



What's the Big IDEA? # 23

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.

Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM)

Adapted from: *Accessible Instructional Materials: A Technical Guide for Families and Advocates* (2011), The National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials at CAST and PACER Center.

Some students have disabilities that make it difficult, if not impossible, for them to access the printed materials that are used in their classrooms every day. In addition to students who are visually impaired, there are other students who may have trouble accessing printed materials. Students with physical disabilities may be unable to hold and turn the pages of a standard textbook. Students with reading disabilities may not be able to process the information they need from their textbooks. These students would benefit from having their materials provided in specialized formats so they can access the information. Specialized formats could include large print, braille, audio or digital versions of books, or computer programs. Materials provided in these specialized formats are called Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM). When IDEA was reauthorized in 2004, it included a requirement that elementary and secondary school students with disabilities who need print instructional materials in an accessible format receive them in a timely manner. So, if you think your child may benefit from (AIM), what are the steps you need to take to get these materials for your child in a timely manner?



First of all, your child needs to qualify for special education and have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The need for AIM is determined at IEP meetings. The team follows these four steps:

1. Establish the student's need for AIM through student assessment. A good time to have this discussion would be when you are considering the accommodations and modifications the student might need.
2. Select which type of specialized format is needed by the student.
3. Determine how to acquire the materials in a timely manner.
4. Consider the supports that will be needed for effective use of AIM by the student.

First of all, the team needs to establish that the student needs AIM. The team will look at the student's abilities. They may ask some of the following questions: Can the student see the materials? Can he or she physically manipulate the material without strenuous effort? Does the student have the physical stamina to read for extended periods of time? Does the student have the decoding, fluency, and processing skills needed to gain the information from grade-level printed materials?

Secondly, the team needs to consider the format that will best enable the student to:

- Access information contained in printed materials,
- Work as independently as possible,
- Develop literacy skills, and
- Participate in educational activities.

The team should also consider the student's interests, memory, listening skills, tactile skills, and English language proficiency. Other considerations will include the environment where the materials will be used. Is there a need for different materials in the classroom and at home? Can the student use the same format for different subject areas or, for example, does she need large print for math but an audio format for language arts? Be aware that your child will need some time to practice with the materials and learn how to use them. This time will vary depending on the complexity of the format. For example, a student will generally adapt more quickly to a large print book than to digital text, which is electronic content delivered by a computer or another device. Digital text is more complex because it has many variables (size, contrast, read aloud options) to accommodate a student's needs.



Next, the team needs to have a plan for how to acquire AIM. There are a variety of sources and the school is responsible for providing the materials. One source for materials is the National Instructional Materials Access Center (NIMAC). To obtain materials from NIMAC, a student must have an IEP and be certified by a competent authority as having a "print disability" as defined by copyright statute. The person who is considered the "competent authority" depends on the student's disability. However, NIMAC regulations state, **"If an IEP team has determined that a student needs accessible instructional materials in order to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE), the specialized formats must be provided even if the student does not have a print disability as defined by copyright statute."** In New Mexico, the Public Education Department has a state coordinator for NIMAC. This person would designate Authorized Users who may obtain files from the NIMAC. The IEP team would want to contact the state coordinator at the Special Education Bureau (505-827-1460) for more information on becoming Authorized Users.

Lastly, the IEP team will want to consider the type of supports the student, teachers, and/or family may need in order to use AIM. Will new technology be needed? What training might be needed and who will provide it? Will the student need accommodations or modifications such as preferential seating, additional time to complete tasks, breaks, or the option of providing responses orally instead of in writing? All of these issues need to be discussed and documented in the IEP so you can make sure the necessary supports will be provided.

The requirement for providing AIM to students is a new provision in IDEA. In fact, your child's school may not be aware of this mandate. As parents, a few of the ways we can promote the use of AIM are by: sharing information about AIM, learning the process for obtaining materials from the NIMAC and other sources, and communicating with IEP teams and school administrators about accessible materials that are available free of charge for eligible students.

If you have questions about AIM, feel free to contact a family liaison in the Parent Training Information Center at Parents Reaching Out – 505-247-0192 or 1-800-524-5176. We can answer your individual questions or direct you to more resources.

Listed below are two resources that can give you more information and details.

Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM): Basics for Families at: <http://aim.cast.org/learn/aim4families> or www.pacer.org

National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials – <http://aim.cast.org>

"What's the Big IDEA?" fact sheets are developed by Parents Reaching Out under a grant from the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education. Views expressed do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education and should not be assumed to be an endorsement by the federal government.