Helping Parents Fund Assistive Technology (AT)

Introduction

It is important to have a process in place for the consideration of assistive technology (AT). Schools are legally required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to discuss and consider if AT is needed for the child or student. Having a process improves understanding of AT consideration for staff and families. It ensures AT consideration is done appropriately and with high quality.

Schools are the first line of funding for providing AT when it has been identified as a need and written into a student's Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), Individualized Education Program (IEP), or 504 Plan. If appropriate, schools may use a third party resource such as third-party billing to fund AT. An example of this would be when a district bills a family's insurance, with their permission, for assistive technology such as communication devices, and services such as occupational therapy. When devices and services are deemed medically necessary, insurance payments can be a source of funding for the school.

Schools often have AT that they assign or purchase to meet the needs of their students. When a student no longer needs it, AT is often put into the school's AT inventory for other student's use.

Membership in local assistive technology lending libraries, such as PACER Center's National Simon Technology Center, can help schools leverage a larger inventory for trying technology. They can try unique items they may not want to purchase, use devices for self-training, or check out items as a short-term accommodation for a student whose device is being repaired or replaced.

When a school shares information about AT resources, parents have increased access to technology to try to meet their child's needs at home and in the community. It is important for schools to share AT resources such as **AT Reuse** (see below) on their websites, newsletters, and other communications parents receive. Some research on using AT with young children shows that the most frequent source of AT information for parents is other parents. This tip sheet was written to help increase awareness of available resources and to encourage school districts to share this type of information with parents.

What is AT Reuse?

"How do I pay for assistive technology?" is one of the questions parents most frequently ask PACER Center. Resources can include waivers, low interest loans, and grants. One highly underused resource is **AT Reuse** initiatives.

AT reuse is the process of giving life to used AT. Recycling initiatives, refurbishing activities, and reuse initiatives are all examples. Not only do AT reuse initiatives save thousands of dollars, but they often connect parents with other resources.

PACER's federally funded project, Technology to Improve Kids' Educational Success (TIKES) found that there was a lack of awareness by district administrators and educators about AT resources. Imagine the difference it could make getting this information to parents. Consider adding the resources in this tipsheet's "AT Reuse Resources" section to websites and informational newsletters, and asking staff to share with parents as a needed resource.

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AT Reuse Resources ....

Facebook

PACER Center's Buy and Sell Group on Facebook **http://www.tinyurl.com/STCATReuse** is a great AT Reuse initiative. **MN Special Needs Equipment for Sale Facebook Buy and Sell Group** is a free and easy way for families and professionals to give new life to used equipment. People who have items to give away or sell post the item in the Facebook group; members then have an opportunity to claim, or buy the item, or tag family and friends that might be interested. As of May 2018, this initiative has garnered over 1,400 members and over 600 postings. Below are examples of items listed on PACER's Facebook AT Reuse Group page.

Bath chair

Switch

Handcycle

Quote from an AT Reuse Group Member on Facebook:

"The PACER Facebook Reuse group is helpful. I have wanted this piece of assistive technology for my son for the last 10 years. Finding these kinds of deals on these types of pages is extremely helpful. Sometimes the pages teach us new things or give me new ideas and sometimes it is the fastest way to reach out to others for advice or help! Thanks again for the track ball. My son loves it and now can use it at home and not just in the school setting!

- Parent

Computer Refurbishing

Some organizations accept donations of gently used computers and refurbish them. Items are then given away or sold at a reduced cost. One such program is UCP Central Minnesota. This organization sells and gives away new and refurbished computers through their Access for All program located online at **https://ucpcentralmn.org/computers**. Individuals who would like to receive a computer must apply and 1) have a disability, or a family member with a disability and/or 2) receive state aid based on need, and intend to use the computer for employment, education, or other self-improvement.

Device Exchange Programs

Every state has a federally funded assistive technology program. Use of funds support a variety of AT activities such as loans, demonstrations, and AT Reuse. In Minnesota, this is the STAR program **https://mn.gov/admin/star**.