




April 2017

TO: District Superintendents
Superintendents of Public Schools
Public School Administrators
Charter School Administrators
Superintendents of State-Operated and State-Supported Schools
Executive Directors of Approved Private Schools
Nonpublic School Administrators
Directors of Special Education
Directors of Pupil Personnel Services
Chairpersons of Committees on Special Education
Organizations, Parents and Individuals Concerned with Special Education

FROM: Christopher Suriano 

SUBJECT: Assistive Technology for Students with Disabilities

This memorandum is to inform school districts of the new policy brief, *Assistive Technology for Students with Disabilities*, developed by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) to assist school personnel in the consideration, assessment, recommendation, and implementation of assistive technology for students with disabilities. This policy brief should be used in conjunction with the guidance provided in NYSED's webcast on assistive technology for students with disabilities in New York State and the *Assistive Technology Consideration Checklist*, released in May 2016. This webcast and the consideration checklist can be found on NYSED's website at: <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/2016-memos/assistive-technology-webinar.html>.

The goal of assistive technology is to facilitate success and independence for students with disabilities while they work toward their academic, social, communication, occupational, and recreational goals. By addressing the students' unique needs, assistive technology can reduce barriers to learning; assist students in progressing in their educational program; provide equitable access to the State's learning standards; and provide students with independence as they participate and progress along with their peers while in school and during post-school living, learning and working. Additionally, assistive technology supports increased social and environmental access, completion of everyday tasks and can enhance an individual's overall quality of life.

Questions regarding this memorandum may be directed to the Special Education Policy Unit at (518) 473-2878 or to speced@nysed.gov.

Attachment: *Assistive Technology for Students with Disabilities*



The University of the State of New York
New York State Education Department
Office of Special Education

April 2017

Assistive Technology for Students with Disabilities

This is one in a series of policy briefs prepared by the New York State Education Department on topics pertaining to implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in New York State and Part 200 of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education.

What is an assistive technology device?

An assistive technology device means 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 student with a disability. Such term does not include a medical device that is surgically implanted or the replacement of a surgically implanted device.

Assistive technology devices range on a continuum from low technology (low tech) devices to high technology (high tech) devices:

- Low tech assistive technology devices can be homemade or purchased items that are not very sophisticated. They can also include simple modifications made to a student's existing equipment. Examples of low tech devices include (but are not limited to): wrist stabilizers, adapted pencil grips, pictures or icons attached to objects with Velcro®, crutches, walkers, nonmotorized wheelchairs, book holders, grab rails, and adapted paper.
- Mid tech assistive technology devices require more sophisticated technology in their creation and/or use and can include some battery-powered devices. Examples of devices that fall into the mid tech range of assistive technology include (but are not limited to): battery-operated word processors, visual timers, automatic page turners, adaptive switches, voice-output (speaking) devices using picture icons, and talking calculators.
- High tech assistive technology devices are advanced in design and typically digital in nature. Examples of high tech devices include (but are not limited to): mobile devices, motorized wheelchairs, screen enlargement applications, eye-gaze interfaces, voice-output (speaking) devices with touch screens and dynamic displays, and text-to-speech software programs/applications.

What is an assistive technology service?

Assistive technology service means any service that directly assists a student with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device. The term includes:

- the evaluation of the needs of a student with a disability, including a functional evaluation of the student in the student's customary environment;
- purchasing, leasing, or otherwise providing for the acquisition of assistive technology devices by students with disabilities; selecting, designing, fitting, customizing, adapting, applying, maintaining, repairing, or replacing assistive technology devices;

- coordinating and using other therapies, interventions, or services with assistive technology devices, such as those associated with existing education and rehabilitation plans and programs;
- training or technical assistance for a student with a disability or, if appropriate, that student's family; and
- training or other technical assistance for professionals (including individuals providing education or rehabilitation services), employers, or other individuals who provide services to, employ, or are otherwise substantially involved in the major life functions of that student.

What is the goal of assistive technology?

The goal of assistive technology is to facilitate success and independence for students with disabilities while they work toward their academic, social, communication, occupational and recreational goals. By addressing the students' unique needs, assistive technology can reduce barriers to learning; assist students in progressing in their educational program; provide equitable access to the State's learning standards; and provide students with independence as they participate and progress along with their peers while in school and during post-school living, learning and working. Additionally, assistive technology supports increase social and environmental access, completion of everyday tasks and can enhance an individual's overall quality of life.

Which students should be considered for assistive technology devices and services?

