

Assistive Technology

A FAMILY GUIDE



New York City Department of Education

Division of Specialized Instruction and Student Support

Center for Assistive Technology and Tech Solutions

Corinne Rello-Anselmi, Deputy Chancellor

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SECTION I: INTRODUCTION – THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

The Department of Education’s goal is to ensure that all students have meaningful access to the curriculum. Depending upon the impact of a disability, your child may require Assistive Technology (AT) or Accessible Educational Materials (AEM) in order to participate in his or her educational program and achieve his or her academic goals. Both AT and AEM help students with disabilities meaningfully access their curriculum and meet their full academic potential. The purpose of this guide is to inform families about available AT and AEM resources that can be used to achieve the best possible educational outcomes for all students.

SECTION II: DEFINITION OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY (AT)

AT refers to tools that are necessary to help students benefit from instructional materials and communicate effectively. AT is intended to provide the support a student with a disability needs in order to access their educational program. More specifically, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the federal special education law, provides the following legal definition of an AT device: “any item, piece of equipment, or product system... that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.”

AT items can be described as "low-tech", "mid-tech" or "high-tech". Some examples of each are provided below.

- Low-tech devices include slant boards, paper communication boards/cards and text highlighting.
- Mid-tech devices include calculators, single switches and word-processors.
- High-tech devices include dynamic-display augmentative-communication devices, speech-to-text programs or computers and eye-gaze devices.

The IDEA requires that school districts provide AT to all students with disabilities who need it to receive a free, appropriate public education (FAPE). The Individualized Education Program (IEP) team is charged with the responsibility for determining a student’s individual need for AT in order to benefit from his or her education and have access to the curriculum.

For additional information, consult our [AT website](#) or the [AT Reference Guide for Students with Disabilities](#)



SECTION III: EVALUATING THE NEED FOR AT

DETERMINING WHAT AT EQUIPMENT AND/OR SERVICES ARE NEEDED

If you feel that AT may be required to help your child access his or her educational program and meet his or her individual educational, communication and/or environmental needs, then you should request that your child's school conduct an AT evaluation. You can request an AT evaluation for your child at any time (see the steps for doing so on the next page). If your school identifies your child as a candidate for an AT evaluation, the school will start the process and contact you for written consent for completing the evaluation.

As a parent or guardian, you have the right to request that your child's school conduct an evaluation to determine if your child has a disability and is eligible to receive AT services. This evaluation is free of charge and will be reviewed by your child's IEP team when considering the appropriateness of an AT recommendation. Your child does not need an IEP in order for AT to be considered. If he or she does not already have an IEP, your request for an AT evaluation will result in a special education or 504 referral. If the DOE refuses your request for an evaluation, you will be provided with a written notice explaining the reason for refusal.

Your child's school may also consider whether AT is appropriate for your child at any time. If your child's school thinks he or she may require AT, they will contact you to request your written permission to evaluate your child.



Your child will be evaluated by a qualified professional or a multi-disciplinary team of professionals. In some cases, depending upon the student's needs and available expertise, the AT evaluation may be performed by school staff. In other instances, the school may request completion of an evaluation by central DOE AT staff. AT evaluators can include qualified Classroom Teachers, Speech Teachers, Speech Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, and Physical Therapists, as well as other AT

professionals. You may choose to provide your input during your child's AT evaluation process at your option. However, your knowledge of your child's strengths and needs, as well as your insights and concerns, make you a valued and essential member of the IEP team.

THE AT EVALUATION PROCESS – REQUESTING AN EVALUATION

To request an AT evaluation, follow these two steps:

1. Provide a handwritten or typed request for an AT evaluation. Prepare a letter stating that you are requesting an AT evaluation for your child, and be sure to include the following information:
 - The date of your request
 - Your child’s name
 - Your child’s date of birth
 - The school your child attends
 - Your child’s nine digit student ID (OSIS #), if available
 - Your name and signature
 - Your concerns, and why you feel your child may require AT (optional)
2. Mail or hand-deliver this letter to any of the following school staff: the School Psychologist or the Principal of your child’s school (Districts 1-32 & District 75), or your CSE Representative (Charter and Non-Public Schools).

You should expect to receive a Request to Consent letter. This letter will seek your formal permission to perform the evaluation (within 15 days after you have submitted your letter). In the unlikely event that you are not contacted for consent after 15 days of submitting your written request, here’s how to follow up:

- For public school students (other than charter schools): Send an inquiry with a copy of the letter to the [Superintendent for the district in which your student’s school is located](#).
- For all other students: Send an inquiry with a copy of the letter to [the CSE Chairperson for the district in which your student’s school is located](#).
- You may also inquire sending an email to relatedservices@schools.nyc.gov or by calling 311.

