



# **Assistive Technology Technical Assistance Guide**

**Office of Special Education Programs**

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## INTRODUCTION

This Assistive Technology (AT) Technical Assistance Guide is a tool to aid South Dakota school districts and local IEP teams in creating and developing local processes and procedures surrounding AT. This document provides links to federal guidance, resources, and considerations surrounding AT. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that the IEP team consider AT needs in the development of every Individualized Education Program (IEP). Districts should have written policies in place outlining the district steps for receiving parent requests, assessing student needs for AT, and implementing AT devices and services.

## FEDERAL GUIDANCE

The United States Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology and the Office of Special Education Programs, created the below guidance in support of children with disabilities who need AT devices and services for meaningful access and engagement in education. The guidance is found at the link <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/idea-files/at-guidance/>.

- Dear Colleague Letter: Assistive Technology (January 2024)
  - <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/idea-files/dcl-assistive-technology-jan-22-2024/>
- Myths and Facts Surrounding Assistive Technology Devices and Services
  - <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/DCL-on-Myths-and-Facts-Surrounding-Assistive-Technology-Devices-01-22-2024.pdf>
- Office of Educational Technology – National Technology Plan
  - <https://tech.ed.gov/netp/>

## RESOURCES

- Further resources may be found at the below links: CAST Professional Publishing
  - <https://www.castpublishing.org/>
- Assistive Technology and Employment Toolkit - AT3 center – Disability Employment TA Center
  - <https://at3center.net/wp-content/uploads/publications/at3-toolkit-final-accessible.pdf>

## **APPENDIX REFERENCE**

The following appendix was selected by the South Dakota Department of Education (SD DOE) as a guide for school districts and local IEP teams in creating and developing local processes and procedures surrounding AT. Districts should consult with their district attorneys regarding AT in relation to the IDEA.

Information in the appendix is from the following reference:

QAIT Leadership Team (2015). Appendix A: Quality indicators for consideration of assistive technology needs. In *Quality indicators for assistive technology: A comprehensive guide to assistive technology services* (p. 205-219). CAST Professional Publishing.

\*Asterisk signifies that 'Questions to Consider' were edited by SD DOE.

## **Appendix A:**

### **Quality Indicators for Consideration of Assistive Technology Needs**

#### **Quality Indicators for Consideration of Assistive Technology Needs**

Consideration of the need for AT devices and services is an integral part of the educational process contained in IDEA for referral, evaluation, and IEP development. Although AT is considered at all stages of the process, the Consideration Quality Indicators are specific to the consideration of AT in the development of the IEP as mandated by the IDEA. In most instances, the Quality Indicators are also appropriate for the consideration of AT for students who qualify for services under other legislation (e.g., 504, ADA)

#### **Consideration Quality Indicators**

1. AT devices and services are *considered for all students with disabilities* regardless of type or severity of disability.
  - Consideration of AT need is required by IDEA and is based on the unique education needs of the student. Students are not excluded from consideration of AT for any reason (e.g., type of disability, age, administrative concerns).
2. During the development of an individualized educational program, every IEP team consistently uses a *collaborative decision-making process* that supports systematic consideration of each student's possible need for AT devices and services.
  - A collaborative process that ensures that all IEP teams effectively consider the AT of students is defined, communicated, and consistently used throughout the agency. Process may vary from agency to agency to most effectively address student needs under local conditions.
3. IEP team members have the *collective knowledge and skills* needed to make informed AT decisions and seek assistance when needed.
  - IEP team members combine their knowledge and skills to determine if AT device and services are needed to remove barriers to student performance. When the AT needs are beyond the knowledge and scope of the IEP team, additional resources and support are sought.
4. Decisions regarding the need for AT devices and services are *based on the student's IEP goals and objectives, access to curricular and extracurricular activities, and progress in the general education curriculum*.
  - As the IEP team determines the tasks the student needs to complete and develops the goals and objectives, the team considers whether AT is required to accomplish those tasks.
5. The IEP team *gathers and analyzes data* about the student, customary environments, educational goals, and tasks when considering a student's need for AT devices and services.
  - The IEP team shares and discusses information about the student's present levels of achievement in relationship to the environments and tasks to determine if the student requires

AT devices and services to participate actively, work on expected tasks, and make progress toward mastery of educational goals.

