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Documenting Assistive Technology into the IEP

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This chapter is about the challenging task of documenting in the IEP the assistive technology devices and services that the school district will be providing. We have tried to include a variety of examples. We have not shown a specific form because there are so many different ones being used.

We believe that there are many “right” ways to include assistive technology in the IEP. The main concern should not be on getting it “right” or “wrong” but rather trying to clearly communicate to the parents and future readers of the IEP document exactly what services the school district will provide and the intended outcomes for the student.

We have attempted to include here a variety of examples of children with varying ages, disabilities, and needed assistive technology, not to provide something you would copy, but instead to stimulate your thinking about potential ways to describe your own unique situations.

Documenting AT in the IEP

Changes to the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process made by The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004 were effective July 1, 2005. The federal regulations for IDEA 2004 became effective October 13, 2006. When Congress reauthorized IDEA 2004, they specifically noted the intent to coordinate IDEA 2004 with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Section 1400(c)(5)(C)). Many definitions in IDEA 2004 come directly from NCLB.

In the “Purposes” section of IDEA 2004 (Section 1400(d)), Congress described what they intended the law to accomplish. Congress also added “further education” as a purpose of the law: “The purposes of this title are to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment and independent living.” (Section 1400(d)(1)(A))

The IDEA requires that the IEP team consider what, if any, assistive technology may be needed by every student with a disability. When a determination is made that there is a need for assistive technology by the IEP team, it is then necessary to describe the assistive technology in the student’s IEP. This may be done in a variety of ways. This section provides several examples. First we’ll review the definitions and legal requirements.

Assistive technology may be any tool that assists a child performance in a functional task that they cannot perform well or cannot perform at all because of their disability. Assistive Technology devices and services are defined in IDEA as:

§300.5 Assistive Technology device

Any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of children with disabilities. (Authority: 20 U.S.C. Chapter 33, Section 1401 (25))

The definition is consistent with past legislation but includes new language from Section 602 (1) of the Act. The definitions of “assistive technology device” and “related services” do not include a medical device that is surgically implanted or the replacement of the device.

§300.6 Assistive Technology service

Any service that directly assists an individual with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device. Such terms include:

- (A) the evaluation of needs including a functional evaluation, in the child’s customary environment;
- (B) purchasing, leasing or otherwise providing for the acquisition of assistive technology devices;
- (C) selecting, designing, fitting, customizing, adapting, applying, maintaining, repairing, or replacing of assistive technology devices;

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- (D) coordinating with other therapies, interventions, or services with assistive technology devices, such as those associated with existing education and rehabilitation plans and programs;
 - (E) training or technical assistance for an individual with disabilities, or where appropriate that child’s family; and
 - (F) training or technical assistance for professionals (including individuals providing education and rehabilitation services), employers or others(s) who provide services to employ, or are otherwise, substantially involved in the major life functions of children with disabilities.
- [Authority 20 U.S.C., Chapter 33, Section 1401(26)]

There are several “special factors” that must also be considered when developing the IEP. While none of these factors are new additions, changes in wording have occurred. For all students, the team must consider the need for assistive technology devices and services. IEP teams must now consider whether a student with a disability needs assistive technology, instead of whether the student requires assistive technology. The specific IDEA requirement for schools to provide assistive technology states:

§300.105 Assistive Technology

Each public agency shall ensure that assistive technology devices or assistive technology services or both, as those terms are defined in 300.5 - 300.6 are made available to a child with a disability if required as a part of the child’s

- (a) Special education under 300.36;
- (b) Related services under 300.34; or
- (c) Supplementary aids and services under 300.114(a)(2)(ii).

The development of a student’s IEP has always been guided by the consideration of several important factors. These are:

- The strengths of the child
- The concerns of the parents for enhancing the education of their child
- The results of the initial evaluation or most recent evaluation of the child

IDEA 2004 includes the above in addition to the:

- academic,
- developmental, and
- functional needs of the child.

The IEP must contain several statements that describe the child’s performance and outline the special education and related services the school district will provide. There have been many important changes to these areas, as explained below.

Present Level of Performance. The statement of the child’s present level of education performance has been revised to reflect the child’s academic achievement and functional performance, including how the child’s disability affects the child’s involvement and progress in the general education curriculum.

