

Section 4

# **Assistive Technology Consideration in the IEP**

2013

## Implications of Assistive Technology Consideration

Beginning with the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997, the IEP team is required to “consider” the AT needs of every student receiving special education services.

### 1. Development of IEP

#### a. Consideration of special factors. The IEP team must:

##### i. Consider whether the child needs assistive technology devices and services

(IDEA 2004, 300.324)

When addressing “AT consideration” within the IEP process, it is important to realize that “consideration” is by nature a brief process that must be conducted during the development of every student’s annual IEP. At least one person on the IEP team should have some knowledge about AT. AT consideration requires that the team participate in a consistent decision-making process in relation to the student’s goals and objectives that facilitate access and progress in the general curriculum.

The following is a listing of the quality indicators for consideration of AT needs to help teams effectively implement the consideration process:

## Quality Indicators for Consideration of Assistive Technology Needs

Consideration of the need for AT devices and services is an integral part of the educational process contained in IDEA for referral, evaluation, and IEP development. Although AT is considered at all stages of the process, the Consideration Quality Indicators are specific to the consideration of AT in the development of the IEP as mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In most instances, the Quality Indicators are also appropriate for the consideration of AT for students who qualify for services under other legislation (e.g., 504, ADA).

### 1. Assistive technology devices and services are considered for all students with disabilities regardless of type or severity of disability.

**Intent:** Consideration of assistive technology need is required by IDEA and is based on the unique educational needs of the student. Students are not excluded from consideration of AT for any reason. (e.g., type of disability, age, administrative concerns)

### 2. During the development of an individualized educational program, every IEP team consistently uses a collaborative decision-making process that supports systematic consideration of each student’s possible need for assistive technology devices and services.

**Intent:** A collaborative process that ensures that all IEP teams effectively consider the assistive technology of students is defined, communicated, and consistently used throughout the agency. Processes may vary from agency to agency to most effectively address student needs under local conditions.

**3. IEP team members have the collective knowledge and skills needed to make informed assistive technology decisions and seek assistance when needed.**

**Intent:** IEP team members combine their knowledge and skills to determine if assistive technology devices and services are needed to remove barriers to student performance. When the assistive technology needs are beyond the knowledge and scope of the IEP team, additional resources and support are sought.

**4. Decisions regarding the need for assistive technology devices and services are based on the student's IEP goals and objectives, access to curricular and extracurricular activities, and progress in the general education curriculum.**

**Intent:** As the IEP team determines the tasks the student needs to complete and develops the goals and objectives, the team considers whether assistive technology is required to accomplish those tasks.

**5. The IEP team gathers and analyzes data about the student, customary environments, educational goals, and tasks when considering a student's need for assistive technology devices and services.**

**Intent:** The IEP team shares and discusses information about the student's present levels of achievement in relationship to the environments, and tasks to determine if the student requires assistive technology devices and services to participate actively, work on expected tasks, and make progress toward mastery of educational goals.

**6. When assistive technology is needed, the IEP team explores a range of assistive technology devices, services, and other supports that address identified needs.**

**Intent:** The IEP team considers various supports and services that address the educational needs of the student and may include no tech, low tech, mid-tech and/or high tech solutions and devices. IEP team members do not limit their thinking to only those devices and services currently available within the district.

**7. The assistive technology consideration process and results are documented in the IEP and include a rationale for the decision and supporting evidence.**

**Intent:** Even though IEP documentation may include a checkbox verifying that assistive technology has been considered, the reasons for the decisions and recommendations should be clearly stated. Supporting evidence may include the results of assistive technology assessments, data from device trials, differences in achievement with and without assistive technology, student preferences for competing devices, and teacher observations, among others.

**COMMON ERRORS**

1. AT is considered for students with severe disabilities only.
2. No one on the IEP team is knowledgeable regarding AT.
3. Team does not use a consistent process based on data about the student, environment and tasks to make decisions.
4. Consideration of AT is limited to those items that are familiar to team members or are available in the district.

5. Team members fail to consider access to the curriculum and IEP goals in determining if AT is required in order for the student to receive FAPE.
6. If AT is not needed, team fails to document the basis of its decisions.

