Developing Guiding Documents for Consideration of Assistive Technology (AT)

Technology to Improve Kids' Educational Success

Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams are required to **consider** AT when planning for the education of children with disabilities. Data about the inclusion of AT in an IFSP or IEP shows that it is underutilized.

Staff with PACER Center's federally funded project, Technology to Improve Kids' Educational Success (TIKES), observed that while AT was being used in early childhood classrooms, it was often under-documented in the IFSP or IEP. Additionally, PACER realized a direct relationship between the presence of district guiding documents on AT and the quantity and quality of AT documentation.

The following sections detail information districts may want to include in their guiding documents about the process for considering and documenting AT.

## Define AT under Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)

Start by defining AT using language from IDEA as the foundation. The Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center defines both an AT device and an AT service: **http://ectacenter.org/topics/atech/definitions.asp**. AT is anything that helps a child do something they otherwise could not do. It is often a bridge between what a child is struggling with and what that child might be capable of doing. Including frequently asked questions (FAQs) is a great way to help staff understand the scope and breadth of AT, and results in a better match between needs and technology.

It is also important to understand that AT consists of a range of items. Simply using the word "technology" may not be clear, as sometimes AT is very simple. For example, visual supports, such as an early childhood classroom schedule, are commonly used but often not documented as assistive technology. AT also consists of more sophisticated technology such as communication devices, tablets, apps, and software programs. Though it might seem that some of these options are too complex for young children, with adult assistance, they can provide access to robust language that helps them develop their communication skills.

How to consider AT

Next, give staff information about the legal requirement to consider AT. Guiding documents should help to define the consideration of AT. Questions to be included are:

1) Why consider AT? Define their legal obligation

2) When should consideration occur? In general, considerations would occur annually for every IFSP/IEP, but may occur more frequently as the child or the technology changes

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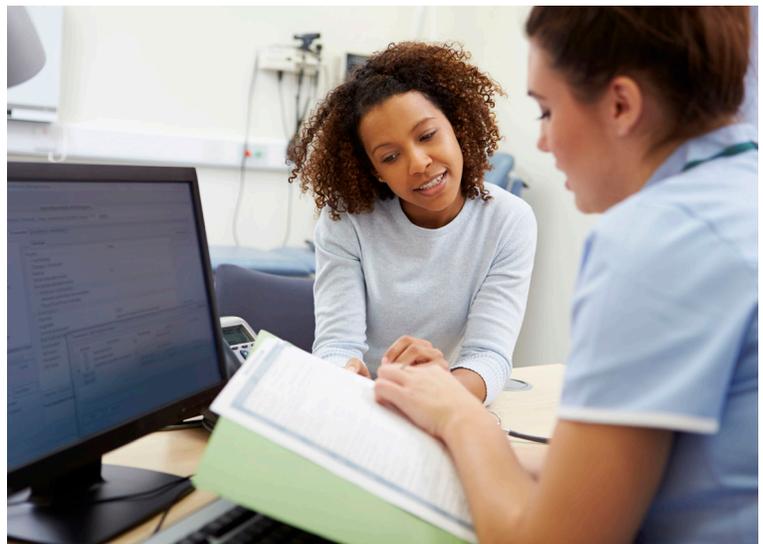
3) Who should be involved in the conversation? The IFSP/IEP team, which should include one or both parents

All student documentation should have at least one of the four possible outcomes reflected in their IFSP, IEP, or 504 Plan:

- AT was considered and is not needed at this time
- AT was considered, and the child or student is currently using AT successfully
- The team has determined that the child or student needs AT and has enough information to make specific decisions about it
- The child or student needs AT, but the team needs information to determine the type of AT that would meet the needs of the child or student.

Team conversations about consideration should be held at least annually for every child or student with an IFSP, IEP, or 504 Plan. Additional meetings may be held when the child or the technology changes, but legally the conversation about consideration is held annually. The TIKES Project developed planning documents that one might find useful. Those documents are located at: **PACER.org/stc/tikes/including-at-in-school.asp**.

How to Document AT

The TIKES Project review of special education documentation found that AT was most frequently not documented in the IFSP, and highly under-documented in the IEP. Guiding documents and a designated place to indicate consideration of AT within a district's special education forms makes it more likely that staff will document AT. If your special education software or documentation program does not have a dedicated place for AT, you can use your guiding documents to clearly indicate where you would like staff to document their consideration and outcomes of AT. For example, in the IFSP, an appropriate place to document AT could be in the *What Will Happen* section (this is Minnesota specific language, but similar in structure to what is found in other state documents). In an IEP, the *Accommodations and Modifications* section might be an appropriate place.

A commitment to continuous training is also a key to increasing the quantity and quality of documentation. Revisit the conversation about consideration of AT with staff at least annually. Both new and veteran staff will benefit from conversations or trainings that emphasize the process and clarify questions.

Using AT can make a big difference in the life of a child with a disability. Starting young with AT support helps children become more independent. They also gain the opportunity to learn the value of embracing AT and developing the ability to advocate for the AT that they need as they move through all the stages of life. Starting early sets a precedent of documenting AT as children grow.

Look for guidance from your state education agency about how to document AT. Many state education agencies have a department for AT. Look to their guiding documents to pave the way for your district protocols.