



Assistive Technology and Special Education

What is Assistive Technology for Special Education?

Assistive Technology device: An assistive technology (AT) device is any item used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a student with a disability.

Assistive Technology service: An AT service is any service that assists in choosing, getting, or using an assistive technology device. This includes evaluations, modifications, and maintenance and repair of AT devices. It also includes training for a student, family and school personnel in the use of such devices.

What does the law require?¹

- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that AT devices and services be provided to a student with a disability, if needed for his/her educational program.
- As part of the Individualized Education Program (IEP), consideration must be given to whether a student needs some kind of AT device in order to receive a free appropriate education.
- Special education, including AT devices and services, must be funded by the school district, not the student or his/her family, unless the family chooses to do so.
- IEP teams may not deny AT to students based on cost alone. However, if two different AT devices are recommended and each would allow the student to achieve the IEP goals and objectives, the team may choose the less expensive device.
- Generally, a school district is not responsible for providing personally prescribed devices, such as hearing aids or eyeglasses.

¹ Medical devices that are surgically implanted (e.g. cochlear implants) are not covered under IDEA and are not the responsibility of the school district. However, nothing limits the responsibility of the school district to appropriately monitor and maintain such devices in order to maintain the health and safety of the child. This also includes while a child is being transported to and from school. (34 CFR 300.34(b))

How does one make sure the IEP addresses AT devices and services?

- The IEP team must consider whether there is any possibility that the student may need AT.
- Once AT devices and services have been properly considered for a student, the district must provide an AT evaluation of the student by a qualified professional within a reasonable time. If the AT evaluation is part of an initial special education evaluation, it should be completed within 60 days.
- When the evaluation is completed, the IEP team meets to review the evaluation and determine whether or not AT is needed.
- AT devices should be described in detail in the IEP. AT services, such as training, maintenance and repair of devices should be addressed in the IEP.
- The student's use of the devices should be incorporated into the student's IEP goals, if appropriate (and short-term objectives if these are part of the IEP).
- If necessary to assist the child, school personnel should be trained.
- If the device will be used at home, family members must be trained as well, if needed. All of these needs must be addressed in the IEP.

Where might Assistive Technology appear in the IEP?

- The consideration of special factors.
- The annual goals.
- The short-term objectives, if these are part of the student's IEP. (Note: under IDEA 2004, short-term objectives are now required only for students whose disabilities are severe enough that they participate in alternative standard testing).
- The list of special factors considered by the IEP team.
- The list of supplementary aids and services necessary to maintain the student in the least restrictive environment.
- The list of related services necessary for the student to benefit for his/her education.
- As an accommodation the student may need.

What if parents disagree with what is proposed for their child?

If parents do not agree with their child's IEP, or if the district refuses to provide

needed AT devices, they should first informally discuss the matter with the IEP team and other school personnel (like the special education director). If the parents still disagree, they have the right to ask for an independent evaluation at the school's expense, mediation or a due process hearing. They may also file a complaint with the SC Department of Education's Office of Special Education Services.

Can the student bring a school district provided device home?

Students may use AT devices owned by the school district outside of school property whenever necessary to achieve IEP goals. This need should be addressed by the IEP team. For example, if an IEP calls for the use of an AT device in order for the student to do his/her homework assignments, the student may bring the device home after school and on weekends. Generally, the school is responsible for damages and needed repairs unless damage is due to unauthorized use or unwarranted damage. In such case, parents may be held responsible.

What happens during transition?

- Transition is planning for the time when the student leaves school.
- Consideration of a student's need for AT devices and services should continue during transition.
- All transition services, including AT devices, need to be included in the student's IEP.
- Transition in South Carolina should begin when a child turns 13 years old, and the transition plan should identify appropriate adult service providers and encourage a working relationship with those agencies. Adult service providers include Department of Disabilities and Special Needs, South Carolina Commission for the Blind, Department of Mental Health and the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department.
- If a student will need to continue to use an AT device, parents may ask the school to transfer ownership or sell the device to the adult service provider. This prevents any gap in services between the special education system and the adult service system.
- If an AT device has been funded by the parent through private insurance, Medicaid or by other means, it is the property of the student and will go with the student upon exit from high school.

What if a student has a disability, but is not in special education?