6. When AT is needed, the IEP team *explores a range* of AT devices, services, and other supports that address identified needs.
  - The IEP team considers various supports and services that address the educational needs of the student and may include no tech, low-tech, mid-tech, and/or high-tech solutions and devices. IEP team members do not limit their thinking to only those device and services currently available within the district.
7. The AT consideration process and *results are documents in the IEP* and include a rationale for the decision and supporting evidence.
  - Even though IEP documentation may include a checkbox verifying that AT has been considered, the reasons for the decisions and recommendations should be clearly stated. Supporting evidence may include the results of AT assessments, data from device trials, differences in achievement with and without AT, student preferences for competing devices, and teacher observations, among others.

\*Questions to Consider:

1. Does the district consider AT for all students with disabilities?
2. Is there someone on the IEP team knowledgeable with regards to AT?
3. Does the district have a consistent process using student data, including environments and tasks that is used to make decisions?
4. Where can the district find an extensive list of AT items to be considered and/or discussed for each student?
5. How does the IEP team consider access to the curriculum and IEP goals when determining if a student requires AT to receive FAPE?
6. How does the district document the need for AT based on the team discussion?

## Quality Indicators for Assessment of Assistive Technology Needs

Applying the Quality Indicators for Assessment of AT Needs is a process conducted by a team, used to identify tools and strategies to address a student's specific needs. The issues that lead to an AT assessment may be simple and quickly answered or more complex and challenging. Assessment takes place when these issues are beyond the scope of the problem solving that occurs as a part of normal services delivery.

1. *Procedures* for all aspects of AT assessment are clearly defined and consistently applied.
  - Throughout the educational agency, personnel are well informed and training about assessment procedures and how to initiate them. There is consistency throughout the agency in the conducting of AT assessments. Procedures may include – but are not limited to – initiating an assessment, planning and conducting an assessment, conducting trials, reporting results, and resolving conflicts.
2. AT assessments are conducted by a team with the *collective knowledge and skills needed* to determine possible AT solutions that address the needs and abilities of the student, demands of the customary environments, educational goals, and related activities.
  - Team membership is flexible and varies according to the knowledge and skills needed to address student needs. The student and family are active team members. Various team members bring different information and strengths to the assessment process.
3. All AT assessments include a functional assessment in the student's *customary environments*, such as the classroom, lunchroom, playground, home, community setting, or workplace.
  - The assessment process includes activities that occur in the student's current or anticipated environments because characteristics and demands in each may vary. Team members work together to gather specific data and relevant information in identified environments to contribute to assessment decisions.
4. AT assessments, including needed trials, are completed within *reasonable timelines*.
  - Assessments are initiated in a timely fashion and proceed according to a timeline the IEP team determines to be reasonable based on the complexity of student needs and assessment questions. Timelines comply with applicable state and agency requirements.
5. Recommendations from AT assessments are *based on data* about the student, environments, and tasks.
  - The assessment includes information about the student's needs and abilities, demands of various environments, educational tasks, and objectives. Data may be gathered from sources, such as student performance records, results of experimental trials, direct observation, interviews with students or significant others, and anecdotal records.

6. The assessment provides the IEP team with clearly *documented recommendations* that guide decisions about the selection, acquisition, and use of AT devices and services.
  - A written rationale is provided for any recommendations that are made. Recommendations may include assessment activities and results, suggested devices and alternative ways of addressing needs, services required by the student and others, and suggested strategies for implementation and use.
7. AT needs are *reassessed* any time changes in the student, the environments, and/or the tasks result in the student's needs not being met with current devices and/or services.
  - An AT assessment is available any time it is needed due to changes that have affected the student. The assessment can be requested by the parent or any other member of the IEP team.

\*Questions to Consider:

1. How does the district conduct an AT assessment that is defined and/or customized to meet the student's needs?
2. How does the district use a team approach to an AT assessment?
3. What is the process for ensuring that individuals conducting the AT evaluations have the tools, supports, and qualifications necessary to complete the evaluation?
4. How does the district complete the AT assessment in a timely manner, including trials with AT (what is the timeline expectation)?
5. What communication plan is in place between team members conducting AT assessments?
6. What does involving the student in the AT assessment process look like?  
How do all members of the AT evaluation team communicate (what is the mode of communication)?



