

# Assistive Technology in the IEP



Appropriate assistive technology (AT) devices and services can allow students with disabilities to engage in and benefit from the general education curriculum and to meet **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** goals. For every student with an IEP, federal and state regulations require the team to consider the student's need for assistive technology devices and services.

IEPs should clearly reflect the AT needed and describe how and when it will be used, as well as the support required. Because AT devices and services can take various forms and are appropriate for students with a broad range of academic and functional needs, team members need to understand the various options for thoughtfully considering and including AT in the IEP document.



## How is AT defined in IDEA and in Pennsylvania special education regulations?

The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) 2004 and Pennsylvania Chapters 14 and 711 define AT as both devices and services. The law makes it clear that the purpose of AT is to improve the *functional capabilities of the child with a disability*.

**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 child with a disability. The term does not include a medical device that is surgically implanted, or the replacement of such device (34 CFR 300.5). The term AT device may refer to complex devices or software, as well as simple “low-tech” devices and solutions that may be available to many learners, but which the team decides are required by the student with an IEP as part of a free, appropriate public education (FAPE).

**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 (34 CFR 300.6). AT services may include:

- Assessing AT needs
- Purchasing, leasing, or acquiring AT
- Selecting, designing, fitting, customizing, or adapting AT devices
- Coordinating and using other therapies, interventions, or services with AT devices
- Training or technical assistance in use or operation of AT for child, family, or team members

Assistive technology services are those that are necessary to enable the student and/or IEP team to use any AT devices specified in the IEP.

## What does it mean to consider AT?

Consideration of AT, in the context of IEP development, review, or revision, is intended to be a collaborative process in which team members determine whether AT devices or services are needed for the student to access the general education curriculum or meet IEP goals. Consideration may be brief or extended. It may necessitate the IEP team to include—or have access to—someone who has knowledge about AT, or someone who can guide the team in considering AT in the context of what they know about the student. (See *resources for more information on AT technical assistance*.)

## What questions might the IEP team ask when considering AT?

Team members who are considering AT should examine available data and observations about the

student, and ask whether the student may need assistive technology:

- To be in the least restrictive environment (LRE)
- To meaningfully participate in the general curriculum
- To participate in activities
- To access educational/print materials, including textbooks
- To access auditory information
- For written communication/computer access
- For augmentative-alternative communication
- To participate in state and local assessments



## What are possible outcomes to AT consideration?

- When the team agrees AT is not a necessary part of the IEP for the student, it is appropriate for the team to check “no” on the IEP document.
- When AT that is already in place is considered effective or sufficient for the student (as specified in IEP), it is appropriate for the team to check “yes” on the IEP document.
- When it is determined that the team needs more information, particularly if they are not certain whether a student needs AT, or how AT may benefit the student, it is appropriate to check “yes” and further specify steps to be taken in the IEP. The team may decide to obtain AT consultation or conduct a targeted AT assessment. These steps may introduce well-planned trials of AT for identified curricular tasks, including data collection to determine effectiveness.

In all cases in which the team determines that the student needs AT, and checks “yes” on the special considerations portion of the IEP, AT must be addressed in the IEP document.

## How might AT devices and services be documented in the IEP?

In addition to the consideration of special factors, described above, AT devices and services can be appropriately documented in the IEP in many areas. The following sections of the IEP are appropriate locations for documenting AT:

- Special Considerations
- Present Levels
- Participation in State and Local Assessments
- Transition Services
- Annual Goals
- Program Modifications and Specially Designed Instruction
- Related Services
- Supports for School Personnel

Regardless of where AT is described in the IEP, it should clearly reflect the AT needed, describe the manner and context in which it will be used, and the support and services required.

## Should a specific AT product be named in the IEP document?

When describing the AT needed by the student, it is appropriate to describe the features needed rather than brand name, because most devices and software have multiple features, not all of which may be required by the student to have FAPE. Listing the features may provide a more accurate description of what is needed by the student and may be particularly helpful in providing back-up or temporary replacement for the AT in the event of a breakdown. However, it is also acceptable to name a device in the IEP, when the IEP team determines it is necessary.

## Whose responsibility is it to provide AT for students who need it as part of their IEPs?

The local educational agency (LEA) is responsible for providing and maintaining AT as identified in the IEP, as well as providing services for supporting its use. IDEA states that, *“Each public agency must ensure that assistive technology devices or assistive technology services, or both, as those terms are defined in §§ 300.5 and 300.6, respectively, are made available to a child with a disability if required as a part of the child’s special education, related services, or supplementary aids and services.”*

State and federal law do not require the LEA to purchase AT as needed in the IEP. It is appropriate for LEAs to purchase, rent or borrow AT, or to utilize AT acquired through the student’s insurance. However, the LEA cannot require the family to utilize insurance or any other funding source. If no alternative funding is available, the LEA remains responsible for the timely provision of AT needed as specified in the IEP.

When AT is provided for a student through a funding source other than the LEA, the LEA remains responsible for any costs related to repair, maintenance, or replacement of AT specified in the IEP.



## Is it the responsibility of the LEA to provide AT for use at home or other locations?

On a case-by-case basis, the use of school-purchased AT devices in a child's home or in other settings is required if the child's IEP team determines that the child needs access to those devices to receive FAPE (34 CFR 300.105). This may include providing AT devices or software when needed for homework or functional skills necessary across environments, such as communication using an augmentative/alternative communication (AAC) device. The use of AT devices and services can increase the student's independence while engaging with others at school, home, and their community, and better prepare them for post-secondary settings.

