



The Computer Monitor



Volume XVII

Fall 2003



*Simon Technology Center Open House
Saturday, November 8, 2003
10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
PACER Center
8161 Normandale Blvd.
Bloomington, MN 55437-1044*

Children and young adults with disabilities and their families and professionals serving them are invited to try assistive technology devices for home, school, work, and play. There will be interactive games for all ages, a photo shoot, and snacks and beverages. Popular children's author Nancy Carlson will read to children from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The Open House is sponsored in collaboration with AbleNet, Inc., a local vendor of assistive technology.

Please join us! Call PACER at 952-838-9000 to register.

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Funding Your Assistive Technology

By Janet Peters, Coordinator

Michael Manning is a typical 11-year-old boy who loves fishing and listening to the Back Street Boys. Michael also has cerebral palsy and has a new assistive technology system. Michael's computer helps him with communication, academics, and just plain having fun.



Michael relaxing at home

It's been a long haul to select and fund the right technology for Michael's complex needs. Michael first tried a computer at PACER Center when he was 4 years old. For the last couple of years, Michael, his family and school

have been trying and evaluating different systems with potential to help him. They finally settled on the Mercury Computer from Assistive Technology Inc. In addition to the Mercury, Michael uses proximity switches on his electric wheelchair to operate his computer with his head. Michael's mom, Cathy, did much of the research to find a system. She talked with the STC, explored information on the Internet, and tried equipment at workshops and conferences.

Funding the equipment was the family's next big challenge. Michael's system cost approximately \$14,000, including the computer, software, mounting system, and switches. The Mannings were able to obtain funding for the computer, software, and wireless internet access through Michael's Home and Community Based Waiver. The family also explored using their private health insurance, which would pay for part of the device because Michael uses it to communicate. Cathy

recommends taking the time necessary to select and try technology before applying for funding. She said the equipment trials really allowed Michael to learn the system, so she and the school could make an educated evaluation. It normally takes a year to apply for waiver funds, so being sure about your technology choices is critical.

There are several established funding sources for assistive technology, but obtaining financial assistance can be a complex matter. Often assistive technology is funded within larger programs, such as special education or by medical insurance. But persistence, assertiveness, and imagination will often be rewarded in extraordinary ways.

Systemic barriers are particularly difficult to overcome because they relate to administrative and bureaucratic obstacles. They are exemplified by agencies that provide access to technology but only for specific types of applicants, or agencies with the potential to fund the acquisition of assistive technology but only for specific or limited activities.

The goals for technology will determine the selection of equipment and prioritizing of potential funding sources. It is useful to begin collecting information on all potential sources as early as possible. Generally speaking, funding sources can be organized according to their criteria, which may include:

- The purpose for using the technology (such as vocational, educational, communication, quality of life and independent living issues, or medical care)

Selecting the right technology and funding can be time consuming, but the effort is worth it.

Needs

- The nature of the equipment
- The age of the user
- Location requirements
- Financial circumstances requirements

Meeting the Criteria

The chances of persuading people or organizations to financially support the purchase of the assistive technology increase with the ability to meet their criteria, to follow their procedures, and to use their language. By researching potential funders thoroughly, parents learn what information funders need.

Funding sources have different and sometimes complex sets of selection criteria. Parents are advised to review the eligibility criteria carefully and not dismiss a potential source until they are certain it will not work for them or their child. For instance, many programs use “means testing,” which is a way of determining eligibility for a program or service based upon income, resources, or other measures of an individual’s family economic status. Within the means tests, however, some things may be exempt. Until a parent knows exactly what goes into a particular agency’s calculations for the means test, they should not assume they are ineligible.

The language used with different sources should reflect the orientation of the funding source.

- **Medical.** In medical settings, stressing the therapeutic nature and “medical necessity” of the equipment is important.

- **Vocational.** In vocational settings, the goal and potential for self-sufficiency are crucial elements. Again, it is important to research and understand the language the potential funder prefers.
- **Educational.** In educational settings, the technology needs to help a student achieve academic and educational goals.
- **High-Need Situations.** In high-need or time-sensitive situations, service organizations, which have more flexibility, may often offer the best options.

Sometimes vendors, those who supply the goods and services, can help families understand what is needed to obtain authorization from an agency or insurance company. Vendors may also offer their own financing programs.

