no obligation to purchase the device, reduction of obsolete inventory, flexible leasing terms, upgrading equipment as improved technology becomes available, and upgrading of equipment as the child's needs change.

5. Who determines how assistive technology will be purchased and with what available funding resources – the IEP team or administration?

Once the IEP team makes the determination that assistive technology must be provided as part of the child's IEP, it is the responsibility of the school administration to determine how the assistive technology will be provided and with which funding resources. The decision as to the appropriate type of assistive technology should be based on the child's needs as determined by the evaluation recommendations and IEP team decision.

6. Is a school responsible for providing “state of the art” equipment for a child?

IDEA states that “state of the art” technology is not required. AT must be “educationally necessary” and “appropriate”. Top of the line technology is not a requirement.

Equipment: Ownership, use, repair, insurance

1. Who owns the assistive technology that is purchased for the child?

If the school or district purchases the equipment or device, the school or district owns the device. If the device(s) is purchased with the child’s private insurance or Medicaid funds, it belongs to the child and is meant for exclusive use by the child. If the device was donated, the IEP team or the donor decides ownership.

2. Under what circumstances can assistive technology devices be taken and used in the home?

A child can take a device home if the IEP team determines the child needs the device in order to implement the educational program. A school or district cannot limit access to AT because of anticipated or real fears of damage.

3. What happens to the assistive technology device when the child transitions from Part C to Part B services or moves or leaves the school system?

If a child’s AT device is listed on the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) then it can be transitioned to the IEP at school. A transition plan for the child should be documented on the IFSP. Any device belonging to the CCB, school or district remains with the CCB, school or district if the child leaves the system. The same device or a comparable device must be provided when a child moves from grade to grade or school to school.

5. Can the school require the child to bring a personally owned assistive device, such as an augmentative communication system or laptop computer, to school?

The school cannot require the child to bring a personally owned assistive device to school, but the parents may choose to send the device because the child is most familiar or comfortable with it.

6. How can one trial hardware or software prior to purchase?

The state SWAAAC loan bank allows for four-week trials of AT through the SWAAAC team coordinator. Some vendors allow individuals to borrow equipment or download free software trials. Contact individual vendors for more information.

The IEP (Individual Education Plan)

1. How can effective implementation and continuity be achieved in the child's program with regard to assistive technology devices and services from classroom to classroom, teacher to teacher, school to school, year to year?

The IEP team needs to discuss how the devices will be used by the child and how it will be integrated into the curriculum and used by the child in the classroom. All members of the team who work with the child and are impacted by the AT device should participate in this discussion and document the recommendations. Each child's IEP must be reviewed at least annually. The IEP team should discuss and identify personnel and family training needs as they relate to the child's progression through the school program.

2. How does one distinguish between assistive technology and personal items (e.g., wheelchairs, hearing aids, eyeglasses, etc.)?

As a rule, public agencies such as schools are not responsible for providing students with eyeglasses, hearing aids or braces that the student would wear regardless of whether or not they attended school. However in rare circumstances, if a student's IEP team specifies that a student requires a specific device in order to receive FAPE, the public agency must provide the device at no cost to the student's parents. One example might be eye glasses that are use for a non-corrective purpose such a magnification or glare reduction.

3. How is assistive technology documented on the IEP?

The IEP team must consider whether the child needs assistive technology devices and services and is required to check the corresponding yes/no box on the IEP. It is important that the child's need for AT devices and/or services be documented on the IEP. The need for AT devices and/or services may be documented or described in the following sections of an IEP: Consideration of Special Factors, Accommodations and Modifications, Goals and Objectives, and/or Special Education and Related Services.

4. How is assistive technology considered on the IEP?

Consideration is not specifically defined in IDEA. The word consideration means to give careful and deliberative thought. Appropriate practice would suggest the IEP team needs information about:

- The student
- The environments
- IEP goals,
- Benchmarks and objectives
- AT possibilities