## Quality Indicators for Including Assistive Technology in the IEP

The IDEA requires that the IEP team consider AT needs in the development of every IEP. Once the IEP team has reviewed assessment results and determined that AT is needed for provision of a free\appropriate\ public education (FAPE), it's important that the IEP document reflects the team's determination as clearly as possible. The Quality indicators for AT in the IEP help the team describe the role of AT in the child's education program.

1. The education agency has *guidelines for documenting AT* needs in the IEP and required their consistent application.
  - The education agency provides guidance to IEP teams about how to effectively document AT needs, devices, and services as a part of specially designed instruction, related services, or supplementary aids and services.
2. All *services* that the IEP team determines are needed to support the selection, acquisition, and use of AT devices are designated in the IEP.
  - The provision of AT services is critical to the effective use of AT devices. It is important that the IEP describes the AT services needed for student success. Such services may include evaluation, customization or maintenance of devices, coordination of services, and training for the student, family, and professionals, among others.
3. The IEP illustrates that AT is a *tool to support achievement of goals* and progress in the general curriculum by establishing a clear relationship between student need, AT devices and services, and the student's goals and objectives.
  - Most goals are developed before decisions about AT are made. However, this does not preclude the development of additional goals, especially those related specifically to the appropriate use of AT.
4. IEP content regarding AT use is written in language that describes how AT contributes to achievement of *measurable and observable outcomes*.
  - Content that describes measurable and observable outcomes for AT use enables the IEP team to review the student's progress and determine whether the AT has had the expected impact on student participation and achievement.
5. AT is included in the IEP in a manner that provides a *clear and complete description* of the devices and services to be provided and is used to address student needs and achieve expected results.
  - IEPs are written so that participants in the IEP meeting and others who use the information to implement the student's program understand what technology is to be available, how it is to be used, and under what circumstances. Jargon should be avoided.

\*Questions to Consider:

1. What training or support is provided to assist IEP teams with including AT in IEPs?
2. How will the IEP team address the unique needs of each student with regards to AT?
3. Where on the IEP will AT be addressed, and how will AT be linked to goals and objectives?
4. When support and professional development for use of an AT device is needed, how is that support identified or requested?
5. How will data be collected on usage of AT devices?

## Quality Indicators for Assistive Technology Implementation

AT implementation pertains to the ways that AT devices and services, as included in the IEP (including goals/objectives, related services, supplementary aids and services, and accommodations or modifications) are delivered and integrated into the student's educational program. AT implementation involves people working together to support the student using AT to accomplish expected tasks necessary for active participation and progress in customary educational environments.

1. AT implementation proceeds according to a *collaboratively developed plan*.
  - Following IEP development, all those involved in implementation work together to develop a written action plan that provides detailed information about how the AT will be used in specific educational settings, what will be done, and who will do it.
2. AT is *integrated* into the curriculum and daily activities of the student across environments.
  - AT is used when and where it is needed to facilitate the student's access to, and master of, the curriculum. AT may facilitate active participation in educational activities, assessments, extracurricular activities, and typical routines.
3. Persons supporting the student across all environments, in which the AT is expected to be used *share responsibility* for implementation of the plan.
  - All persons who work with the student know their roles and responsibilities, are able to support the student using AT, and are expected to do so.
4. Persons supporting the student provide opportunities for the student to use a *variety of strategies – including AT* and to learn which strategies are most effective for particular circumstances and tasks.
  - When and where appropriate, students are encouraged to consider and use alternative strategies to remove barriers to participation or performance. Strategies may include the student's natural abilities, use of AT, other supports, or modifications to the curriculum, task, or environment.
5. *Learning opportunities* for the student, family, and staff are an integral part of implementation.
  - Learning opportunities needed by the student, staff, and family are based on how the AT will be used in each unique environment. Training and technical assistance are planned and implemented as ongoing processes based on current and changing needs.
6. AT implementation is initially based on assessment *data* and is adjusted based on performance data.
  - Formal and informal assessment data guide initial decision-making and planning for AT implementation. As the plan is carried out, student performance is monitored and implementation is adjusted in a timely manner to support student progress.
7. AT implementation includes *management and maintenance of equipment* and materials.
  - For technology to be useful, it's important that equipment management responsibilities are clearly defined and assigned. Though specifics may differ based on the technology, some general areas may include organization of equipment and materials; responsibility for acquisition, set-up, repair, and replacement in a timely fashion; and assurance that equipment is operational.

