

# A Guide for Maine Families on Assistive Technology and Accessible Educational Materials



A digital version of this guide may be found at [mainecite.org/education](https://mainecite.org/education)

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## Table of Contents

About this Guide .....	3
Introduction.....	4
Remote Learning and Special Education.....	4
General Information .....	5
Family Involvement is Essential.....	5
Assistive Technology .....	6
Maine CITE Assistive Technology Program .....	7
AT in Early Intervention – Birth to Age 5.....	8
AT in Special Education – Age 5 to 20 .....	8
Transition .....	9
AT Evaluation .....	10
Selecting AT.....	11
Training and Instruction .....	11
Ownership of the AT .....	11
Accessible Educational Materials (AEM) .....	12
Funding.....	13
AT Resources in Maine .....	14

## ***About this Guide***

This Guide is for Maine families of children who have disabilities ages birth to 20 years who are eligible for services and/or programs under the federal **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**. This information covers children birth to 20 who receive services from Part B of the IDEA. There are differences between the two sections Part B and Part C in the IDEA. Families are advised to check specific legal references for children who receive early intervention services through Part C of IDEA.

This guide will assist families to get assistive technology (AT) devices and services and accessible educational materials (AEM) for their children. If you find information that is no longer accurate, please call or write – we welcome your input.

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*The Maine CITE Program is funded by the federal DHHS/Administration on Community Living through the Maine Department of Education.*

## ***Introduction***

There are important federal laws which address the needs of people with disabilities.

- The **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act - IDEA** amended in 2004 is intended to have children leave the educational system *ready for employment and independent life*.
- **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973** – regulations that require general education programs provide nondiscriminatory access to all children with disabilities.
- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** - federal law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in the areas of employment, public services, public accommodations, transportation, and communication.
- **The Assistive Technology Act of 1998** – amended in 2004, recognizes the importance of assistive technology in the lives of individuals with disabilities.

In all these federal laws, AT is defined as "any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially modified or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities". Identical definitions of AT are found in both the IDEA and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

All program decisions, including those relating to AT devices and services under IDEA and Section 504 are made by a *Planning Team*. For this Guide the Planning Team refers to the Individualized Education Program - IEP Team, the Early Childhood - IFSP Team, or the Section 504 Individual Service Plan – ISP Team.

These plans assist families to better understand assistive technology (AT) and its role in providing free appropriate education to children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. The years of special education services are intended to prepare the student for living independently in their community after high school and with the ability to pursue further education and be successful in employment.

Using assistive technology (AT) can be powerful and impact every area of life: education, employment and living in the community. This Guide is for Maine families who are seeking AT devices and AT services for their children who have disabilities.

## ***Remote Learning and Special Education***

Recent times have made it necessary for students to stay home and receive educational services remotely. If your local school is providing remote learning to their general education students, they must do so for special education students. As identified in the IEP, learning materials, technology and AT must be available at home to support the student's learning.

Teachers, case managers, educational technicians and therapists can use technology to provide services and teaching to students at home in real time. During remote learning time communications is key and families need to connect frequently with school staff.

- For more information and guidelines, please see **Maine Parent Federation** – [mpf.org](http://mpf.org)
- For more information about on-line learning, please see **Maine CITE** [mainecite.org/education/resources-for-maine-educators-teaching-online/](http://mainecite.org/education/resources-for-maine-educators-teaching-online/)

### ***General Information***

The **Maine Department of Education – Office of Special Services** is primarily responsible for providing information, technical assistance, support and monitoring of implementing the AT requirements contained in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

At the local level, your School Administrative Unit (local school district), and/or regional Child Development Services (CDS) use the **Individual Education Program (IEP) Team**, the **Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) Team** or the **Section 504 Individual Service Plan (ISP)** to determine individual AT needs, and then provide AT devices and services set forth by each Planning Team. To do this, local schools and regional CDS providers develop procedures for addressing the following issues: the need for staff and user training, the development of IEPs, IFSPs, or ISP, the acquisition and maintenance of AT devices, the provision of AT services and exploring funding sources (MaineCare/Medicaid, private insurance, Vocational Rehabilitation).

If there are questions regarding the availability of and access to AT devices and services for a child, you should contact the local administrator of special education or the regional CDS director.

