Accessible Materials

Technology has made great strides in making reading materials, textbooks, the internet and computers accessible to those with disabilities. Software is available that reads text from computers and other electronic devices. Costs for this software and equipment have been declining. Despite the advancements, many students do not have the access to the tools to access the general curriculum to the extent that they need.

As part of IDEA, 2004, the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS) and the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Center (NIMAC) were created to support a nationwide system to provide accessible versions of core instructional materials, textbooks and related products, to qualifying students with print disabilities. While parents cannot receive files directly, they can help the school be aware of and access this resource. A video clip on NIMAS has been developed by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and can be seen at: *http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/%2Croot%2Cdynamic%2CVideoClips%2C8%2C*, a Question and Answer document is also available at: *http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/%2Croot%2Cdynamic%2CQaCorner%2C5%2C*

However, regardless of whether or not a student with learning disabilities, dyslexia or any other disability is eligible for NIMAS-derived materials, the school still has the responsibility for providing accessible versions of materials to any student the ARD/IEP team determines needs them. It is important for parents to build a case for these materials. There are sources of information, such as Wrightslaw.com, to assist parents in doing this.

Many resources are available on assistive technology helping individuals to access textbooks and the general curriculum. For example, see Assistive Technology for Children with Learning Difficulties (*www.pluk.org/pub.htm*); Dyslexia and the Challenge of Using Today's Technology (*http://www.ldonline.org/article/13720*); a series of articles on how kids with learning disabilities can benefit from technology is at: www.greatschools.net/LD.topic?content=1541, and the Assistive Technology Training Online Project (ATTO) (*http://atto.buffalo.edu*).

Texas developed the Texas Assistive Technology Network coordinated by Education Service Center 4 to work "to ensure that students with disabilities receive assistive technology devices and services when needed to benefit from a free, appropriate public education." In 2008 they developed a document: *Making Decisions about Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM): What ARD Committees Need to Know* (*www.texasat.net/default.aspx?name=resources.aim*)

The Center for Applied Special Technology and LD OnLine (2007) have developed a useful article called *Accessible Textbooks: A Guide for Parents of Children with Learning Disabilities* (*www.ldonline.org/article/16308*). This article begins by noting that parents "need to be sure that teachers and school staff understand that the printed materials they rely on—textbooks—may be inappropriate for your child's use. Even if your child's reading level isn't as high as his or her classmates, they nevertheless need to understand the material that the other students are learning." Access to the curriculum can be by letting students hear text spoken out loud, or providing text in color combinations, different fonts, larger sizes, or any combinations of these.

Today's technology allows words to be read aloud by a computer using synthetic speech. This occurs through the use of "supported reading software." Many software programs allow text to be highlighted as it is read. Some programs can automatically read a whole page. Others offer study skill features such as looking up words in a dictionary or glossary, highlighting colors, or copying and pasting text. The LD online article lists some good

software programs and then has a section on where parents can obtain "e-text". For more information on software programs see Reading Software: Finding the Right Program at: *http://weta.convio.net/site/R?i=emAY-uLpokOp F4MfCxLnw*. NVDA is a free and open source screen reader for the Microsoft Windows Operating System available at: *www.nvaccess.org/download*

A resource for school staff is *Accessible Textbooks in the Classroom – An Educator's Guide to the Acquisition of Alternate Format Core Learning Materials*, (*www.uvm.edu/~cdci/tripscy/?Page=aimresources.html&SM=etsub menu.html*)

Accessible Educational Materials Navigator

What is AEM Navigator? – The AEM Navigator (name changed from AIM; Accessible Instructional Materials) is an interactive tool that facilitates the process of decision-making around accessible instructional materials for an individual student. The four major decision points in the process include:

1) determination of need;
2) selection of format(s);
3) acquisition of format(s); and
4) selection of supports for use.

The AEM Navigator also includes a robust set of guiding questions and useful references and resources specifically related to each decision point. Different scaffolds of support are built in so that teams can access information at the level needed to assist them in making informed, accurate decisions.

The AEM Navigator is NOT a screening or diagnostic tool that results in a prescriptive report. Rather, it is a process facilitator that guides the work of a collaborative team as they work through the AEM-related needs of individual students.

As a team works through the AEM Navigator, a step-by-step series of decision options from which to select are presented and text boxes in which information, evidence, and rationales upon which decisions are based can be entered. All decisions and supporting information is saved to a Student Summary that can be edited, saved, and printed. It also includes an optional, running "To Do List" where team members can record responsibilities that need to be accomplished to ensure that what is needed is available to the student when needed.

Who is it for? – The AEM Navigator is designed to be used by IEP teams and other collaborative teams that include students, family, and pertinent school personnel.

How does it work? – The AEM Navigator is a server-side application that requires connection to the Internet. There are two ways the AEM Navigator can be used.

- Use Navigator with an email address associated with a student account – This option enables teams to work through the process, save, print all data, and retrieve all data at a later time. When this option is used, both student summaries and to-do lists are saved for later reference. All data is saved to a server and can be accessed at any time through a link sent to the associated email address. A team can re-enter the Navigator at any time to retrieve saved information, continue through the process, or edit a Student Summary and/or To Do List.

- Use Navigator without an email address associated with a student account – This option enables teams to work through the process and collect all data to create a student summary and to-do list. A Student Summary and/or To Do List can be saved to a local computer or printed; however, when the browser is closed, information is not saved and cannot be retrieved.

AEM Navigator Accessibility – The AEM Navigator is designed to be fully accessible to people using a variety of assistive technologies. Elements on each of the AEM Navigator screens are accessible to screen readers. To access the AEM navigator, visit the National Center on Accessible Educational Material website at: h*ttp://aem.cast.org/ navigator*.

Accessible Books and Periodicals for Readers with Print Disabilities

Bookshare™ (*http://www.bookshare.org*) provides the world's largest online library of accessible reading materials for people with print disabilities. Individuals can sign up for membership and access the library on their own.

Organizations that serve individuals with print disabilities (schools, libraries, community centers, etc.) can sign up and provide access to their students or clients. It dramatically increases the accessibility of books.

A Bookshare membership offers unlimited access to accessible books, textbooks, newspapers and magazines. Additionally, free access technology makes it easy to read books with a computer. Membership is free for all U.S. schools, students with qualifying disabilities. Bookshare believes that people with disabilities deserve the same ease of access to books and periodicals that people without disabilities enjoy. They offer more than 70,000 digital books, textbooks, teacher-recommended reading, periodicals and assistive technology tools to members of all ages. They are used by the state of Texas to provide materials to public schools and students.

The Learning Ally organization (*www.learningally.org*) also provides reading materials and equipment to schools and individuals with an eligible print disability, at little or no cost. It began almost 70 years ago. They can help a person obtain the proper documentation as part of membership.

PATH Project: 1-800-866-4726   PEN Project: 1-877-762-1435   TEAM Project: 1-877-832-8945

www.partnerstx.org