\*Questions to Consider:

1. What method is used to gather information for all staff members regarding implementation of AT in the classroom?
2. How is implementation monitored to ensure everyone has a working knowledge of the AT being used by the student?
3. Will support be provided on the implementation of the devices in all settings?
4. What is the plan to include all staff working with the student in the implementation of AT?
5. Who is the designated person the student or staff will contact regarding maintenance of AT?
6. When, how, and who will need to be contacted for broken or lost devices? What will the timeframe look like for replacement of the device? What supports will be provided while the waiting for replacement?

## Quality Indicators for Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Assistive Technology

This area addresses the evaluation of the effectiveness of the AT devices and services that are provided to individual students. It includes data collection, documentation, and analysis to monitor changes in student performance resulting from the implementation of AT services. Student performance is reviewed in order to identify if, when, or where modifications and revisions to the implementation are needed.

1. Team members share *clearly defined responsibilities* to ensure that data are collected, evaluated, and interpreted by capable and credible team members.
  - Each team member is accountable for ensuring that the data collection process determined by the team is implemented. Individual roles in the collection and review of the data are assigned by the team. Data collection, evaluation, and interpretation are led by persons with relevant training and knowledge. It can be appropriate for different individual team members to conduct these tasks.
2. Data are collected on specific student achievement that has been identified by the team and is *related to one or more goals*.
  - In order to evaluate the success of AT use, data is collected on various aspects of student performance and achievement. Targets for data collection include the student's use of AT to progress toward mastery of relevant IEP and curricular goals and to enhance participation in extracurricular activities at school and in other environments.
3. Evaluation of effectiveness includes the *quantitative and qualitative measurement of changes* in the student's performance and achievement.
  - Changes targeted for data collection are observable and measurable so that data is objective as possible. Changes identified by the IEP team for evaluation may include accomplishment of relevant tasks, how AT is used, student preferences, productivity, participation, independence, quality of work, speed and accuracy of performance, and student satisfaction, among others.
4. Effectiveness is evaluated *across environments* during naturally occurring and structured activities.
  - Relevant tasks within each environment where the AT is to be used are identified. Data needed and procedures for collecting those data in each environment are determined.
5. Data are collected to provide teams with a means for *analyzing student achievement and identifying supports and barriers* that influence AT use to determine what changes, if any, are needed.
  - Teams regularly analyze data on multiple factors that may influence success or lead to errors in order to guide decision-making. Such factors include not only the student's understanding of expected tasks and ability to use AT, but also student preferences, intervention strategies, training, and opportunities to gain proficiency.

6. *Changes are made* in the student's AT services and educational program when evaluation data indicate that such changes are needed to improve student achievement.
  - During the process of reviewing evaluation data, the team decides whether changes or modifications need to be made in the AT, expected tasks, or factors within the environment. The team acts on those decisions and supports their implementation.
7. Evaluation of effectiveness is a dynamic, responsive, *ongoing process* that is reviewed periodically.
  - Scheduled data collection occurs over time and changes in response to both expected and unexpected results. Data collection reflects measurement strategies appropriate to the individual student's needs. Team members evaluate and interpret data during periodic progress reviews.

\*Questions to Consider:

1. What does observable, measurable student behavior look like and how is it documented?
2. What does shared responsibility for evaluation of effectiveness look like? Who gathers the data?
3. Are the data collection and strategies environmentally appropriate?
4. Does the district have a protocol for gathering and sharing AT use?
5. Who decides when a program review for possible modification is needed? What is the timeline for the review?

## Quality Indicators for Assistive Technology in Transition

Transition plans for students who use AT address the ways the student's use of AT devices and services are transferred from one setting to another. AT transition involves people from different classrooms, programs, buildings, or agencies working together to ensure continuity. Self-determination, advocacy, and implementation are critical issues for transition planning.

