

Assistive Technology (AT) in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

The essentials that all educators, parents, and students need to know.

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Topics for Today

- What is an AT device vs. AT service?
- Low-tech to high-tech AT
- Legal connections
- AT Development
- AT Implementation
- AT in the IEP vs. IFSP
- Roles in Planning
- AT Evaluation Tools
- State AT Supports
- National AT Supports



What is an “AT device” under IDEA?

Part A. Section 1401. (1) Assistive technology device

(A) In general

- 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 functional capabilities of a child with a disability.

(B) Exception

- The term does not include a medical device that is surgically implanted, or the replacement of such device.

What is an “AT service” under IDEA?

Part A. Section 1401. Assistive technology service (2)

- 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. Such term includes:
 - **(A) the evaluation** of the needs of such child, including a functional evaluation of the child in the child’s customary environment;
 - **(B) purchasing, leasing,** or otherwise providing for the **acquisition of** assistive technology devices by such child;
 - **(C) selecting, designing, fitting, customizing, adapting, applying, maintaining, repairing, or replacing** assistive technology devices;

Part A. Section 1401. (2) Assistive technology service continued...

- The term “assistive technology service” also includes:
 - (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 such **child**, or, where appropriate, the **family** of such child; and
 - (F) **training or technical assistance for professionals** (including individuals providing education and rehabilitation services), **employers**, or other individuals who provide services to, employ, or are otherwise substantially involved in the **major life functions** of such child.

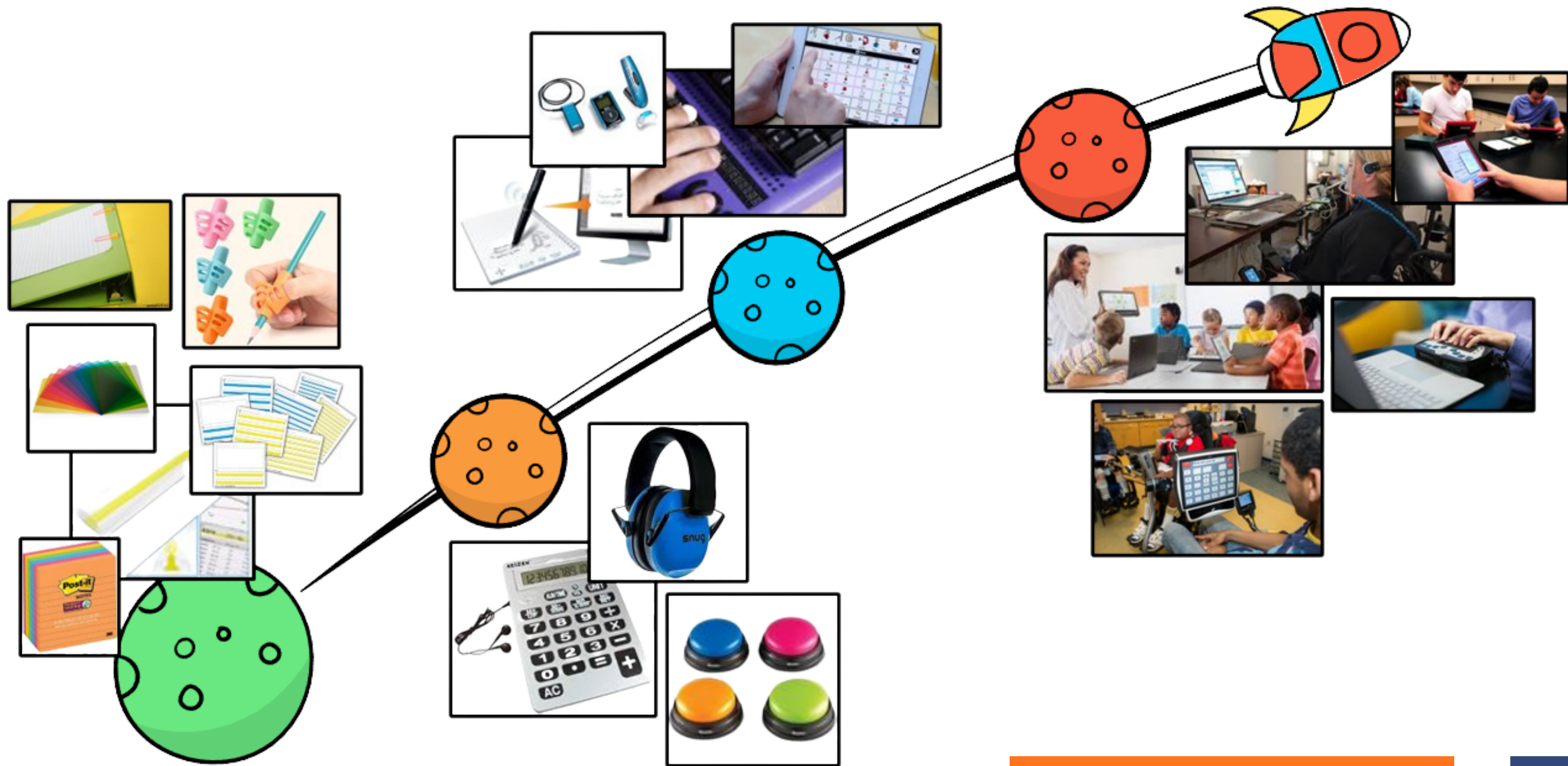
“A device alone is not an intervention”

