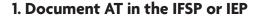# Assistive Technology: Tips for Administrators

As an administrator, you want the best for your staff and students, and for many students the use of assistive technology (AT) can help them achieve their best results. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) tells us that we must consider assistive technology devices and services but does not provide us with a lot of information about what this process looks like. Your staff may know that assistive technology can benefit their students, but they may need more information about how to provide access to AT for the child. Who do they talk to? Where do they document AT in the Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Program (IEP)? How do they acquire assistive technology for a student? Administrators can provide answers to these and other essential questions and make it possible for students to have access to assistive technology. Here are five tips on how administrators can take the lead and provide direction to staff to ensure that AT is available for students who need it.

1. Document AT in the IFSP or IEP

It's important to ensure that staff know where to document the use of assistive technology in the IFSP or IEP. Documentation provides clear evidence that the legal requirement to consider assistive technology has been met. More importantly, it communicates with all team members what decisions have been made about assistive technology for the child.

- Take time to show staff where and how AT is documented on the IFSP or IEP.
- Ensure staff know it is required to discuss, at least annually, a child's AT needs during the IFSP or IEP meeting.

- Provide guidance on how the use of AT should be phrased in the IFSP or IEP.
- Remind staff that it is also important to document a decision that assistive technology is not needed at a given time if that is the case.

2. Provide staff access to assistive technology

As an administrator, you can provide clear direction to staff about who to talk to regarding AT, what assistive technology resources are available, and how to request new AT for a classroom or student. Here are some tips for providing staff access to assistive technology:

- Create an AT lending library. Lending libraries are cost effective resources that help staff try and use assistive technology with students.
- If you have an AT lending library, make sure all staff are aware of this resource. Mention it during meetings and consider highlighting it on your district website.

- Familiarize yourself with other local resources your staff can use to try assistive technology that you don't have.
- Identify individuals who can serve as an AT point person that your staff can turn to if they have questions about assistive technology and how to access it in your district.
- It is helpful for your district to develop an AT use policy. This allows staff to confidently speak about district AT policies when communicating with families.

3. Clarify the AT funding process

Once staff are consistently using AT and documenting it on the IFSP or IEP, the next step is communicating how assistive technology is funded.

- Clarify your process for acquiring AT and how funding AT for a specific student might differ from how assistive technology is purchased for the classroom.
- Inform staff about the process for making assistive technology purchasing requests. If staff members are trying AT with individual students, much of this information (e.g., increased competence, inclusion, etc.) can be collected to help make funding decisions.
- Create an encouraging atmosphere where staff feel comfortable asking for assistive technology that would benefit students.
- Once a particular AT is funded, make sure staff know the policies for AT that belongs to the school. Who will be responsible for maintaining it? Will it be used in the child's home?

4. Share AT funding options with parents

For a child to fully benefit from assistive technology, it should also be used at home. It's important that your staff know about, and can refer parents to, the different funding sources or low-cost options available to help parents acquire assistive technology for their child.

- Parents should know that certain types of assistive technology, such as dedicated communication devices, may be covered by medical insurance or third-party billing.

- Many early childhood AT needs can be met using Do-It-Yourself (DIY) solutions, and staff can provide parents with ideas or resources for creating these.
- Some disability organizations offer families micro loans for assistive technology, allowing it to be paid for on a scheduled budget that fits their particular circumstances.
- Assistive technology reuse programs, such as PACER's SUPER (Still Useful Product and Equipment Referral) service, offer used assistive technology at low or no cost. For electronic technology, such as tablets, many vendors offer refurbished devices that provide a fully functional device at a lower price.

5. Encourage staff to take part in high-quality professional development opportunities

Technology is constantly changing and it's important for staff to stay current. There are numerous web-based resources and AT conferences that make it easier to do that.

- Keep your staff informed about available assistive technology webinars and workshops. Many of these are free of charge.
- Consider attending assistive technology conferences or hiring other organizations to provide AT in-services.
- Encourage staff to use social media such as Pinterest and Twitter to connect with other professionals and assistive technology resources.

Research demonstrates that students can benefit greatly from the use of assistive technology, both in the classroom and at home. As an administrator, it's up to you to provide your staff with direction and assistance to ensure that students have the opportunity to realize those benefits and achieve their highest potential. These tips should help you do that.