## What resources are available for IEP teams?

### PaTTAN and IU Assistance:

Technical assistance and training in AT are available from Assistive Technology consultants through

intermediate units (IUs). Most IUs have local procedures for requesting technical assistance or training; teams are encouraged to contact the IU for more information. PaTTAN AT consultants may also provide assistance, in collaboration with IU staff.

[www.pattan.net](http://www.pattan.net)

### PaTTAN Short Term Loan:

PaTTAN maintains a short-term loan library, which offers a broad array of AT devices. These AT devices may be borrowed by LEA teams to determine the appropriateness of an AT device or device features for the student's AT needs.

<https://www.pattan.net/Short-Term-Loan/>

### TechOWL PA:

TechOWL (Technology for Our Whole Lives) provides information on AT to all Pennsylvanians who may need it. TechOWL also operates an AT Lending Collection, which can serve as another source for borrowing AT devices. <https://techowlpa.org/>

## Assistive Technology (AT) Consideration Checklist:

STUDENT'S NEEDS	YES	NO	NOT SURE
1. Does the student need AT to meaningfully participate in the general curriculum?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Does the student need AT to participate in academic or functional activities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Does the student need AT to access and comprehend print materials?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Does the student need AT to access auditory information?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Does the student need AT for written communication and/or computer access?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Does the student need AT for augmentative/alternative communication (AAC)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Does the student need AT to participate in state and local assessments? (Is it addressed in Section VI of the IEP?)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

  

AT SERVICES REQUIRED	YES	NO	NOT SURE
8. Does the student require services for evaluation of AT needs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Does the student require services for purchasing, leasing, or acquisition of AT devices?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Does the student require services for selecting, fitting, customizing, or adapting AT devices?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Does the student require support for coordinating other services with AT use (e.g., charging, maintenance, updates)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Does the student, family, or school personnel require training or technical assistance on AT usage?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

  

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS	YES	NO	NOT SURE
13. Is the student making sufficient progress in the curriculum with current supports in place?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Can the student access the curriculum with currently available instructional materials?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Is the student communicating effectively without AT?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Is at least one team member knowledgeable about AT devices and services relevant to the student's needs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. If AT is not needed, has the reason been documented appropriately in the IEP?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. If AT is needed, has the student's need for AT been documented in the IEP?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Has the team identified specific AT devices and services that meet the student's needs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Decision Summary:

Based on the team's review, select one of the following outcomes and briefly describe:

- AT is not necessary at this time.
- The student has not had access to AT and may benefit from it.
- Current AT is effective and meets the student's needs.
- The student is using AT, but has additional needs.
- The IEP team needs more information; further assessment or assistance is required.

## Suggestions for Documenting AT Throughout the IEP Document:

IDEA mandates that school districts provide AT devices or services (or both) to students with disabilities when needed as part of their special education, related services, or supplementary aids. AT should be clearly described in the IEP, detailing how and when it will support the student's achievement of goals, progress in the general curriculum, or provide access. This table can help IEP teams ensure AT is thoroughly considered and documented across all relevant sections of the IEP.

IEP SECTION	NOTES ON AT NEEDS AND CONSIDERATIONS
<b>Special Considerations</b>	<p>Describe any AT devices or services necessary to address the student's needs in specific areas, such as communication, mobility, or sensory supports. A brief description of IEP team consideration should reflect one of the following possibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• AT was considered but is not needed at this time.</li><li>• AT was considered; the student has not had access but may benefit from it.</li><li>• AT was considered; current AT is effective, and the student's needs are being met.</li><li>• AT was considered; the student is using AT but has additional needs.</li><li>• AT was considered; more information or assistance is needed (follow LEA referral policy).</li></ul>
<b>Present Levels</b>	<p>Document current AT usage, if any, and its effectiveness in supporting the student's academic and functional skills. Include observations and data showing how AT contributes to progress or provides equal access.</p>
<b>Participation in State and Local Assessments</b>	<p>Note any AT accommodations needed for the student to be able to participate in state assessments, such as screen readers, calculators, or scribe support. Specify the devices or tools approved for testing conditions.</p>
<b>Transition Services</b>	<p>Identify AT devices and skills that may be needed as the student moves to new environments (e.g., post-secondary, work, community). Include plans for AT training or evaluations, if needed.</p>
<b>Annual Goals</b>	<p>AT may be embedded into goals that address specific skills, reflecting context and means of access. Objectives should reflect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the tasks or skills the student is expected to achieve</li><li>• the specially designed instruction for the student</li><li>• an observable measure of proficiency</li></ul> <p>Goals related to the use of AT may also be needed, such as learning specific device features, achieving independence in using AT, or improving task completion with AT support.</p>
<b>Program Modifications and Specially Designed Instruction</b>	<p>Describe any modifications or adaptations involving AT required by the student to access the general curriculum, like text-to-speech, adaptive keyboards, or specialized devices and software.</p>
<b>Related Services</b>	<p>List any related services needed to support the student's AT use, including regular consultations with the speech-language pathologist (e.g., AAC), occupational therapist, physical therapist, or other specialists.</p>
<b>Supports for School Personnel</b>	<p>Outline any AT training, resources, or technical assistance needed to effectively implement and support the student's AT use across settings and team members.</p>

# Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Josh Shapiro, Governor