### ***Family Involvement is Essential***

It is key that families fully participate in their child's **Individual Education Program (IEP)**, **Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP)** and/or **Section 504 Individual Service Plan (ISP)** and be involved on an ongoing basis. Family input can help to shape decisions about the practical use of devices at home and in other out of school settings. Also, the federal definition for AT services includes the provision of training and technical assistance regarding AT to families when necessary. Make sure that the child's IEP/IFSP/ISP clearly states the shared responsibilities of families and schools in providing, maintaining, repairing and replacing equipment.

The family's active participation on the Planning Team ensures that all educational opportunities for their child are equal to those of other children. Planning should begin

before the child enters school and continue until the child completes high school. Close communication between families and administrators, teachers, related service personnel and other school personnel is essential to ensure the AT and services are used safely and effectively. The Planning Team is responsible to creating the program and implementing, evaluating, and monitoring of the effectiveness of the use of a child's AT devices and services.

It is the shared responsibility of the family, students, and educators to take reasonable care of the AT. Families may be responsible for basic maintenance (charging batteries) and for reporting broken equipment to the appropriate CDS or school personnel. Families are not responsible for getting equipment repaired that is specified as necessary in the IFSP and/or IEP. The vendor that provided the AT may be responsible for doing repairs and supplying a substitute device when necessary to ensure delivery of services. Discuss this with the vendor at the time of purchase.

### ***Assistive Technology***

As defined in **Chapter 101, Maine Unified Special Education Regulation (MUSER)**, the term "**assistive technology device**" means "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 children with disabilities."

The term "**assistive technology service**" means "any service that directly assists a child with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device."

Assistive technology services include:

- A. The **evaluation of the needs of a child with a disability**, including a functional evaluation of the child in their customary environment;
- B. Purchasing, leasing, or otherwise **providing for the acquisition of AT devices** by children with disabilities;
- C. **Selecting, designing, fitting, customizing, adapting, applying, retaining, repairing, or replacing** assistive technology devices;
- D. **Coordinating and using other therapies**, interventions, or services with assistive technology devices, such as those associated with existing education and rehabilitation plans and programs;
- E. **Training or technical assistance** for a child with disabilities or, if appropriate, that child's family; and

- F. **Training or technical assistance for professionals** (including individuals providing education or rehabilitation services), employers, or other individuals who provide services to, employ, or are otherwise substantially involved in the major life functions of children with disabilities.

MUSER further details that for students receiving **Early Intervention Services (B-2)**:

- IFSP Team determines that an AT device or service is necessary for the provision of services and specifies the AT device or service in the child's IFSP, the SAU is responsible for ensuring the provision of the AT device or service.
- The use of the purchased AT device(s) in a child's home or other settings is required if the child's IFSP Team determines that the child needs these devices in order for the child to benefit from early intervention services.
- What professionals are qualified to provide AT services.

MUSER further details that for students receiving **Related Services (3-20)**:

- If the IEP Team determines that an assistive technology device or service is necessary for the provision of a Free, Appropriate Public Education and specifies the assistive technology device or service within the children's IEP, the school administrative unit is responsible for ensuring the provision of the assistive technology device or service at **no cost to the parents**.
- On a case-by-case basis, the use of school purchased assistive technology devices in a student's home or in other settings is required if the child's IEP Team determines that the child needs access to those devices in order to receive a free appropriate public education.
- The only time "cost" can be a consideration is where two equal alternatives exist that would each enable the child to receive an "appropriate" education. In this case, the school or site may choose the less costly option.

### ***Maine CITE Assistive Technology Program***

**Maine CITE**, a program of the Maine Department of Education, provides technical assistance and information about Assistive Technology (AT) and Accessible Educational Materials (AEM) to local schools, educators, therapists, families, and the public. Maine CITE helps families to understand the laws regarding access, evaluation, and acquisition of AT devices and services, as well as accessible electronic and information technologies and Accessible Educational Materials (AEM).

Examples of the types information which the Maine CITE Program provides include but are not limited to:

- The assessment of needs, the selection and acquisition of AT and AEM,

- Our online AT inventory for device demonstration and loan - AT4Maine,
- AT and AEM funding and policy development; and
- AT and AEM training events: courses, workshops, and webinars.

