

What is Assistive Technology?

People use assistive technology (AT) to achieve greater independence and to enhance the quality of their lives. Assistive technology includes both devices and services. It may also be called “adaptive” technology or “aids” for independent living.

- Devices include any item or piece of equipment used to maintain or improve the functional capabilities of a person with a disability, for example, aids for daily living, wheelchairs, computers, assistive listening devices, magnification systems and communication devices.
- Services are supports provided to people with disabilities and/or their caregivers to help them select, acquire, or use assistive technology devices. Services also include functional evaluation, training on or demonstration of devices, and purchasing or leasing, and maintaining devices.

Does My Child Have a Right to Assistive Technology?

If the assistive technology is necessary to achieve a “free and appropriate public education”.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, (IDEA), states “The Individualized Education Program, (IEP), team shall consider whether the child requires assistive technology devices and services”. This is a strong mandate to use in advocating for inclusion of assistive technology in your child’s IEP.

What Kinds of Devices Do Schools Have to Provide?

Both the State and Federal special education laws define assistive technology broadly to include a range of devices (from “off the shelf” to customize) and services. The inclusion of “services” is very important. Such services can include evaluation and training for both school staff and family members. Such training is often the key to successful use of the assistive technology. Some examples of AT could be: word processors, electronic communication devices, computers and printers, calculators, speech recognition software, print enlargement, text reading equipment, wheelchairs, electric scooters, etc.

How Do I Know What Kind of AT My Child Needs?

Get an evaluation from a competent professional. If your school district does not have a staff person knowledgeable about AT, they are required to find an appropriate person. There are many, many devices available. Be open-minded. There may be more than one appropriate solution for your child’s needs. The most expensive device may not be the best match for your child. Sometimes, such devices are complicated and frustrating for the child, resulting in a total turn-off from technology. A progressive approach is often the most effective – for example, where the child “works up” from simple to technology that is more complex.

Can My Child Bring the Device Home?

Yes. If it is necessary to achieve a free and appropriate education as for example, when the device is needed at home for homework and/or additional and supplementary training.

Does the School Have to Pay for Any Device – No Matter How Expensive?

Not necessarily, the school is not required to buy the “Cadillac” of assistive technology if a “Volkswagen” will work to achieve a free and appropriate education. The school’s obligation is to “provide” assistive technology from their own inventory or an outside source and it cannot ask you to contribute. If the device is paid for by the school district, the district maintains ownership of it.

What Will Happen to the Child’s AT When the Child Graduates or Leaves the District for Another Reason?

Although the district owns the equipment, Texas law allows the school to sell/transfer the device to the parent or adult student based on its “fair market value”. The school is not required to do so. If the transfer is a sale, a “Uniform Transfer Agreement” must be done. Planning for your child’s transition to postsecondary education (college or vocational training) is also a critical part of the process. To help ensure a successful transition after high

school, planning should begin by at least age 16. Remember to consider what AT the child will continue to need in the higher education setting.

What is a College or Vocational School's Obligation to provide Accommodations or Assistive Technology?

In higher education, there is no requirement that the college provide special education. However, the college must provide reasonable accommodations, including auxiliary aids and services as necessary to provide equal access to its services in as integrated a setting as possible.

This information adapted from an article written by Karen Ozmun and Frances J. Pennell at the Washington Assistive Technology Alliance.



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