In many instances, particularly when several components or parts are involved, funding will not come entirely from one source or all at one time. Components may include the computer itself and peripherals such as printers, assistive devices, or software.

For this reason, a funding plan must prioritize, as well as identify, potential resources so that the parties seeking funding know who to approach first. Prioritizing and order of approach are also important because a number of sources consider themselves “payers of last resort,” meaning they won’t pay until all other sources have either agreed or refused to fund. It is, therefore, critical to document the results even when denied funding.

“I hope all parents put time into obtaining assistive technology for their child. Every child has great potential. Our kids need help getting the right equipment so they can develop. The child’s joy is well worth it.”

Cathy Manning

Using Multimedia Software to Support

By Brad Buelow, Assistive Technology Specialist

Reaching *all* students, including those with disabilities, different learning styles, and varying interests is a key issue in developing curriculum. Designing lessons and class projects to be engaging, accessible, and achievable for all students in the classroom is a goal of all educators. However, many teachers are at a loss for ideas when it comes to reaching their students in any way beyond the use of textbooks and basic visual aids.

Multiple formats

Presenting information in multiple formats offers each student access to the material without focusing on any one particular learning skill. The result is that students with special needs may grasp the concepts more easily, reducing the need for remedial help.

The development of user-friendly multimedia tools has begun the process of breaking down these barriers to both learning and instruction. What follows is the information needed to take the first steps toward developing a curriculum that spans physical or mental limitations and reaches out to all learners in a variety of ways.

Multimedia is a combination of different media formats such as text, imagery, sound, and movies. These devices are already being used individually to support learning. However, the combination of these elements offers educators the ability to reach learners in a variety of ways, thereby ensuring that all students, regardless of learning styles, are given equal access to the same information.

Studies show that not all students learn the same ways. It has been proven that using data in various forms appeals to a broader audience than only students with the ability to learn simply by listening or reading. Adopting a “one size fits all” strategy of curriculum design is a sure fire

way to ensure that some students will be neglected in the instruction process.

Reaching the student via multimedia

Troy is a student with a low attention span who has difficulty processing large amounts of text. Therefore, using an encyclopedia would not be the best method of teaching Troy about the different industries in his home state. However, Troy has displayed an aptitude for remembering visual information. Multimedia, in the form of a digital encyclopedia, presents Troy with smaller amounts of reading, still images, movies, and sounds depicting the agricultural and industrial regions of his state. After this lesson, rather than struggling through three pages of text, Troy can read along with three paragraphs, watch two short movies, listen to the audio tracks of the films, and review graphs pertaining to his topic. The result: according to follow-up exams, Troy retains this information better than by reading alone.

A situation like Troy’s is all too common in today’s classroom. Every day, teachers are expected to reach not only Troy, but other learners with any variety of disabilities and learning styles. By using multimedia tools, teachers can spend more time discussing the information presented with their students than tending to the 20 to 30 learning styles present in their classroom.

Assessing students through multimedia

In addition to giving students access to information, multimedia can also be an effective and exciting evaluation tool. Providing students a variety of ways to communicate what they’ve learned enables them to successfully display an understanding of the material.

Inclusion

A student such as Troy can employ alternate methods of communicating to show an understanding of content. Multimedia enables him to do so in whatever way is most comfortable for him. This adaptation not only enables Troy to be successful, but also serves as an opportunity to build his self-esteem as a learner.

Multimedia as an assessment tool can take many forms, depending on the types of student. It can be equally effective to measure how well a preschooler has learned alphabet letters and sounds or how well a high school student understands the life cycle of a plant.

Programs with simple, child-friendly interfaces like *BuildAbility* or *KidPix* can be used by young learners and teachers alike for displaying simple concepts like size, shapes, and other content. Teachers can also use multimedia to enable students to display their knowledge according to their abilities using technology. Creating a template or fill-in-the-blanks project for students to build on can make things easy. A report on a field trip, for example, can be generated by a teacher while students complete the project based on a series of open-ended prompts. It also accommodates students with physical disabilities who can choose from a list of possible answers to complete their project. The physical manipulation of the data and final assembly of the project can be done by either teaming with other students or working with a teacher or paraprofessional.

