



What's the Big IDEA? #13

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. This series is designed to offer information about IDEA as amended in 2004. Each fact sheet will focus on a different aspect of IDEA.

Assistive Technology

What is Assistive Technology (AT)?

AT is any kind of technology that helps a person with a disability. In the schools the purpose of AT is to help children with disabilities learn and meet their IEP goals. It is also used to increase the independence of children with disabilities. Assistive technology can range from low-tech solutions, such as a magnifying glass, to a high-tech computerized communication device.

Why is Assistive Technology important?

Appropriate AT devices can provide access to the curriculum and improve opportunities for social interaction for children with disabilities. This supports a child's right to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). IDEA 2004 requires IEP teams to consider a student's need for AT at every IEP meeting. Just because a child does not need AT one year does not mean he or she may not benefit from it another year.

What do I do if I think my child needs AT?

Ask the IEP team to conduct an AT assessment. The assessment should consider the child's abilities in five areas: physical, communication, cognitive, social/emotional, and academic. The question to ask is: What do we want the child to be able to do that he/she currently has difficulty doing because of a disability? It should also consider the different environments that your child is in. For example, your son's or daughter's needs for AT will be different in the classroom, library, cafeteria, and playground. The assessment should consider your child's strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes. The assessment should also consider strategies that have been tried before. What were the results?

What happens after an assessment?

The IEP team will meet again to review the recommendations. You can request that an assistive technology specialist be a part of the IEP team. The team will decide which AT device(s) will be tried first. Sometimes your child will need to try several devices before a good match is made. Don't get discouraged if the first tool is not appropriate; request that the IEP team meet again to try another device or program.

Goals related to AT depend on the student's needs and are determined on a case-by-case basis.



What types of devices are available?

The IEP team will determine the devices or services based on your child's needs. AT is not a one-size-fits-all service. For example, if your child has a hearing impairment, an assistive listening device or captioning technology may be useful. For a child with a learning disability, reading and/or writing software may be appropriate. The team needs to continue to monitor the child's AT needs.

How can AT Services help my child?

Since assistive technology needs for each student will vary, students' goals will be different. However, each goal should help a student work towards:

- Accuracy
- Increased independence
- Task mastery
- Improved attentiveness
- Increased rate of task completion
- Enough stamina to accomplish task(s)
- Increased social interactions



What about training?

It is vital that your child and **everyone** who works with your child (service providers, teachers, and family) receive training and ongoing technical assistance. The law requires schools to provide training (20 USC, Section 1401[2]) so you will want to make sure it is written into the IEP. If the IEP states that assistive technology is necessary for your child, a teacher or service provider cannot decide not to use it. After everyone has received training, an assistive technology specialist should do follow-up observations to make sure everyone is using the equipment properly.

Who pays for an AT device?

The school district is responsible for providing AT devices and services along with training. Lack of availability or cost cannot be used as an excuse by the district for denying AT if the IEP team has determined that a particular tool is needed. Also, your child may be allowed to use a device at home if it will enable him or her to benefit educationally. Make sure this is written into the IEP!

Where can I get more information?

Your school district may have an Assistive Technology department that can answer your questions. In addition to the following websites, remember that Parents Reaching Out is always ready to answer your questions. Give us a call at (505) 247-0192 or 1-800-524-5176.

Helpful websites:

Family Center on Technology and Disability – www.fctd.info

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities - <http://www.nichcy.org>

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