A device **can fail** when teams **do not** provide:

- Time to learn the device
- Opportunities to use it during authentic activities
- Adult modeling and prompting plans
- Vocabulary or content programming
- Technical support and maintenance
- Coordination across home, classroom, therapy, and community settings
- Ongoing review of whether the support is working



Low-Tech to High-Tech AT



Low-Tech to High-Tech AT

Area of need	Low-tech examples	Mid-tech examples	High-tech examples
Reading and literacy	Reading window; color overlay; large-print text; tactile markers; braille materials	Text-to-speech; read-aloud; audiobooks; digital text; font, spacing, contrast, and magnification settings; digital dictionaries	Screen reader; refreshable braille display; braille notetaker; OCR with specialized access; advanced magnification system
Written expression	Raised-line paper; raised-line graph paper; pencil grip; adapted paper; slant board; printed graphic organizer	Speech-to-text; word prediction; spell check; grammar tools; digital graphic organizers; keyboarding; digital note-taking	Eye-gaze writing access; switch-scanning writing access; head-tracking; highly customized alternative keyboard or computer-access system
Communication	Printed communication board; core-word board; communication book; choice board; eye-gaze board	Single-message or sequential-message voice-output device; basic communication app; digital visual-choice display	Dynamic-display AAC; speech-generating device; individualized robust AAC system; eye-gaze AAC; switch-access AAC
Vision access	Tactile graphics; braille labels; raised-line paper; handheld optical magnifier	Built-in magnification; contrast settings; enlarged cursor; electronic magnifier; talking labeler	Screen reader; refreshable braille display; braille notetaker; OCR-to-speech system; advanced video magnification



Low-Tech to High-Tech AT

Area of need	Low-tech examples	Mid-tech examples	High-tech examples
Hearing access	Written directions; printed notes; visual schedule; visual alert	Captions; transcripts; live captions; remote microphone system; FM/DM system; hearing-device connectivity	Specialized real-time transcription system; customized auditory-access system integrated with other technologies
Motor and computer access	Non-slip mat; keyguard; adapted writing tools; page turner; positioning supports	Trackball mouse; joystick mouse; large-key keyboard; alternative mouse; touch-screen settings; voice control; built-in keyboard accessibility	Eye-gaze software; head tracking; facial-recognition access; switch scanning; customized computer-control system
Organization and executive functioning	Printed checklist; visual schedule; paper planner; task strip; color-coded folders	Digital calendar; reminders; visual timer; digital checklist; task-management app; note-taking tools	Customized scheduling, prompting, or environmental-control system integrated with communication and access technology
Math	Raised-line graph paper; number line; tactile manipulatives; adapted ruler; color-coded operation guides	Talking calculator; digital manipulatives; digital graph paper; accessible calculator; read-aloud math tools	Accessible math software with screen-reader or braille integration; specialized accessible graphing system



AT & Legal Connections

IDEA Part B: ages 3–21 and IEPs

- The IEP team must consider whether the child needs assistive technology devices and services whenever it develops, reviews, **or** revises the IEP.
 - This is one of IDEA's required "special factors."