Multimedia Resources and Applications

The following are some of the many multimedia tools available. In addition to these programs, there are many advanced

products. These more robust software programs allow for an unlimited range of effects, large projects, and professional multimedia applications. For educational use, the following section focuses on programs that are less expensive, developmentally appropriate, and have a smaller learning curve.

BuildAbility – Don Johnston
(www.donjohnston.com)
This is a linear multimedia tool perfect for building early literacy skills in young children, BuildAbility is designed to be switch accessible, allows users to create animated drawings in their projects, and is intended for an early childhood or elementary audience.

HyperStudio – Knowledge Adventure
(www.hyperstudio.com)
One of the most widely used multimedia programs, HyperStudio allows users to design multimedia projects in a wide range of styles, sizes, and complexities. HyperStudio's wide range of options appeals to more advanced students.

IntelliPics Studio – IntelliTools
(www.intellitools.com)
IntelliPics Studio is the premiere multimedia tool within the IntelliTools family. Massive in its power, versatility, and learning curve, IntelliPics Studio offers the skilled designer the ability to create any manner of presentation with accessibility features ranging from single switch access to IntelliKeys capabilities.

Multimedia

Multimedia in the classroom can open many new doors for students, allowing them to display their knowledge. Both situations provide communication options enhancing and celebrating student strengths rather than limiting students.

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Using Multimedia Software

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Microsoft PowerPoint – Microsoft Corp.
(www.microsoft.com/office/powerpoint)

Microsoft PowerPoint is a presentation tool adaptable with a single switch. PowerPoint is standard in the Microsoft Office Suite and is easily used to create digital books, multimedia presentations, or simple slideshows.

Multimedia product comparison

When it comes to comparing different products, the most important step is to think about what features are important to you and then find a product that matches most closely. The following are some basic features of all multimedia creation products.

Ease of Design – It is important to consider the ease of using each program in two categories: **Teacher** – As a teacher or parent, a program that you can use effectively with as little time as possible spent learning the software is important.

Both - Considering whether or not you and your students will be able to use the software to create and design multimedia projects may be relevant to your situation.

Supported Media Types – Whether or not the software will be able to use your images

and sounds is a very important issue. Look for software that supports the following most common file types.

Video Types – .mpg, .mpeg, .avi, .asf, .wmv

Audio Formats – .mp3, .wav, .aiff

Image Types – .jpg, .jpeg, .bmp, .gif, .pict, .tiff

Supported Navigation – When creating your multimedia projects, consider if your projects will move in a **linear** (A to B to C) path, or in a **non-linear** way allowing the user to move freely in several directions. Linear progression creates simpler, easy to understand projects, but it can limit more advanced users.

Platform – Whether the software is Macintosh or Windows is still an issue, so be sure to buy software that will work on your computer.

Free Player – Multimedia projects are made to share with others. Full featured multimedia *authoring* software allows the user to both create and “play” or view the multimedia.

Most manufacturers of multimedia authoring tools provide a free *player* program to allow users without the full program software to view the multimedia creations.

Software Title	Platform	Supported Media			Ease of Design	Navigation Options	Free Player?
		Video	Image	Audio			
BuildAbility	Mac/Win	.mpg .mpeg .mov	.pict .bmp	.wav .aiff	Both	Linear	Yes
HyperStudio	Mac/Win	.mpg .mpeg .mov .avi	.pic .tif .jpg .pcx .bmp .gif .psd .tga .wmf	.wav .aif .snd .aiff .mid	Both	Both	Yes
IntelliPics Studio	Mac/Win	.mpg .mps .mov	.pict .gif .jpg .dib .png .bmp .wmf	.wav .aif .mp3 .snd	Teacher	Both	Yes
PowerPoint	Mac/Win	.mpg .mpeg .mov .avi	.emf .gif .jpg .png .bmp .tiff .wmf	.wav .mp3 .mid	Both	Both	Yes

Software for Real Life Situations

By Perrine Dailey, Assistive Technology Specialist

The Simon Technology Center usually focuses on serving children, but adults with disabilities are learning independent living and social skills with a little help from programs borrowed from PACER's Software Lending Library. A community rehabilitation organization called Mankato Rehabilitation Corporation Incorporated (MRCI) has been participating in the library for the past two years. PACER's software has enhanced the organization's ability to provide vocational rehabilitation, placement, and other employment services to adults with all types of disabilities.