### ***AT in Early Intervention – Birth to Age 5***

Early intervention services are provided to children from birth to 3 years through the regional CDS program. Services are also provided to children ages 3 to 5 years through CDS at no cost to the family. In general, if the device meets the legal definition of an assistive technology device and the Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) or the Individual Education Program (IEP) specifies that the provision of an AT device and/ or service is necessary, then the regional Child Development Services (CDS) site is responsible for providing the device and/ or service.

Types of AT used in Early Intervention include devices for developing balance, sitting and positioning, head control and mobility, walking, adapted feeding devices, communication devices, eye-hand coordination, adapted toys, adapted switches, tablets with appropriate learning apps to name a few.

- Please see **Maine Department of Education – Child Development Services** website for more information - <https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/cds>

### ***AT in Special Education – Age 5 to 20***

**Chapter 101, Maine Unified Special Education Regulation (MUSER)** mandate that as part of each student's IEP, the IEP Team shall consider whether the student requires AT devices and services.

- Please see the **Maine Department of Education – Special Education** website for:
  - Laws and Rule - <https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/specialed/laws>
  - IEP Forms and Guidance documents  
<https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/specialed/data>

When the IEP Team decides that the student needs to take the AT out of the school building such as home or to a school activity, the safe transport of the device should be addressed in the student's IEP. When selecting an AT device, transporting the device to and from school should be considered.

The determination of need for AT devices or services should be made with consideration of the student's educational strengths and needs. For example, the use of a calculator, an adaptation to classroom computers, or a communication device might be necessary for the student to participate in the regular curriculum. Use of AT into the



classroom enables a student with a disability to perform the same tasks, attain the same learning objectives, and achieve the same educational goals as the non-disabled peer.

**Examples:** Students may need AT and AEM such as hearing aids, a talking calculator, an FM auditory system, CCTV, digital books, display changes with text format, size, spacing and color, Braille devices, smart pens, portable digital devices, learning apps, accessible educational materials, alternative keyboards, trackballs, mouth sticks, touch screen, keyguard, pencil grip, switches, communication devices, text-to-speech software, spelling and grammar check, talking dictionary, speech-to-text software and word prediction software.

## Transition

Planning for Transition, moving from high school to adulthood, is an *essential* goal of the IEP Team. When a student reaches the age of 14, it is important to include professionals on the IEP Team who are knowledgeable about AT, transition issues, and community services. The Transition plan identifies how the student will move on to living independently, higher learning and work. A Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Transition counsellor should join the IEP Team.

- Please see the **Maine Department of Labor – Division of Vocational Rehabilitation** website for more information - [maine.gov/rehab/dvr/](http://maine.gov/rehab/dvr/)

During the Transition years, the student moves from school to community living. AT is an essential part of the Transition plan. Transition plans should not be limited to academics. Transition planning include adult life goals including independent living, education and work. Self-advocacy, functional life skills, pre-employment experiences, are key to the goal.

The Transition Plan should consider:

- Recommendations of AT assessment.
- The *Summary of Performance* document. Sample on the Maine Department of Education IEP forms/data page [maine.gov/doe/learning/special/data](http://maine.gov/doe/learning/special/data)
- AT needed at school, home, work and/or in the community.
- Transportation issues.
- Funding sources for paying for AT.
- AT device demonstration and loan services through AT4Maine.
- For students going on to higher education:
  - College disability support services.
  - Needed Accessible Educational Materials.

## ***AT Evaluation***

An AT evaluation can be requested at any time by any member of the IFSP or IEP Team including the family. It should be requested if there is reason to believe that the child/student could benefit from AT. School-based therapists provide this evaluation or may opt to consult with other providers. Tele-practice consultation may be utilized.

### *Indicators for children birth to 5:*

- Does the child need AT to accommodate needs related to hearing, vision or mobility?
- Does the child play with toys independently? Could AT improve the child's ability to play independently?
- Does the child communicate independently and effectively? Could AT impact the child's ability to communicate?
- Does the child have the ability to sit independently? Stand independently? Walk independently? Could AT improve the child's ability to become mobile?
- Does the child have self-care skills for feeding, toileting, and dressing? Could AT impact the child's ability to do so?