Key legal connection: FAPE

- If an IEP team determines AT devices and/or services are required for a student to receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), the public agency must make them available.

Home and other settings

- School-purchased AT may need to be used at home or in other settings when the IEP team determines that access is necessary for the student to receive FAPE.
- This is an individualized determination.
- It is not based on a blanket district policy or a general "no devices leave school" rule.

AT & Legal Connections

IDEA Part C: birth through age 2 and IFSPs

- For infants and toddlers receiving early-intervention services under IDEA Part C, AT devices and services can be included in the IFSP when needed to support the child's development and participation in natural environments and everyday routines. AT may be addressed within early-intervention services, family supports, outcomes, strategies, and transition planning.

Critical distinction

- **IEP**
 - Education-centered planning for eligible children ages 3–21.
 - The plan focuses on FAPE, access to instruction, progress in the general education curriculum, and educational benefit.
 - **IFSP**
 - Family-centered early-intervention planning for from birth through age 2.
 - The plan emphasizes family priorities, functional outcomes, and participation in natural environments and daily routines.
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Who is Responsible?

Age/program	Planning team	Entity responsible for services
Birth to under age 3	IFSP Team	Maine Child Development Services, or CDS, through the State Intermediate Educational Unit
Ages 3–5	IFSP or IEP Team, depending on program and plan	CDS and/or the responsible school administrative unit, as applicable
Ages 3–22	IEP Team	School Administrative Unit, or SAU; this includes local school districts and other responsible public agencies



Roles in Planning and Implementation

- **Student or child**
 - Shares preferences, strengths, interests, and challenges whenever possible.
 - Learns to use tools and, over time, builds self-advocacy skills.
 - Provides essential feedback about comfort, fatigue, ease of use, privacy, and what works in real situations.



Roles in Planning and Implementation

- **Parents and caregivers**
 - Share priorities, routines, successes, concerns, language and cultural considerations, and what works at home.
 - Participate in trials, training, and decisions.
 - Help teams understand whether tools transfer across settings.
 - Are partners in the decision-making process, not simply recipients of information.



Roles in Planning and Implementation

- **Educators**

- Build AT into daily instruction, assignments, assessments, classroom routines, and peer interactions.
- Ensure the learner has meaningful, repeated opportunities to use AT.
- Collect implementation and progress data.
- Coordinate accessible materials and instructional technology.



Roles in Planning and Implementation

- **Related Services**

- Depending on the learner's needs, professionals such as the following may contribute expertise related to communication, access, sensory needs, motor access, positioning, mobility, or participation:
 - speech-language pathologists,
 - occupational therapists,
 - physical therapists,
 - vision specialists,
 - teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing,
 - orientation and mobility specialists,
 - behavior specialists, and
 - school psychologists

Roles in Planning and Implementation

- **AT specialists or teams**
 - Coordinate AT assessment and trials.
 - Help identify required features rather than prematurely selecting brands or products.
 - Support setup, customization, programming, training, maintenance, troubleshooting, and data review.
 - Help teams address implementation across settings.
- **Administrators and district leaders**
 - Create procedures for AT referral, assessment, procurement, training, maintenance, loan systems, and repair.
 - Ensure staff have the capacity to implement AT.
 - Avoid delays caused by unclear responsibility or fragmented processes.



Where is AT in an IEP?

- AT does not have to be isolated in one place.
- Highly recommended to be within the AT section of the IEP.
 - Present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP)
 - Annual goals
 - Special education and related services
 - Supplementary aids and services
 - Accommodations
 - Supports for school personnel
 - Transition services
 - Assistive technology consideration

Strong IEP Documentation

- Effective documentation is specific enough for **consistent** implementation.
- **It should answer:**
 - What device, software, materials, or feature will be available?
 - What functional purpose does it serve?
 - In which settings, activities, and times will it be used?
 - Who will ensure access, setup, instruction, and troubleshooting?
 - What training will the student, family, and staff receive?
 - How will the team monitor effectiveness?
 - Will the device be used at home or in other settings if necessary for FAPE?