Paul Kustermann, a supported employment coordinator for MRCI, is a strong believer in software and technology. Paul said, "Software is used in our training center to teach and reinforce everyday living skills." Paul has used software from the PACER Library to complement training in areas such as grooming and money handling.

Software was one of the tools Paul used when he began to help 68 people prepare for a job fair. The adults in the MRCI program used Attainment Company's software, *Grooming for Life* to review essential grooming skills several weeks prior to the job fair. This video-based CD-Rom stresses the importance of personal care routines in maintaining a good appearance necessary in the workplace. The program offers book and movie options and provides gender-specific information about the steps men and women should take for proper grooming and hygiene. By providing only the needed information for each gender, the job seekers were able to benefit from the personalized information.

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Free technology trainings from Simon Technology Center

"This program is such a wonderful resource for families and school staff. I can't wait to share the information I learned with other people at school. Thank you!"
— Laura Krueger, teacher and co-author of *Play and Learn*



Don't pass up this great opportunity for free technology trainings! Project KITE (Kids Included through Technology are Enriched) is an early childhood inclusive technology training funded through the Department of Education. This program offers teams of parents and teachers the chance to learn strategies and practices for incorporating technology into early childhood classrooms and homes. This is a great opportunity for experienced teachers who want a little help with technology use, new teachers looking for help including children with disabilities in their classrooms, and parents who want to work with their schools to ensure the best possible experience for their children.

Former KITE participants have noted improved technical abilities, a new level of confidence with assistive technology, and increased participation among their special needs students. To read more about Project KITE and download applications please visit www.pacer.org/kite or call PACER Center at (952) 838-9000 to speak to a KITE representative.

Software for Real Life Situations

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Just before the job fair, Paul trained with segments from Attainment's *At Work* series. This CD-Rom features short, captioned videos of workers in real jobs. The program reinforces work behaviors, job skills and other employment issues faced by people in the workplace. Paul said the software was helpful because it showed that people with disabilities can be successful in the workplace.



MRCI Job Fair participants

Paul commented that the most useful software programs have been ones that support everyday life. For example, money management skills taught in *Dollars and Cents* by Attainment Company were useful for almost everyone. "Money is a subject of great interest to the people I work with. They understand the concept of money but need to know how to offer the proper denomination and receive the correct change." The software is available for Macintosh and Windows and offers three programs to teach the user the names and values of coins and paper money, then how to shop with a list and budget, and how to make correct change.

Software programs borrowed from PACER's Library have helped the people from MRCI in Burnsville on their road to work. With appropriate software that promotes independent living skills, the users from MRCI prepared for real life situations. And when they arrived all dressed up for the job fair, Paul said, "They looked marvelous!"

The Simon Technology Center has many independent living skills programs available in the Software Lending Library for members to preview. Persons who are not library members may visit the Simon Technology Center during Open Hours, which are Tuesday from noon until 8 p.m. and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.



Did You Know?

Did you know the Simon Technology Center answered over 2000 phone calls and questions from parents, persons with disabilities, and professionals last year? We can help you, too! Call us if you have a question on assistive technology. It's free.

One parent said:

"The STC Staff asked insightful questions to ensure they had a thorough understanding of my issue and then undertook the research to determine whether an assistive technology solution existed for me. I had not anticipated that level of interest or attention when I called."

New Communication Device Available

By Kari Jaehnert, Assistive Technology Specialist

Children who are non-verbal or who are difficult to understand often use communication devices to interact with family and friends. Until recently, AAC devices and full-functioning computers were rarely one in the same. Children who used AAC devices would need a separate computer to access software and the Internet, leaving parents and professionals struggling to find an affordable solution to meet all the needs of their child. Needing both an AAC device and a computer system required parents and professionals to learn, program, and afford twice as much technology as the rest of the world.

Assistive Technology, Inc. offers a solution. The recently released *Mercury* and *Mini Mercury* are two computerized communication systems that allow a student to talk with friends and family, call others on the telephone, surf the Internet, send e-mail messages, change the channels on the TV, and listen to their favorite CDs - all through the same device.

The Mercury, a fully integrated system, allows the user to communicate with pre-installed copies of Boardmaker & Speaking Dynamically Pro by Mayer-Johnson, Inc. (www.mayerjohnson.com) The Mercury also runs and supports any Windows XP compatible software. This system allows full computer usage, plus communication abilities such as telephone connections using additional software like PhoneTools. The Mercury weighs 6.5 lbs, is notebook computer sized, and has a 12" display.