1. *Transition plans address AT needs* of the student, including roles and training needs of team members, subsequent steps in AT use, and follow-up after transition takes place.
  - The comprehensive transition plan required by IDEA assists the receiving agency/team to successfully provide needed supports for the AT user. This involves assigning responsibilities and establishing accountability.
2. *Transition planning empowers the student* using AT to participate in the transition planning at a level appropriate to age and ability.
  - Specific self-determination skills are taught that enable the student to gradually assume responsibility for participation and leadership in AT transition planning as capacity develops. AT tools are provided, as needed, to support the student's participation.
3. *Advocacy related to AT use is recognized as critical* and planned for by the teams involved in transition.
  - Everyone involved in transition advocates for the student's progress, including the student's use of AT. Specific advocacy tasks related to AT use are addressed and may be carried out by the student, the family, staff members, or a representative.
4. *AT requirements in the receiving environment* are identified during the transition planning process.
  - Environmental requirements, skill demands, and needed AT support are determined in order to plan appropriately. This determination is made collaboratively and with active participation by representatives from sending and receiving environments.
5. *Transition planning for students using AT proceeds according to an individualized timeline.*
  - Transition planning timelines are adjusted based on specific needs of the student and differences in environments. Timelines address well-mapped action steps with specific target dates and ongoing opportunities for reassessment.
6. *Transition plans address specific equipment, training, and funding issues* such as transfer or acquisitions of AT, manuals, and support documents.
  - A plan is developed to ensure AT equipment, hardware, and software arrives in working condition accompanied by any needed manual. Provisions for ongoing maintenance and technical support are included in the plan.

\*Questions to Consider:

1. How are students taught self-determination, self-awareness, and self-advocacy when they need AT devices?
2. How is long-range planning developed with sending and receiving agencies (timelines)?
3. How is the district ensuring adequate communication and coordination?
4. What is the district's policy and/or procedures for addressing funding issues?
5. How is the district ensuring adequate evaluation processes (e.g., clear documentation, sufficient data, effective communication)?
6. What does communication between sending and receiving agencies look like? How are philosophical differences communicated and worked out?
7. How are staff made aware of the laws regarding AT? Do they know what their responsibility is to follow the laws?



## Quality Indicators for Administrative Support of Assistive Technology Services

This area defines the critical areas of administrative support and leadership for developing and delivering AT services. It involves the development of policies, procedures, and other supports necessary to improve quality of services and sustain effective AT programs.

1. The education agency has *written procedural guidelines* that ensure equitable access to AT devices and services for students with disabilities, if required, for a FAPE.
  - Clearly written procedural guidelines help ensure that students with disabilities have the AT devices and services they require for educational participation and benefit. Access to AT is ensured regardless of severity of disability, educational placement, geographical location, or economic status.
2. The education agency *broadly disseminates* clearly defined procedures for accessing and providing AT services and supports the implementation of those guidelines.
  - Procedures are readily available in multiple formats to families and school personnel in special and general education period all are aware of how to locate the procedures and are expected to follow procedures whenever appropriate.
3. The education agency includes appropriate AT responsibilities in *written descriptions of job requirements* for each position in which activities impact AT services.
  - Appropriate responsibilities and the knowledge, skills, and actions required to fulfill them are specified for positions from the classroom through the central office. These descriptions will vary depending on the position and may be reflected in a position description, assignment of duty statement, or some other written description.
4. The education agency employs *personnel with the competencies* needed to support quality AT services within their primary areas of responsibilities at all levels of the organization.
  - Although different knowledge, skills, and levels of understanding are required for various jobs, all understand and are able to fulfill their parts in developing and maintaining a collaborative system of effective AT services to students.
5. The education agency includes *AT in the technology planning and budgeting process*.
  - A comprehensive, collaboratively developed technology plan provides for the technology needs of all students in general education and special education.
6. The education agency provides access to *ongoing learning opportunities about AT* for staff, family, and students.
  - Learning opportunities are based on the needs of the student, the family, and the staff and are readily available to all. Training and technical assistance include any topic pertinent to the selection, acquisition, or use of AT or any other aspect of AT service delivery.

