

What is Assistive Technology?

Assistive Technology is used by individuals with disabilities in order to perform functions that might otherwise be difficult or impossible for them such as communication, or reading. Assistive technology (AT) is an important factor in reducing barriers for students to access the curriculum and learning.

The Individuals with Disabilities Act defines AT as, "Any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off-the-shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of students with disabilities." (34 Code of Federal Regulations Sec. 300.5.)

The official definition of assistive technology is very general in that it provides IEP teams with the flexibility to explore and provide a range of AT for students to access the curriculum and complete their learning tasks.

A large variety of technological devices and equipment, from no-tech or low-tech to high tech, can be considered for students to support writing, reading, math, executive functioning, and speaking & listening. AT can help students gain confidence in their abilities ability to produce work and demonstrate what they know.

Contact Us

Casi Heartstrong, M.A., CCC-SLP
AT/AAC Specialist
cheartstrong@bcoe.org

Bekki Carson, M.A., SLP
AT/AAC Specialist
rcarson@bcoe.org

Butte County SELPA - Chico Office
3881 Benatar Way, Suite C
Chico, CA. 95928
Phone: 530-457-0608

AT Webpage:
www.buttecountyselpa.org/info/assistive-technology

Helpful Websites

- <http://abilitytools.org/>
- <http://castpublishing.org/at-wheel/>
- <https://www.isetcec.org/>
- <https://askjan.org/resources/California-Assistive-Technology-Network.cfm>



Assistive Technology

Making Learning
Accessible for *All*





What are Assistive Technology Services?

Also defined in federal law, AT services are “any services that directly assist the student with a disability in the selection acquisition, and use of an assistive technology device.” Assistive technology should be thought of as any technology that enables an individual with a disability to compensate for specific deficits. In some instances, the technology may assist or augment task performance in a given area of the disability, while in others it is used to “bypass” specific deficits entirely.

Assistive technology is not aimed at “curing,” “fixing,” or remediating; rather, it is used as a strategy to compensate for, or circumvent, areas of difficulty, generally, by “playing to” an individual’s area of strength. Furthermore, assistive technology is not intended to teach or instruct (as is the case with computer-aided instruction), although it to teach or instruct (as is the case with computer aided instruction), although it can be used to increase access to instruction.

When to Consider AT

Assistive Technology should be considered for a student after readily available strategies and resources have been exhausted. In our current world, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), for example, has significantly reduced the need for AT. The main principles of UDL include offering variety in how we present content, allowing students options to interact with academic content to show what they have learned, and implementing various methods of engagement. When the tools and strategies available to all students in the classroom are not enough for a student to access the curriculum or social opportunities, assistive technology should be considered. At that time the IEP/IFSP/504 team may make a referral to the Butte County SELPA AT team. (Schools generally follow their District procedures.) Referrals may initiate further observation, interviews, and device Trials.

The purpose of an AT assessment is to determine if a student requires assistive technology tools and services in order to access curriculum, interact with peers, and make progress at school. During the assessment process, the AT/AAC Specialist will conduct a review of records, seek input from the IEP team, observe the student in their educational setting, and utilize common AT assessment measures. AT/AAC Specialists collaborate with the full IEP team to gather essential information about the student’s skills and needs. The evaluator presents the assessment findings and makes recommendations based on student strengths and needs. Recommendations may indicate what type(s) of AT is needed, what device features are best suited for the student, possible goals related to successful AT use, AT accommodations, AT consultation, and AT services.

AT versus “AAC”

Assistive Technology (AT) - broadly stated, is an umbrella term used to describe tools that offer a disabled student access to their education, which was otherwise inaccessible due to their disability. Here are examples of AT commonly used in schools:

- Text-to-Speech technology
- Speech-to-Text technology
- Visual Schedules that visually demonstrate each step in a task so that a student may sequence the steps with greater independence.
- Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), technology that can be used to communicate by students who are minimally or nonspeaking.
- Cause & Effect Switches that enable students to activate devices, such as a stereo, lamp or blender, using an adapted switch.

Augmentative and Alternative

Communication (AAC) - is under the umbrella of AT, and is broadly stated as any communication tool used apart from oral language.

- Light-Tech AAC communication boards, communication books, and single icons.
- Mid-Tech AAC battery operated devices with limited messages recorded specifically for the user.
- High-Tech AAC includes computer-based devices with thousands of vocabulary words and access to a keyboard

AAC can be accessed by touching the system using a finger, hand, elbow, toe, etc.; directly using adaptive tools, such as a head or hand stylus; eye gaze using eye gaze boards or infrared technology; switch Scanning using external switches and joysticks to make selections on the AAC.