For students who need more portability, the new Mini Mercury is a solution. The Mini Mercury has all of the features of its larger twin, but only weighs 3.5 pounds. Its smaller size allows active children to carry their devices independently. This welcome addition to the Mercury family will be released this fall.

Assistive Technology, Inc. offers two preview options for parents and professionals interested in their products. ATI's rental program allows users and families to rent a device for trial evaluations, to accommodate short-term disabilities, or for insurance approvals. Equipment is rented on a monthly basis. The first month's rental fee can be applied to the purchase price if you choose to buy within 30 days, or at the end of the rental period. The Professional Preview Program enables professionals to borrow the device for evaluations, clinical assessments, presentations, and insurance approvals. The professional preview period is limited to 14 days.

If you are interested in learning more about the Mercury, the Mini Mercury or other augmentative communication products, please come to the Simon Technology Center Open House on November 8, 2003, where these and other products will be demonstrated.

It helps

Many children with disabilities rely on assistive technology (AT) or augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices to talk to friends and family, play computer games, and complete homework assignments.

Smart Thinking: Portable Technology

By Annette Cerreta, Assistive Technology Specialist

While many of us may joke about not remembering our own phone number or where we last placed the car keys, memory loss is no laughing matter for a child with a cognitive disability. Memory loss can have a devastating effect on a child and his or her family, dramatically altering the landscape of everyday life.

Memory strategies that most of us rely on to carry out our daily routine, such as checklists, calendars, and Post-it notes, may not provide adequate support for the child with a cognitive disability and memory loss.

When conventional memory compensation tools and strategies aren't enough, families may consider more sophisticated cognitive aids. Recent advances in computer and telecommunications technologies have given rise to a number of powerful devices that offer an alternative to the pen and paper strategies and other low-tech approaches.

These devices are often off-the-shelf technologies that many people use every day, such as personal digital assistants, pagers, wristwatches, and cell phones. Children with cognitive deficits can learn to use these technologies to compensate for memory and other cognitive deficiencies.

Karen's story, below, is a good example of how off-the-shelf technologies, such as an electronic watch or personal electronic organizer, offer the added layer of support a child with memory loss needs to function more independently.

Karen's Story

Karen, a 15-year-old girl, was hit by a car when she was 10 years old, resulting in severe cognitive deficits, including memory loss.

Although her cognitive skills improved over the five years after her accident, she continued to struggle with keeping track of time and activities. Karen kept a written daily planner, but she often forgot to use it and she frequently misplaced it.

*Karen's mother consulted an occupational therapist who suggested that Karen try using a wristwatch called the **Timex Data Link®**. This watch merges electronic daily planner technologies with a wristwatch alarm system. Multiple alarms were set to alert Karen when she was supposed to attend to a task, such as taking her medication, making a phone call, or turning in a homework assignment to her teacher. When the alarm sounded, Karen could read a message on the watch, such as "Call home now" or "Take your medication" which would prompt Karen to carry out these activities. Karen was also less likely to misplace the watch since she wore it on her wrist.*

Karen was anxious about using the watch at first, so her therapist taught her how to use the most essential features only. She also showed Karen's mother how to program the watch for Karen, so that Karen needed only to respond to the alarms and messages throughout her day. This approach minimized Karen's stress, and she began to appreciate how the watch helped her to stay on track by reminding her to do important daily tasks. After a few months of training, Karen was ready to start using other helpful features of the watch, such as the to-do list, schedule planner, and phone book.

Families should also be aware of cognitive aids designed expressly for persons with cognitive deficits. The *TimePAD* by Attainment Company, for example, is a small, pager-sized device created for people who need reminders throughout their day. The device is programmed by a caregiver to

Memory loss is no laughing matter for a child with a cognitive disability and can leave devastating effects on the child.

that Empowers People with Memory Loss

play pre-recorded voice messages at pre-set times, such as “It’s 7:30 a.m.—go outside to wait for the school bus.” The main difference between this device and a regular pager is that it speaks the messages aloud instead of displaying them in a text format. This could be beneficial to children with reading difficulties, visual impairments, or those who respond best to auditory cuing. The device will hold up to 72 seconds of speech divided among five messages. It cost about \$30 and comes with a belt clip. For more information contact Attainment Company, www.attainmentcompany.com

Strategies for Selecting the Right Cognitive Aids

Before acquiring a cognitive aid for your child, families should give consideration to several factors during the selection process to assure a good match between their child’s needs and a cognitive aid device.