TIMELINE FOR PROCESSING AN AT EVALUATION REQUEST

The DOE strives to provide evaluations and services to students as quickly as possible. As described above, you will be contacted for formal consent within 15 days after a request for an AT evaluation is received. The DOE cannot begin the evaluation process until we receive your formal consent. Therefore, we encourage you to return the consent form that you receive from the DOE as soon as possible.

Once the DOE has received your consent, the Department has 60 calendar days to evaluate your child. However, if you delay the evaluation process, the timeline may be adjusted.

In the event that the DOE does not complete an evaluation after 60 calendar days, you will receive an Assessment Authorization Letter. The letter explains how you can select an appropriately licensed non-

Department of Education independent evaluator at no cost to you. It includes a list of names, addresses and telephone numbers of appropriate public and private agencies and other professional resources from which you may obtain an independent evaluation.

SECTION IV: FORMALIZING THE AT RECOMMENDATION ON THE IEP

Following completion of the evaluation, AT is recommended by the IEP team when appropriate to enable a student to access his/her instructional program and meet his/her individual educational needs. If the IEP team determines that AT devices and/or services are necessary, the IEP team must specify this on the IEP, formally obligating the DOE to supply the devices and services.

AT CONSIDERATION AT THE IEP MEETING

The IEP team is required to consider the AT needs of every student receiving special education services. The IEP team considers AT in a thoughtful way prior to establishing a student's educational goals. Consideration of AT need is based on the unique educational needs of your child. The team considers the student, the tasks they need to complete, the environment, the student's present levels of performance, current accommodations / technology as well as the student's strengths and disabilities to determine if AT is necessary to remove barriers to student performance.

BEST PRACTICES IN ADDING AT TO THE IEP

The IEP team considers a number of elements during the IEP decision-making process to create a student-centered AT plan that is focused on successful completion of tasks and the environment necessary to do so. According to this best practice guideline, the IEP team's process should include consideration of the student, environment, task and tools including:

- an analysis of the instructional and access areas relevant to the student;
- a review of the educationally relevant tasks with each of the appropriate instructional access areas;
- a review of the different environments in which the student is required to produce the relevant tasks referenced above;
- a review of the standard classroom tools, accommodations, modifications, and AT solutions that are currently in place and a determination as to whether these strategies are adequate to meet the student's needs;
- a review of the AT evaluation (if there is an evaluation); and
- a generation of potential solutions, including AT, if the student's needs are not being met.

IEP teams are encouraged to use the DOE's AT Consideration Checklist when considering AT. The Checklist provides a framework for considering AT that is appropriate for students of all ages and ability levels and serves as documentation of the procedure used to consider AT. It addresses all instructional areas in which AT may be required. It also addresses a continuum of AT solutions as well as standard classroom tools, modifications, and accommodations that are currently in place to address the student's needs.



IEP teams may also refer to the AT Resource Guide to identify potential modifications of current AT, accommodations, standard classroom tools, and AT solutions that may be in place or to identify modifications, accommodations, and technology solutions that may need to be implemented. This document is designed as a companion to the AT Consideration Checklist and is available at <http://tiny.cc/ATResourceGuide>.

HOW AT NEEDS ARE REFLECTED ON THE IEP

If the IEP team determines that a student has a need for AT, the student's IEP will include specific information about the recommended AT service and/or device(s). Documentation will include:

- a check mark in the AT boxes on the IEP to confirm that AT is recommended and whether it is recommended to be used at home; and
- a rationale and specific recommendations for AT.

AT may also be addressed in other sections of the IEP, including:

- the present levels of performance (PLOP),
- the recommended special education programs and services;
- the listing of testing accommodations, participation in State and district-wide assessments; and
- the measurable annual goals and benchmarks.

SECTION V: PROVIDING MANDATED AT EQUIPMENT AND SERVICES

OBTAINING MANDATED AT EQUIPMENT FOR YOUR CHILD

If your child is mandated for AT, the DOE will provide all AT equipment and/or services that are recommended on your child's IEP at the DOE's expense. AT equipment and services will typically be delivered to your child's school or CSE. Students who are on home instruction will receive their AT delivery and services at home or at their CSE.

AT TRAINING

The DOE will provide training as needed to students, teachers, other school administration and families. Initial training is provided by the evaluation team for all staff and for family members who attend. School staff is responsible for supporting integration and use of the device and on-going support to the student to ensure effective utilization of the AT.

AT EQUIPMENT OWNERSHIP AND USE

All AT devices provided by the DOE are purchased and owned by the DOE. Students who leave the DOE system upon graduation or by transfer to a district outside of the DOE must return their AT to the DOE.