Weak vs. Strong IEP Language

Less useful wording	More implementable wording
“Student may use technology as needed.”	“During written assignments exceeding one paragraph, Jordan will have access to speech-to-text with word prediction and will receive direct instruction and guided practice in its use.”
“AAC will be available.”	“Across classroom, lunch, specials, and therapy routines, Sofia will have immediate access to her speech-generating device. Staff will model core vocabulary during naturally occurring interactions and document communication opportunities weekly.”
“Provide text-to-speech.”	“For grade-level digital text, Sam will use text-to-speech with synchronized highlighting, headphones, and access to teacher-assigned materials in an accessible digital format.”
“Use a visual schedule.”	“At arrival, transitions, independent work, and dismissal, Kai will use an individualized visual schedule with a first–then support; the case manager will review and update it weekly with input from the family.”



Where is AT in an IFSP?

- **In an IFSP, AT should connect to:**
 - functional child and family outcomes,
 - daily routines,
 - services, and
 - transition planning (IFSP to an IEP).
- **AT supports could include:**
 - A low-tech choice board with photos of people, foods, toys, and activities
 - Modeling of gestures, signs, symbols, or AAC vocabulary during routines
 - A consistent location for the communication system
 - Family and provider coaching on wait time, aided language modeling, and responding to all communication attempts
 - Ongoing review of what work best in the family's routines

Where is AT in an IFSP?

- **Family resources, priorities, and concerns**
 - What routines matter to the family and what barriers they experience
- **Present levels of development**
 - Describe functional participation, communication, mobility, play, feeding, sensory access, and emerging independence
- **Functional outcomes**
 - Connect AT to meaningful activities, such as joining family meals, participating in play, making choices, or engaging during child care
- **Strategies and activities**
 - Describe how caregivers and providers will use AT naturally during routines
- **Early-intervention services**
 - Include AT-related evaluation, consultation, device access, training, and support when appropriate
- **Natural environments**
 - Use in home, child care, playground, community, and where the child typically participates
- **Transition planning**
 - Address the transfer of information, equipment, communication systems, and supports when moving to preschool services

Weak vs. Strong IFSP Language

Less useful wording	More implementable IFSP wording
“Use communication supports during routines.”	“During snack, outdoor play, and arrival at child care, Amara will have a portable picture-based communication display with familiar foods, toys, people, and actions. Her caregivers and early-intervention provider will point to and model words during interactions, pause for Amara to respond, and add new vocabulary as her interests and routines change.”
“Provide support for participation in play.”	“During floor play with family members and peers, Theo will use a consistently positioned switch to activate adapted toys and music activities. The occupational therapist will coach caregivers on positioning, wait time, and turn-taking so Theo has repeated opportunities to initiate and continue shared play.”
“Give access to sensory supports.”	“During busy routines, including grocery trips, family gatherings, and child-care transitions, Nia’s caregivers will offer identified supports such as noise-reduction headphones, a small comfort item, and a visual ‘break’ choice. The team will review caregiver observations to identify which supports help Nia remain engaged and recover from overstimulation.”
“Support independence during meals.”	“At family meals and snacks, Owen will use a non-slip mat, stable seating, and an angled spoon to participate in self-feeding. The occupational therapist will collaborate with the family to adjust positioning and utensils based on Owen’s comfort, safety, and growing independence.”

AT Evaluation Tools for Teams

SETT Framework

- Widely recognized framework for educational AT decision making
- Can be used by educators or parents
- It keeps teams from beginning with a device rather than a participation need.
 - **S** Student
 - **E** Environment
 - **T** Tasks
 - **T** Tools

S

is for student's **strengths**, current performance and weaknesses in:

- Reading
- Math
- Writing
- Communication
- Learning and studying
- Vision, hearing and mobility
- Activities of daily living



E

is for learning **environment**:

- How is the classroom physically arranged?
- What materials and equipment are used?
- How is instruction given (small groups, whole class)?



T

is **tasks** for learning:

- What is the class expected to be able to do?
- Which tasks are essential for your child to be successful?



T

is for **tools** being used to help your child and other tools that may help.

The IEP team considers the assistive technology range:

Low/No Tech



Mid-Level Tech



High Tech



AT Evaluation Tools for Teams

Quality Indicators for Assistive Technology (QIAT) Indicators and Matrices

- Evaluating the quality of an AT service process
- Quality indicators for:
 - AT consideration,
 - assessment,
 - IEP documentation,
 - implementation,
 - training, and
 - effectiveness evaluation
- It is **not** intended to select a particular device for a student.