- Consider the personal characteristics of the child, including their physical, social, cognitive, and sensory level. For instance, a child who is not able to understand the usefulness of a beeper alarm system would not be a good candidate for its use.
- If the child has a functional limitation, such as limited fine motor skills or low vision, look for devices that have larger buttons, larger print displays, or other accessible features.
- Choose devices that are user-friendly and simple. Complicated devices lead to user frustration and device abandonment.

- Set realistic expectations about what the device can do for *your* child.

The technologies of today provide families with additional tools to help their children succeed at home, school, and in the community. To learn more about technology-based cognitive aids, contact PACER’s Simon Technology Center and refer to the following resources.

Cerebreon

www.cerebreon.com

Cognitive Disabilities & Assistive Technology: Web Resources

www.pitt.edu/~eflst4/sig20/weblinks.htm

Devices for Memory Loss

A fact sheet from the RERC on Aging and the University of Buffalo Center for Assistive Technology
http://cat.buffalo.edu/newsletters/mem_loss.php

Institute for Cognitive Prosthetics

www.brain-rehab.com/

Texas Technology Access Project

<http://techaccess.edb.utexas.edu/cognitivesupports.html>

TechDis

www.techdis.ac.uk/

The Simon Technology Center has open lab hours on Tuesdays noon to 8 p.m. and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Staff can demonstrate new software for you and help answer any questions you have.

Simon Technology Center Receives

PACER's Simon Technology Center and the Technical Assistance Alliance for Parent Centers (ALLIANCE) have received a new grant from IBM Corporation to pilot their Web Adaptation Technology software to make the Web easier to use for people with disabilities to use.

The software enables people to customize the Web in ways that work best for them, such as magnifying a Web page, changing the color of text, or sharpening images. A user's preferences are saved and then applied to the Web each time they log on to browse from any computer.

Key features of the software are:

- **Enlarging content on Web pages**
- **Tailoring the font**
- **Reducing visual clutter on Web pages**
- **Keyboard and mouse adaptations**

Examples of some enhancements the technology can make to the Web experience are the following:

Enlarging content on Web pages

Commonly, people want to make the content of Web pages larger. Web Adaptation Technology allows this in a number of different ways:

- Enlarging text size
- Using banner text, which is the presentation of a single line of very large text at the top of the screen
- Page magnification
- Enlarging the size of selected images

- Magnification of browser controls (such as the scroll bar, mouse pointer, file menus)

Tailoring the font

Many Web pages use fonts that are difficult to read. Web Adaptation Technology provides a number of different ways in which legibility can be improved:

- Speaking text aloud
- Enlarging text size
- Changing colors for better contrast
- Changing text style
- Increasing the spacing between letters
- Increasing the spacing between lines
- Using banner text

Reducing visual clutter on Web pages

There is much complexity in the design of some Web pages. There can be so much complexity, in fact, that it can sometimes interfere with the ability to make sense of the page. Web Adaptation Technology provides a number of different ways in which legibility can be improved:

- Changing the page layout
- Hiding backgrounds
- Hiding animations
- Hiding images
- Page magnification to reduce the amount of information presented
- Increasing the spacing between lines

New Grant

Keyboard and mouse adaptations

The computer keyboard and mouse can present a variety of difficulties. Web Adaptation Technology offers ways to better use the keyboard and mouse:

- Tab navigation and shortcut keys
- Keyboard sensitivity that automatically adapts to a person's typing to reduce unwanted repeated key presses

- Ease of one-handed typing
- Audio feedback when keys are pressed
- Mouse keys for using the keyboard to control the mouse cursor

Join us for a free hands-on training of the Web Adaptation Software on November 18, 2003, at PACER Center starting at 6 p.m. Please pre-register. Space is limited.