A student with a disability that does not require special education would not be protected under IDEA. However, he or she may be protected by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This Act prohibits discrimination in providing educational services to students with disabilities, whether they are in regular or special education. AT may be requested as an accommodation under a 504 Plan.

Examples of Assistive Technology Devices in the IEP

- Sensory enhancers help students with sensory limitations (e.g., visual, hearing, orthopedic impairment) access their environments. Sensory enhancers can include augmentative communication devices, text magnifiers, and scanners with speech synthesizers and voice analyzers.
- Keyboard adaptations and emulators are alternatives to using a standard computer keyboard. Examples include joysticks, light pens, touch screens, sketch and graphics pads, and fist/foot keyboards.
- Wheelchair modification adapts a student's wheelchair to hold a computer or other equipment the student needs for education.
- Environmental controls and equipment manipulators modify a device to allow the student with a disability to use it. Examples include adaptations of timers, light switches, and telephones; robotics; additional external switches activated by pressure, eyebrows or breath; telecommunications devices for individuals who are deaf (TTY), and control mechanisms with sonar-sensing devices.
- Instructional uses of technology use computer software to allow students full educational opportunity. For example, computer-assisted instruction uses software to provide instruction and practice opportunities on a device. Computer-managed instruction is software that displays and analyzes grades, schedules, placement, and information management items.
- Motivational devices encourage the student to interact with his or her environment through exploration, manipulation, and play. These devices include battery-operated or modified toys and games, such as adding a switch to a toy.

The following list gives examples of the kinds of AT devices which might be helpful to a student with a disability

- Audio books for a student who cannot read written words.
- Word processors, laptop computers for a student who has a problem with writing.
- Augmentative communication devices and apps for a student who has communication issues.
- A ramp or a special desk or chair for a student with mobility issues.
- A large monitor or reading enhancement software for a student who is visually impaired.

Assistive Technology Services in the IEP

- Evaluation of technology needs, including a functional evaluation of the student's customary environment.
- Purchasing, leasing, or otherwise providing assistive technology devices for students with disabilities.
- Selecting, designing, fitting, customizing, adapting, applying, maintaining, repairing, or replacing assistive technology devices.
- Coordinating and using other therapies, interventions or services with AT devices, such as those associated with existing education and rehabilitation plans and programs.
- AT training and technical assistance for an individual with a disability, and if needed, the family of an individual with a disability.
- AT training or technical assistance for teachers, professionals, or other individuals who provide services to or are involved in the major life functions of students with disabilities.

Who pays for Assistive Technology for children?

- Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA) - which covers early intervention services, services for preschoolers, and children and youth from ages 3-21.
- Vocational Rehabilitation - especially when transition services are being considered for the child at age 13 (in South Carolina).
- BabyNet - funding under Part C of IDEA (for individuals from birth to age 3).
- Children's Rehabilitative Services
- Private Insurance
- Medicaid

Resources:

S.C. Department of Education AT Services: <https://ed.sc.gov/districts-schools/special-education-services/data-and-technology-d-t/assistive-technology-services/>²

South Carolina Assistive Technology Program:

² SCDE AT Specialists are available statewide to all schools and school districts and provides services such as; trainings, workshops, assistance in inventorying assistive technology hardware in different regions, assists with skills needed to conduct appropriate evaluations and assessments, and in obtaining funding through various grants.

<http://www.sc.edu/scatp/resourcecenter.htm>³
803 935-5263

Sources of information for this fact sheet:

34 CFR 300.5 and .6; 34 CFR 300.34; 34 CFR 300.324 (a)(2)(v)

Cross reference:

Disability Rights South Carolina fact sheet: School Transition Services

Disability Rights SC would like to acknowledge that some information shared in this fact sheet was made available from the South Carolina Assistive Technology Project (SCATP) (<http://www.sc.edu/scatp/>) and South Carolina Department of Education (<http://ed.sc.gov/>).

This publication provides legal information, but is not intended to be legal advice. As the law may change, please contact Disability Rights SC for updates. Please let us know if you would like this information in an alternative format.

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Disability Rights South Carolina

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³ The SCATP AT Resource Center provides free consultation for individuals with disabilities, their families and school districts. While they do not provide formal assessments, the SCATP provides demonstrations, loans AT equipment to students, answers questions related to different AT devices and can provide limited consultation to a student's AT team.