AT Evaluation Tools for Teams

Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SIFTS)

- Web-based tool to assist in AT decision-making
- Used across the lifespan (children to adults)
- Developed by the OCALI AT & AEM Center
- Helps teams match a student's needs and strengths with AT features
- Can be used by:
 - parents
 - students
 - educators
 - administrators
 - public consumers



AT Evaluation Tools for Teams

Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative (WATI)

- WATI materials embed the SETT Framework.
- Widely used **free** resources:
 - AT Consideration Guide and Planning tools for IEP teams
 - AT Assessment Process and forms
 - Student Information Guide
 - AT Checklist
 - Area specific forms (e.g., computer access, motor skills, composition, reading, math, organization, vision, hearing, communication, mobility).
 - Professional-development materials



Myths & Facts about AT

Myth: “AT means expensive, high-tech equipment.”

Fact: AT includes low-tech, mid-tech, and high-tech supports. A pencil grip, visual schedule, adapted material, communication board, screen reader, or AAC system may all be AT depending on the child’s functional needs. IDEA’s device definition is deliberately broad.

Myth: “Only students with significant disabilities need AT.”

Fact: AT may support any eligible child whose functional capabilities, access, communication, learning, or participation can be increased, maintained, or improved through a device and/or service.

Myth: “The school only has to consider AT once.”

Fact: IEP teams must consider AT whenever an IEP is developed, reviewed, or revised. AT needs can change as environments, curriculum demands, developmental skills, and student goals change.



Myths & Facts about AT

Myth: “A device is enough.”

Fact: Training, customization, implementation support, collaboration, maintenance, and progress monitoring are all potential AT services under IDEA.

Myth: “School-owned AT cannot go home.”

Fact: On an individualized basis, school-purchased AT must be available at home or in other settings when the IEP team determines this is necessary for the student to receive FAPE.

Myth: “A parent must buy the technology first.”

Fact: If the IEP team determines AT is necessary for FAPE, the public agency is responsible for ensuring it is available as required by the student’s IEP



Maine State AT Supports



Maine CITE and AT4Maine

Email: info@mainecite.org

Maine CITE is Maine's federally funded assistive-technology program and a Maine Department of Education program. It provides information and assistance, training, technical assistance, and resources related to assistive technology, digital accessibility, Accessible Educational Materials, and AT funding; its AT4Maine service offers device demonstrations and free short-term loans so families, students, educators, and providers can explore tools before making a decision.



Maine Department of Education: Office of Special Services & Inclusive Education

Email: Erin.Frazier@maine.gov

The Maine DOE Office of Special Services & Inclusive Education provides leadership, guidance, and oversight for IDEA Part B special education and IDEA Part C early-intervention services in Maine. It is a state-level resource for questions about MUSER, IEPs, IFSPs, FAPE, special education procedures, and the responsibilities of School Administrative Units and Child Development Services.



Maine State AT Supports



Maine Parent Federation

Email: parentconnect@mpf.org

Maine Parent Federation offers statewide information, referral, training, and individual support for families of children with disabilities and special health care needs. Families can contact Parent Information Specialists for assistance understanding special education, disability services, IEPs, and available supports.



University of Maine Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies: Accessibility and AT

Email: ccids@maine.edu

The University of Maine Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies offers disability-inclusion and accessibility resource connections, including links to Maine CITE, AT4Maine, and other Maine AT supports. It can be useful for educators, families, students, and providers seeking broader information about disability inclusion and accessible technology.



National AT Supports



[Administration for Community Living: Assistive Technology Program](#)

Email: Robert.Groenendaal@acl.hhs.gov

The U.S. Administration for Community Living oversees federal assistive-technology initiatives and supports statewide AT programs under the Assistive Technology Act. Its information explains national AT-program activities, including device demonstrations, device loans, reuse programs, financing supports, training, and public awareness.



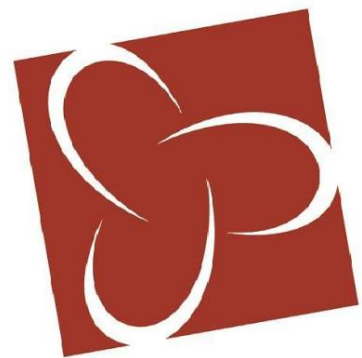
[AT3 Center: State Assistive Technology Program Directory](#)

Email: info@at3center.net

The AT3 Center directory helps individuals locate the Assistive Technology Act Program in every state and U.S. territory. It is particularly useful for finding state-specific contacts, device-loan libraries, demonstrations, reutilization programs, training, and funding-information resources.