The committee on special education/committee on preschool special education ("Committee") is responsible for determining for each student with a disability whether he/she requires assistive technology devices and services, including whether the use of school-purchased assistive technology devices are required to be used in the student's home or in other settings, for the student to benefit from his/her educational program. Consideration of the need for assistive technology must be based on the student's unique needs and not on his/her disability classification or the severity of disability. Effective consideration of assistive technology for a student with a disability should be student-focused and purposeful. In determining whether a student needs assistive technology devices and services to receive a free appropriate public education, the Committee should consider the following guiding questions:

- What can the student do now with and without assistive technology devices and services?
- What does the student need to be able to do?
- Can assistive technology devices and services facilitate the student's success in a less restrictive environment?
- Does the student need assistive technology devices and services to ensure equitable access to the general curriculum and/or to participate in nonacademic and extracurricular activities?
- What assistive technology services would help the student participate in the general curriculum and/or classes?
- Does the student need assistive technology devices and services to benefit from educational/printed materials in alternative formats?

- Does the student need assistive technology devices and services to access auditory information?
- Does the student need assistive technology devices and services for written communication/computer access?
- Does the student need an assistive technology device or service for communication?
- Does the student need assistive technology devices to participate in State and district-wide testing?
- Will the student, staff, and/or parents need training to facilitate the student's use of the assistive technology devices?
- How can assistive technology devices and services be integrated into the student's program across settings such as work placements and for homework?

When is an assistive technology evaluation required?

An assistive technology evaluation may be included in a student's initial evaluation for determination of eligibility for special education programs and services and/or as part of a student's reevaluation. If an assistive technology evaluation is conducted as a part of an initial evaluation or reevaluation, the parent of the student must receive appropriate prior written notice indicating assistive technology as a proposed area of evaluation.

Who can conduct an assistive technology evaluation?

There are no specific credentials required to conduct assistive technology evaluations or to provide assistive technology services to students with disabilities in New York State. Assistive technology evaluations may be conducted by school personnel (e.g. special education teachers, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists, etc.). The Committee must thoughtfully consider the skill sets required to conduct an appropriate assistive technology evaluation that meets the individual needs of a student with a disability. In some cases, it might be necessary for someone with specialized knowledge of specific assistive technology devices and services to conduct the evaluation. This individual might be an employee of the school district who has an assistive technology background or specialty, or the school district may contract with outside agencies or providers to conduct the evaluation.

What information must be included in an individualized education program (IEP)?

The individualized education program (IEP) must describe any assistive technology devices/services determined to be needed for the student to benefit from education, even if the device is generally available in the student's classroom. The type of assistive technology device used by the student should be described accurately in terms of functions and features so that those responsible for implementing the IEP understand what technology must be provided to the student. When a student needs an assistive technology device or service, the Committee must also consider what instruction the student might require to use the assistive technology device as well as any supports and services the student, the student's parents, and/or the student's teachers may need related to the use of the device. Assistive technology devices and services should be documented

as necessary in all appropriate sections of the student's IEP to ensure effective educational programming.

Who is responsible for providing assistive technology services?

If assistive technology services are required for a student, the Committee must decide who will be responsible for providing these services. Such services may include teaching the student to use his/her assistive technology device, customizing the device, if appropriate, and/or maintaining and repairing the device. Other roles or responsibilities related to effective assistive technology implementation may include monitoring student progress with the assistive technology device and, if applicable, providing for the transport of a device between home and school.

What is the relationship of assistive technology to the provision of accessible instructional materials?

School districts must ensure that instructional materials are available in a usable accessible format, which meet the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard, for students who are blind or otherwise unable to use printed materials. Accessible format includes Braille, large print, audio, and digital text and afford the flexibility to meet the needs of a broad range of students. Instructional materials include textbooks and related core materials such as workbooks. Students with disabilities should receive materials in accessible formats at the same time their peers receive their textbooks. If the Committee determines that a student needs his or her instructional materials in an accessible format, the student's IEP needs to specify the accommodations for the student and any related instruction and/or assistive technology devices needed for the student to access instructional materials in an accessible format.

Where can I find more information on assistive technology?

- National Center on Accessible Educational Materials
<http://aem.cast.org/>
- New York State Justice Center TRAIID Program
<http://www.justicecenter.ny.gov/services-supports/assistive-technology-traid>
- NYSED's Webcast on Assistive Technology for Students with Disabilities and Assistive Technology Consideration Checklist
<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/2016-memos/assistive-technology-webinar.html>
- New York State School for the Blind's Assistive Technology Resources
http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/nyssb/departments/atc_resources.html
- Guidelines to Allow for the Transfer of Assistive Technology When a Student Moves from School Jurisdiction to Higher Education, Other Human Services Agency or Employment
<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/persprep/assisttech.htm>
- Guidance on Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM)
<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/aim/>
- Guide to Quality Individualized Education Program (IEP) Development and Implementation
<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/iepguidance/IEPguideDec2010.pdf>

**Legal
Reference**

8 NYCRR - Sections 200.1(e), (f) and (qq), 200.2(b)(10), 200.2(c)(2)(vi), 200.4(d)(2)(v)(b)(6) and 200.4(d)(3)(v)

NOTE: Please reference the Official Compilation of Codes, Rules and Regulation of the State of New York (8 NYCRR) for regulatory language. An unofficial compilation of these regulations can be found at:
<http://www.dos.state.ny.us/info/nycrr.htm>.