(The QIAT Consortium, 2012, pp. 1-2)

Prior to AT consideration within the IEP development, the educational team must identify the student's unique needs and what tasks are to be performed in the educational program. The team must have realistic expectations of what the student should be able to do and establish goals and objectives for specially designed instruction.

### **Consider these examples:**

- A 7-year-old student with cerebral palsy is unable to use a pencil to write letters and words clearly. He dictates answers to his teacher for many assignments. What expectations should his teacher have for him to independently write answers in his school assignments? Should AT be considered?
- An 8-year-old student has a severe visual impairment. The text in the second-grade books is too small for her to recognize. Other students read the text aloud to her. What expectations for increased independence are there for this student to gain information from text material? Should AT be considered?
- A 13-year-old student with learning disabilities is able to write assignments. However, because of severe spelling and grammar errors, most of his assignments are unacceptable. What are the expectations for this student to be able to correct spelling and grammar in all assignments? Should AT be considered?
- A student with developmental disabilities participates in a fourth-grade inclusion classroom. The parents want the student to participate in all activities that the other students are doing. The subject material is cognitively becoming difficult for the student. Therefore, a full-time aide assists him so that he can complete assignments. Are the curriculum expectations appropriate for this student? Should AT be considered?
- A student in the intermediate multiple disabilities classroom is not able to speak. He initiates a few signs and uses gestures to obtain his wants and desires. He frequently displays behavioral outbursts during classroom activities when others don't understand what he is trying to communicate. Because of this behavior, he is not included in any general education settings. What expectations are there for this student to communicate more effectively? Should AT be considered?

In each of these instances, the student is unable to participate in classroom activities through typical modes due to his/her disability. Determination of special education services and goals and objectives must be based on a clear understanding of the student's needs and the classroom expectations.

When developing the student's IEP, the Present Levels of Performance should define the educational expectations as well as the student's areas of difficulty due to his/her disability. The educational expectations should start with the expected participation of typical students and then specify what is expected of the student with disabilities. Enabling the student to participate may involve a series of interventions, strategies, modifications, accommodations, as well as AT.

For these reasons, consideration of AT must be integrated into the IEP process, as opposed to being an afterthought as simply a "special factor."

As the result of AT consideration, the team will reach one of three decisions:

1. AT is not needed. The student is making adequate progress with the available instruction and interventions. Indicate "no."
2. AT is needed. Indicate "yes" and describe in the IEP how, when, and where the new or current devices and services will be provided.
3. AT is needed, but the IEP team is unsure of what devices and services are most appropriate. Indicate "yes." Then decide the areas on which AT will be tried and gather data to determine the best solution. The team may explore resources within or from outside the district to adequately assess the student's need for AT.

## Documenting Assistive Technology Consideration

The IEP document makes provisions for special factors, which includes consideration of the student's need for AT. The following statement is listed on the Special Instructional Factors page of the IEP:

Does the child need assistive technology devices and/or services?

YES    NO

This simple check system does not suggest any means for the IEP team to reach a conclusion or document that the student's AT needs have been considered.

The OCALI Consideration for Assistive Technology Checklist form (see Appendix B) lists several questions to help guide IEP teams in a comprehensive discussion for the purpose of considering students' AT needs as they relate to school performance. Following is an example of the form with annotations for each of the questions indicating the type and content of discussions that may occur.

# OCALI Consideration for Assistive Technology Checklist

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Check an area in which there is concern about the student functioning as independently as possible. (If no concern, indicate "no" in the Special Considerations section of the IEP.)

Academic

- reading       writing       math       learning/studying

Communication

- understanding language       using language       speaking clearly

Access

- computer access       mobility       seating & positioning

Environmental Control

Activities of Daily Living

- play       recreation/leisure       self-care       vocational

Social Behavior

- following routines and rules       making transitions       staying on task

Vision

Hearing

Other \_\_\_\_\_

**1. What specific task in the area identified above do we want this student to perform that he/she is unable to do because of his/her disability?**

The team should define and describe the specific tasks that the student must be able to do. "Other" areas of need may be related to life skills areas, such as mobility, seating and positioning, environmental control, or activities of daily living.