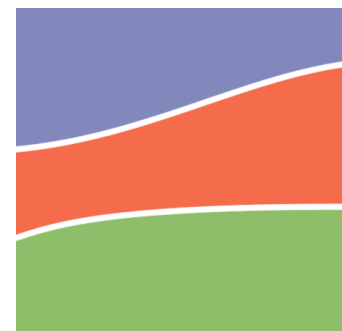
National AT Supports



RESNA: Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America

Email: info@resna.org

RESNA is a national professional organization focused on technology solutions for people with disabilities and older adults. It provides professional resources, continuing education, standards-related work, and the Assistive Technology Professional, or ATP, certification, which may help schools and families identify qualified AT professionals.



National Center on Accessible Educational Materials for Learning (AEM Center) at CAST

Email: aem@cast.org

The AEM Center provides national resources, technical assistance, and guidance on accessible educational materials and technologies for learners with disabilities across the lifespan. It is particularly helpful for schools and families seeking information about accessible digital text, braille, large print, audio formats, captions, accessible instructional materials, and systems for timely provision of accessible content.



National AT Supports



[CAST: Accessibility and Inclusive Technology](#)

Email: info@cast.org

CAST supports education systems in developing accessible and inclusive learning environments through Universal Design for Learning, or UDL, digital accessibility, accessible materials, and inclusive technology practices. This resource can help teams distinguish between universally designed supports available to many learners and individualized AT supports needed for a particular child or student.



[National Center on Accessible Digital Educational Materials and Instruction \(NCADEMI\)](#)

Email: info@ncademi.org

NCADEMI provides resources, training, and technical assistance to support accessible digital materials and instruction for students with disabilities from preschool through graduation. It is a useful resource for educators and leaders working on accessible digital documents, learning platforms, instructional materials, and technology systems.



National AT Supports



PACER Center: Assistive Technology and the Simon Technology Center

Email: stc@pacer.org

PACER Center's Simon Technology Center provides assistive-technology information, consultations, training, and opportunities to explore AT devices and software. Its resources can help families, students, educators, and related service providers consider AT for communication, literacy, writing, computer access, independence, and participation across home, school, and community settings.



Center on Inclusive Technology and Education Systems (CITES)

Email: cites@cast.org

CITES is an OSEP-funded national technical-assistance center that helps education systems create and sustain inclusive technology systems. Its resources are especially relevant for district and school leaders, educators, related service providers, and AT teams working on equitable access to digital tools, AT services, accessible technology procurement, staff capacity, and sustainable implementation practices.



National AT Supports



Described and Captioned Media Program (DCMP)

Email: info@dcmp.org

DCMP is an OSEP-funded program that provides accessible educational videos and media, including captioned and described content, at no cost to eligible users. It is especially helpful for students who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired, deafblind, or who otherwise need accessible video content and related instructional resources.



National Instructional Materials Access Center (NIMAC)

Email: nimac@aph.org

NIMAC is an OSEP-funded national repository of source files used to produce accessible formats of K–12 instructional materials for eligible students with print disabilities. It primarily supports Authorized Users and Accessible Media Producers rather than distributing books directly to families; schools and state systems can use NIMAC files to obtain braille, large print, audio, and accessible digital text.



National AT Supports



Center for Parent Information and Resources (CPIR)

Email: info@parentcenterhub.org

CPIR supports the national network of federally funded Parent Training and Information Centers and Community Parent Resource Centers. It provides family-friendly resources on IDEA, IEPs, IFSPs, early intervention, transition, accessibility, disability-specific information, and family-school partnerships, and it helps families find their state Parent Center.



Bookshare

Email: support@bookshare.org

Bookshare is an OSEP-funded provider of accessible educational materials for eligible students and other qualified individuals with print disabilities. It offers a large library of books and educational materials in accessible digital formats that can be read using text-to-speech, braille displays, enlarged text, and other individualized reading preferences.



Thank you!

Assistive Technology (AT) in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

The essentials that all educators, parents, and students need to know.



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