### *Indicators for children 5 to 20:*

- Does the student have the ability to produce written work with the same ease and at a pace similar to that of peers? Could AT impact the student's ability to do so?
- Does the child have the ability to communicate in an age appropriate manner? Could AT improve the child's ability to communicate effectively?
- Does the child have the ability to sit independently? Stand independently? Walk independently? Could AT impact the child's ability to do so?
- Does the child require adaptations to participate in activities such as art, music, or physical education? Could AT improve the child's ability to participate?
- Does the child have the ability to read at an age appropriate level and at a pace similar to peers? Could AT or AEM impact the child's ability to read at an appropriate level and pace as their peers?
- Do the mechanics of producing work interfere with the quality of the work produced for this student? Could AT or AEM assist the student to efficiently produce school work or improve the quality of the work produced?

AT is used to support achievement of the student goals and objectives. An AT evaluation should address the child's needs and may include communication, written work, seating, positioning, mobility, behavior, academic and nonacademic concerns, self-advocacy skill, access to the general curriculum, transition services, access to extracurricular activities, learning and personal technologies, environmental

modifications, smart home devices and other issues specific to the student's functional needs.

The AT evaluation should be performed in the student's educational settings but should also include home, community, and work settings.

Anyone who is part of the child's life should be a part of this process. If the device is to be fully used by the child, the significant people in their life need to be familiar with the AT. Often, very limited instruction is needed and the school/regional CDS site is responsible for providing this training/service.

### **Selecting AT**

The student, school staff, therapists and families can use the **AT device demonstration and loan services - AT4Maine**. Device demonstrations and loans provide the opportunity to try and compare different AT before selecting devices to purchase.

- Please see the **AT4Maine website** for more information [at4maine.org/](http://at4maine.org/)

### ***Training and Instruction***

Training and instruction on how to use the AT is *very important* and will vary depending on the types of AT used. Hands on practice using the AT is KEY. Depending on the technology, the role of the family, peers and professionals, training should include information about:

- The AT device and how it works, is programmed and set up;
- How to recognize and fix minor problems;
- How to use the AT device at home;
- How to use the AT device to meet goals and objectives of the Transition Plan;
- Maintenance and repair services in the community.

AT evaluation recommendations and training results need to be included in the *Summary of Performance*.

### ***Ownership of the AT***

If the school or CDS buys AT devices, then the school or regional CDS site own the devices. If the state MaineCare program or other funder pays for the device, then ownership of the device is usually with the family. Always be sure to check this with the policy of the funder. These facts, however, do NOT determine whether the device goes home with the child. When books and learning technologies are owned by the school, students often take them home for studying. All AT must be provided and allowed to go home to implement the IEP.

Decisions about liability while the device is at home needs to be made and recorded in the IEP. If the AT device is owned by the school, then the school's insurance policy should be checked to ensure that the AT device is covered.

If the family owns the device, there is no barrier to a child bringing the AT from home to school, but schools have no authority to mandate that this occur. If the family agrees to allow the device to go to school, then a decision about liability while the device is transported to or is at school needs to be made and recorded in the IEP. If a separate insurance rider is necessary for the device to be covered under the family's plan, then the school district may reimburse the family for this coverage. The family may request that schools provide the necessary devices as part of the child's IEP even if the child has identical device(s) at home.

### ***Accessible Educational Materials (AEM)***

Often schools use print-based materials, such as textbooks, to deliver educational content. This system works fine for many learners. But for others - those who struggle to read because of physical, sensory, cognitive, or learning differences - such materials are not usable for learning. Accessible Educational Materials (AEM) are specialized formats of curricular content that can be used by and with a child who has a print-disability.

A *print disability* is, a condition related to blindness, visual impairment, specific learning disability or other physical condition in which the student needs an alternative or specialized format (i.e., Braille, Large Print, Audio, Digital text) to access and gain information from conventional printed materials.

After identifying the student as having a print disability, the IEP or 504 Team determines what AEM and AT is needed and includes this in the IEP or ISP.

IDEA requires students receive their AEM in a “timely manner” - at the same time as students without print disabilities

- Please see the **Maine AEM Program** website for more information [maine-aem.org](http://maine-aem.org)

**Bookshare Accounts:** Bookshare is a free online library of AEM for students with print disabilities. Members may access over a half-million titles, including textbooks, assigned reading, and bestsellers.