7. The education agency uses a *systematic process to evaluate* all components of the agency wide AT program.

The components of the evaluation process include, but are not limited to, planning, budgeting, decision making, delivering AT services to students, and evaluating the impact of AT services on student achievement. There are clear, systematic evaluation procedures that all administrators know about and use on a regular basis as central office and building levels.

\*Questions to Consider:

1. How are policies and procedures widely distributed to assure equitable access by all IEP teams?
2. How are staff made aware that the primary purpose of AT in school settings is to support the implementation of the IEP for the provision of FAPE?
3. How are resources allocated to support AT efforts (time, a budget for devices, professional development, etc.)?
4. How are AT leadership personnel supported in their work?
5. How is the effectiveness of established AT services evaluated?

## Quality Indicators for Professional Development and Training in Assistive Technology

This area defines the critical elements of quality professional development and training in AT. AT professional development and training efforts should arise out of an ongoing, well-defined, sequential, and comprehensive plan. Such a plan can develop and maintain the abilities of individuals at all levels of the organization to participate in the creation and provision of quality AT services. The goal of AT professional development and training is to increase educators' knowledge and skills in a variety of areas including, but not limited to these areas: collaborative processes; a continuum of tools, strategies, and services; resources; legal issues; action planning; and data collection and analysis. Audiences for professional development and training include students, parents or caregivers, special education teachers, educational assistance, support personnel, general education personnel, administrators, AT specialists, and others involved with students.

1. Comprehensive AT professional development and training *support the understanding that AT devices and services enable students to accomplish IEP goals and objectives and make progress in the general curriculum.*
  - The IDEA requires the provision of a FAPE for all children with disabilities. The Individualized Education Program (IEP) defines FAPE for each student. The use of AT enables students to participate in and benefit from FAPE. The focus of all AT professional development and training activities is to increase the student's ability to make progress in the general curriculum and accomplish IEP goals and objectives.
2. The education agency has an AT professional development and training plan that *identifies the audiences, purposes, activities, expected results, evaluation measures, and funding for AT professional development and training.*
  - The opportunity to learn the appropriate techniques and strategies is provided for each person involved in the delivery of AT services. Professional development and training are offered at a variety of levels of expertise and are pertinent to individual roles.
3. The content of comprehensive AT professional development and training *addresses all aspects of the selection, acquisition, and use of AT.*
  - AT professional development and training address the development of a wide range of assessment, collaboration, and implementation skills that enable educators to provide effective AT interventions for students. The AT professional development and training plan includes, but is not limited to, collaborative processes; the continuum of tools, strategies, and services; resources; legal issues; action planning; and data collection.
4. AT professional development and training addresses and is *aligned with other local, state, and national professional development initiatives.*
  - For many students with disabilities, AT is required for active participation in local, state, and national educational initiatives. Content of the professional development and training includes information about how the use of AT supports the participation of students with disabilities in these initiatives.

5. AT professional development and training includes *ongoing learning opportunities that utilize local, regional, and/or national resources*.
  - Professional development and training opportunities enable individuals to meet present needs and increase their knowledge of AT for use in the future. Training in AT occurs frequently enough to address new and emerging technologies and practices and is available on a repetitive and continuous schedule. A variety of AT professional development and training resources are used.
6. Professional development and training in AT follows *research-based models for adult learning* that include multiple formats and are delivered at multiple skill levels.
  - The design of professional development and training for AT recognizes adults as diverse learners who bring various levels of prior knowledge and experience to the training and can benefit from differentiated instruction using a variety of formats and diverse timeframes (e.g., workshops, distance learning, follow up assistance, ongoing technical support).
7. The effectiveness of AT professional development and training is *evaluated by measuring changes in practice that result in improved student performance*.
  - Evidence is collected regarding the results of AT professional development and training. The professional development and training plan is modified based on these data in order to ensure changes to educational placement that result in improved student performance.

\*Questions to Consider:

1. How does the district incorporate AT professional development needs into the professional development plan?
2. How does the district use data in making decisions on what AT professional development is needed?
3. What is included in the district's AT professional development plan, especially as new personnel join the district?
4. What is the timeline for professional development when either new staff or new AT equipment is being used or introduced?
5. In addition to special educators, what professional development and training is provided for administrators, general educators, and instructional technology staff?