**2. What current special strategies, accommodations or assistive technologies have been tried to enable the student to complete this task? How well have they worked? (Include in the Present Levels of Performance section of IEP.)**

The IEP team should recognize and discuss the strategies, accommodations, or AT that are currently in place to facilitate achievement of the student's educational expectations. This may include current AT devices or services.

**"How well have they worked?"**

Have current strategies and tools enabled the student to accomplish the goals and objectives at the desired level of independence? If the answer to this question is "yes," the IEP must contain documentation to support this conclusion. If the answer is "no," the IEP team should continue to ask questions to determine the best course of action. The team should explore the reasons why the present accommodations are not meeting the student's needs. For example, the student's abilities may have changed or a new level of expected participation is in order. **(Include in the Present Levels of Performance section of IEP.)**

**3. Are there continuing barriers when the student attempts this task? If so, describe. (Include in the Present Levels of Performance section of IEP.)**

The team should be specific in determining the concerns that exist. Describe the team's new expectations for the student as related to the tasks that were previously defined. **(Include in the Present Levels of Performance section of IEP.)**

**4. Are there new or additional assistive technologies to be tried to address continuing barriers? If so, describe. (Document in Services section of IEP.)**

If team members have the necessary collaborative knowledge to identify new or additional technologies, these should be discussed at this time. If the team is not prepared to include these in the IEP, discussion should follow on what extended consideration and/or assessment is needed. **(Document in Services section of IEP.)**

**5. Is there a need for further investigation and/or assessment to determine assistive technology solutions? (Describe this plan and document in Services section of IEP.)**

The IEP team must now determine if the decisions regarding AT can be recommended during the immediate IEP process or if extended assessment is necessary to make determinations on AT devices and services that match the current concerns.

The existing team may remain the same during the extended assessment and decision-making process, or additional assistance may be required. Not every team will know everything about all possible AT devices and systems. The individual variables and expertise of team members must be considered at this point with regard to the appropriate course of action. **(Describe this plan and document in Services section of IEP.)**

Any current, new, and/or additional AT devices and services that are outlined on the consideration worksheet must be documented within the body of the IEP. AT devices and services may be included in the student's goals and objectives as a related service or as supplementary aids and services, depending on the situation.

Consideration of AT in the educational program must be ongoing. As the needs of the student change, or at the least during an annual IEP review, the process of consideration must continue.

## **The Difference Between Assistive Technology “Consideration” and Assistive Technology “Assessment”**

While AT consideration is generally a brief process, an AT assessment implies a more indepth look at the student’s abilities and needs for AT. The IEP team must understand the steps to be taken to obtain this assessment. The decision to complete an assessment that “extends” beyond the immediate IEP process must also be written into the IEP document, indicating the areas of concern that will be explored. The assessment procedures may be completed by the existing IEP team if knowledgeable resource persons serve on the team. Otherwise, it may be necessary to contact outside professionals.

For more information about AT consideration and AT assessment, please see the following two Assistive Technology Internet Modules “AT Consideration in the IEP Process” (Harris, 2011) and “AT Assessment Process in the School Environment” (Smith, 2011).

### **Summary**

This section presented information on the AT consideration process. District IEP teams must consider AT for all students with disabilities who have IEPs. The consideration process is more than putting a simple check in the AT section of the Special Factor section of the IEP. The team should have a meaningful discussion about the student’s needs related to AT. A form with discussion questions was provided to help guide teams in this process. Finally, the difference between AT consideration and AT assessment was discussed.

### **References**

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## Resources

Georgia Project for Assistive Technology (GPAT). (n.d.). Considering assistive technology for students with disabilities. <http://goo.gl/txH0p>

The QIAT Consortium. (2012). Quality indicators for including assistive technology in the IEP. In Quality indicators (pp. 5-6). [indicators.knowbility.org/indicators.html](http://indicators.knowbility.org/indicators.html)

Zabala, J. (2002). A brief introduction to the SETT framework. [www.sbac.edu/~ese/AT/referralprocess/SETTUPDATE.pdf](http://www.sbac.edu/~ese/AT/referralprocess/SETTUPDATE.pdf)

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