Upcoming STC Workshops

Register on-line at www.pacer.org or call 800-537-2237

The Process of Choosing Assistive Technology for Your Child

The workshop answers questions about assistive technology and leads parents through the Minnesota Department of Education Manual for Consideration and Evaluation of Assistive Technology that trains IEP teams in selecting assistive technology for each student. It is sponsored by PACER and the department.

- Oct. 30, 6:30 to 9 p.m. (Roseville)
- Nov. 13, 6:30 to 9 p.m. (Anoka)

Introduction to Assistive Technology

For parents of children with disabilities, adults with disabilities, and professionals, the workshop is an overview of technology from simple, low-cost devices to high-tech. It includes a free tour (use your own transportation) of the vendor floor of "Closing the Gap," an international assistive technology conference at the Radisson South.

- Oct. 18, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. (PACER Center – North Entrance)

Technology Just for Girls

For girls with disabilities in grades 6-8, the free workshop is led by women employed in technical fields at IBM. A hands-on group activity illustrates the importance of math and creative problem-solving. Information about next summer's EXITE camp is presented. There will also be a simultaneous parent strand for parents to learn about assistive technology and promoting science for their girls.

- Dec. 4, 6 to 9 p.m. (PACER Center)

STC
workshops
are free,
but you
must pre-
register.

Q & A

The STC offers in-service trainings for groups of five or more people. Call PACER Center 952-838-9000 to arrange a training.

Q: *My daughter has difficulty reading. I recently learned about some assistive technology that could help her. Will the school provide this software, even though she has a learning disability?*

A: If your child receives special education services and has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), she must be considered for assistive technology devices and services. The IEP team, of which you are a critical member, will determine your daughter's assistive technology needs. If assistive technology is needed for a "Free and Appropriate Public Education" it must be provided by the school district at no cost to the family. The school may use non-school funding sources, such as a grant or a family's private insurance (with approval). However, the school is ultimately responsible for providing the documented assistive technology, whether or not they find supplemental funding.

The exact process of how the IEP team "considers" assistive technology is not defined by law, but Minnesota has developed guidelines based on best practices in the field.

For example, in your daughter's case, her IEP team would gather information about your daughter's disability and how it affects her ability to read her textbooks. Because reading her textbooks is required for her to learn the materials, the team might determine that to read the necessary materials for class, she needs assistive technology. After experimenting with a variety of available tools, the IEP team might determine that a screen reader and scanner are the best assistive technology tools to help her read. To have the school provide the computer, software and necessary training so she can use the tools effectively, the AT and related services would need to be written into your daughter's IEP.

When assistive technology is written into the IEP, it can be added in many sections including:

- Special Education and Related Services
- Present Level of Educational Performance
- Transition (as appropriate)
- Annual Instructional Goals and Objectives
- Comprehensive Assessment and Standards Assessment
- Adaptations in General and Special Education

Staff Profile: Scott Wendt

Scott Wendt joined the Simon Technology Center in January as the Software Lending Library assistant. Scott holds a Bachelor's degree in communication from St. John's University and recently completed a Master of Library Science degree through the Minnesota program at the University of North Texas.

Scott's favorite part of working in the lending library has been interacting with members to help them select the best software for their needs. "Whether someone stops by the library to preview the software on one of our seven computers, or whether a request is made via e-mail and the software is sent to a member 200 miles away, it is great to know that I can be helping someone learn."

Scott is enthusiastic about working for PACER. He said "The library offers such a great service to members throughout Minnesota, it is really amazing to see the variety of software and assistive technology we have available for members to borrow."

When he is not working, Scott enjoys spending time with his wife Lori, dog Sera, and cat Mackenzie. Come meet Scott during Software Lending Library hours on Tuesdays from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.



The STC is updating its Web site with past Q & A columns. Check it out at www.pacer.org/stc

Q: My 16-year-old son has autism and loves the computer. We are trying to teach him some basic safety skills. Are there any software programs that he could use, since he's so motivated by the computer?

A: Yes! There are many software programs available that teach safety awareness skills needed to function safely in the home or community. Many of these programs incorporate

multimedia animation, video, music, and narration to make the learning fun. Software with role-playing allows young adults, like your son, to learn about how to protect themselves in situations such as talking to a stranger or crossing the street. When confronted with a fictional situation, the program can guide the user through the appropriate steps he or she needs to take in order to stay safe. Call PACER at (952) 838-9000, for a list of these programs.



The Computer Monitor

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