Students may use their IEP-mandated AT in school. As indicated above, where specified on the IEP, the student may travel with their AT device for use at home in accessing their curriculum.

BRINGING AN AT DEVICE HOME

The IEP team determines when an AT device is required for home use in order for a student to be provided a free appropriate public education (FAPE). This information should be listed on the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) under Student Needs Relating to Special Factors. If the IEP team determines your child needs an AT device at home to access his or her curriculum, he or she will be allowed to travel to and from the school with the device provided.

MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR OF AT DEVICES

It is the joint responsibility of school personnel, parents and guardians and students to take reasonable care of the AT device. Your child's school IEP team is responsible for arranging the repair or replacement of missing or defective AT devices, as well as for re-programming or other maintenance required in order for your child to use the device effectively in accordance with the IEP. If you believe that your child's AT device is in need of replacement or repair, please contact your school IEP team.

SECTION VI: ACCESSIBLE EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS (AEM)

DEFINITION OF AEM

Accessible Educational Materials (AEM) are textbooks and related instructional materials that have been converted into a format that is accessible to a student who is otherwise unable to use standard printed materials. These formats include braille, large print, audio, and digital text. (Note that these may also be referred to as Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM).)



If your child is blind, visually impaired, or otherwise unable to use printed materials, his/her school should assess whether he/she may require AEM. If AEM is found to be appropriate for your child, then your child's school will provide course materials in the alternative accessible format at the same time as your child's peers receive their textbooks or workbooks.

Your child may qualify for AEM if he/she requires the exact same content as the instructional materials used across the curriculum, but requires a specialized format in order to access that content.

AEM THROUGH THE DOE

If you believe your child requires AEM, you should reach out to your school to ask that they determine your child's need for AEM and the specific format that would benefit your child (e.g. braille, large print, audio, digital text). Your child's school may also initiate this process, if appropriate. The determination of whether AEM is required is made during the development of your child's IEP or 504 plan. If AT is required in order for your child to access AEM (for example, a text-to-speech device), this need will also be considered.

If it is determined that your child requires AEM, the materials will be provided in school at the DOE's expense. Families may also want to explore Bookshare, which provide free accounts for home use to certain children. Please visit [Bookshare.org](https://www.bookshare.org) to see if your child is eligible and for more information.

TIMELINE FOR AEM

Students who require AEM should receive their specialized materials at the same time other students receive their instructional materials. Adapting instructional materials into accessible formats can take

time, so your child’s school will be planning instruction in advance in order to ensure your child receives his/her AEM at the same time as the rest of his/her class.

SECTION VII: TRANSITION PLANNING

If a student requires AT and AT is indicated on their IEP at the time of graduation, the transition planning team and family should meet in early spring of the student’s graduation year to discuss supports. Details regarding student AT needs should be clearly indicated in a student’s transition packet so any agency or school working with your child after graduation will have this information.

Students who receive Medicaid or a Medicaid waiver can apply to Medicaid to obtain necessary AT. Additionally, many AT vendors will assist with the process to obtain the devices that they sell.

Student AT equipment provided by the DOE is property of the DOE and should be returned to the DOE upon graduation or transfer to another school district.

SECTION VIII: FAQs

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AT ON AN IEP AND AT ON A 504?

Not all students who have disabilities are eligible for IEPs under the IDEA. A student with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life function is eligible to receive accommodations under Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The 504 team will meet to determine which accommodations are appropriate for each student based on the nature and severity of the student’s impairment, in order for the student to participate in school on an equal basis with his/her non-disabled peers. Depending on the individual student’s needs, 504 accommodations may include AT devices. For more information about 504 accommodations, please consult the 504 Accommodations Guidance for Families at <http://tiny.cc/504FAQs>

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY (AT) AND INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY (IT)?

There are many technology options available to us today. We carry smartphones or tablets and use computers. These technologies can be “instructional technology” (IT) when we use them to support education and learning. These technologies can also be considered “Assistive Technology” when used to improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities who cannot access their curricula through other means. All AT is listed on the student’s IEP or 504 plan. In contrast, IT is equipment utilized as a resource for learning by students who are able to access their curriculum through other means.

SECTION IX: DOE CONTACT INFORMATION

We recommend that you reach out to your child's school to discuss assistive technology needs. You may also reach out to:

- for public school students (other than charter schools): Send an inquiry with a copy of the letter to the [Superintendent for the district in which your student's school is located](#).
- for all other students: Send an inquiry with a copy of the letter to [the CSE Chairperson for the district in which your student's school is located](#).

SECTION X: FEDERAL LAWS RELATED TO AT

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: <http://idea.ed.gov/>

Americans with Disabilities Act: <http://www.ada.gov/>

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act: <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html>



**Department of
Education**

Carmen Fariña, Chancellor