Students who have an IEP or ISP and receive their AEM through Bookshare are often encouraged to become a Bookshare Member (membership is free for all qualified students). As a Member, the student can get school-related materials, as well as books

for personal reading. In addition, teachers often create their own accounts with Bookshare which allows them to assign textbooks and other AEM to their students.

Students can download the Bookshare AEM on many digital devices including AT devices. With the Bookshare Web Reader, the student to get AEM from any location using any device. Bookshare is free for all qualified U.S. students including college students.

- Please see the **Bookshare** website for more information - [bookshare.org](http://bookshare.org)

### ***Funding***

The school district provides for the AT, equipment and services recommended in the IFSP, IEP or ISP. The school, in collaboration with the family, may explore other funding sources such as Medicaid, Vocational Rehabilitation, and/or private health insurance. Families and transitioning students should know about their funding options and be involved in the funding decisions.

- Families are not required to pay for AT device(s) or service(s) identified in the IFSP, IEP or ISP or to use the families' health insurance.
- Schools can use Maine Care to pay for a child's AT, *IF the parent gives written permission.*

For more complete information, visit the Maine CITE funding page at [mainecite.org/paying-for-at](http://mainecite.org/paying-for-at)

## ***AT Resources in Maine***

Maine CITE Coordinating Center [mainecite.org](http://mainecite.org) or call 207-621-3197

Maine Accessible Educational Materials Program [maine-aem.org](http://maine-aem.org)

AT4Maine – AT Device Loan Program [at4maine.org](http://at4maine.org)

Maine DOE - Special Services - [maine.gov/doe/learning/specialed](http://maine.gov/doe/learning/specialed) or call 207-624-6713

Spurwink-ALLTECH - [spurwinkalltech.org/](http://spurwinkalltech.org/) or call 207-535-2017

CARES, Inc - [caresinc.org](http://caresinc.org) or call 800-773-7055

Maine Administrators of Services for Children with Disabilities (MADSEC) - [madsec.org](http://madsec.org) or call 626-3380

Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies (CCIDS) - [ccids.umaine.edu](http://ccids.umaine.edu) or call 207-581-1084

Alpha One - [alphaonenow.org/](http://alphaonenow.org/) or call 800-640-7200

Disability Rights Maine - [drme.org](http://drme.org) or call 800-452-1948

Assistive Technology Advocacy Program -

[drme.org/assistive-technology](http://drme.org/assistive-technology)

Telecommunication Equipment Program - [drme.org/deaf-services/tep](http://drme.org/deaf-services/tep)

Deaf-Blind Equipment Program - [drme.org/deaf-services/deaf-blind](http://drme.org/deaf-services/deaf-blind)

Bureau of Rehabilitation Services - [maine.gov/rehab](http://maine.gov/rehab) or call 800-760-1573

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)

Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI)

Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened (DoD)

IRIS Network - [theiris.org](http://theiris.org) or call 207-774-6273

Mainely Access, Inc. - [mainelyaccess.com](http://mainelyaccess.com) or call 207-650-8151

Maine Parent Federation - [mpf.org](http://mpf.org) or call 800-870-7746

Adaptive Equipment Loan Program - [alphaonenow.org/alternative-financing/](http://alphaonenow.org/alternative-financing/) or call 800-640-7200

Pine Tree Society - [pinetreesociety.org](http://pinetreesociety.org) or call 207-443-3341

University of Maine Farmington - AT Resource Center -  
[www2.umf.maine.edu/cmc/at/](http://www2.umf.maine.edu/cmc/at/) or call 207-778-7050

AgrAbility Maine - [extension.umaine.edu/agrability/](http://extension.umaine.edu/agrability/) or call 800-287-0274

Maine Adaptive Sports - [maineadaptive.org/](http://maineadaptive.org/) or call 207-287-0274

Univ of Maine Speech Therapy Telepractice Program -  
[umaine.edu/telespeech/](http://umaine.edu/telespeech/) or call 207-581-2006

Hillary Helps U Learn - [Hillary@hillaryhelpsulearn.com](mailto:Hillary@hillaryhelpsulearn.com) or call 207-467-5850

AT for Education - [atforded.com](http://atforded.com) or call 844-922-2833

Maine AT Solutions - [kelleysmithatp@outlook.com](mailto:kelleysmithatp@outlook.com) or call 207-321-1051

Gallant Therapy Services - [maineot.com/](http://maineot.com/) - 207-623-3900