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Measurable Annual Goals

A statement of measurable annual goals must be included in the IEP, including academic and functional goals, designed to meet the child’s needs that result from the disability, to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum, and meet each of the child’s other educational needs that result from the disability.

It is probably most logical to complete the IEP AT “consideration” after goals and objectives are established. Since assistive technology by definition is something that helps a child to “increase, maintain, or improve a functional capability” it is important to know what specific tasks the child will be expected to be able to accomplish in the next year. This information will make “consideration” more focused and concrete. The decision to provide assistive technology would logically be based on the recognition that the student is struggling to complete one or more specific tasks, is not able to access specific aspects of the curriculum or environment, is not able to communicate effectively, or is not as productive as will be needed over the course of the next year.

Although assistive technology devices or services may be either a part of a child’s **special education program**, a **related service**, or a **supplementary aid or service**, documenting it in the IEP continues to be a challenge for many. Following are examples of assistive technology that has been included in the IEP document in each of these three ways.

1. AT as a part of the child’s Special Education program

Special education is specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability that is provided at no cost to the child or the child’s parents. It is provided in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions and in other settings. The process for identification of a disability is made by the child’s IEP team and includes a two-part analysis:

1. Determination that the child meets at least one of the eleven eligibility areas identified in state and federal law AND
2. Identification of the need for special education services as a result of the identified impairment

When the assistive technology is provided as part of the child’s special education program, it will be described in the goals and objectives. IDEA 2004 eliminated short-term objectives and benchmarks for students with disabilities, except for those students who take alternate assessments (Section 1414(d)(1)(A)(i)(I)). Nothing in IDEA 2004 prohibits the development of short-term objectives, however.

In writing annual goals, both academic and non-academic, it is important to include three components: the area of need; the direction of change; and the level of attainment (Wright & Laffin, 2001). In addition, it is critical to relate it to the functional task that the child needs to complete. For instance, a technically correct annual goal might be, “Bobby will activate a single switch 75% of the time.” However, it fails the “So What?” test. Why is it that you want Bobby to activate a switch in the first place? What will he accomplish? Will he operate a toy? Will he operate a computer? Will he use it to call for help? Will he use it to indicate he is ready to be moved to a new position? Will he greet a friend? If we always relate the use of the technology to a functional outcome, we will avoid the mistake of focusing on the equipment as an end in itself rather than a means to an end.

In some cases the child will need training and instruction on the use of the assistive technology and in other cases, it will be a material that the child is using to achieve a specific goal or objective. An augmentative communication device might be used under either of these conditions. Included here are a variety of examples of AT in annual goals and short-term objectives.

Example 1:

Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance: Johnny uses his right hand to write and to physically position his left arm and hand. He has difficulty managing papers as he writes. He collects and utilizes a lap tray, incline board, non-slip mat and modified clipboard but often waits for staff to set up modifications.

Annual Goal: Johnny will initiate the set-up of his writing station 80% of the time given a chart of needed materials for each task.

Example 2:

Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance: Eric participates in regular education programs for his academic subjects. His hand strength is limited and he fatigues quickly when doing any handwriting task. Civics and English homework are a particular problem because of lengthy assignments and reports that need to be completed.

Annual Goal: Eric will use a computer or portable word processor to complete 100% of his assignments in 10th grade English and Civics classes.

Example 3:

Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance: Becky is learning to read and is anxious to complete writing assignments with her peers. She is not able to produce handwritten material due to severe spastic quadriplegia. Becky is interested in using the computer and has been introduced to it. The staff has helped Becky experiment with several switches in a variety of locations. She seems to be most accurate using a switch mounted next to her head.

Annual Goal: Becky will use a single switch mounted on a switch-mounting arm positioned to the right side of her head and scanning software to access the computer 9 out of 10 times for a variety of educational assignments.

Example 4:

Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance: Mary currently communicates with sounds that are not always understood by those around her. She often becomes upset when she is not understood. She likes people and likes to be around both adults and children. She is beginning to play simple games.

Annual Goal: Mary will communicate her interests and needs in three or more environments/situations using a single message voice output device.

Short Term Objective (STO) 1: Using a single message voice output device, Mary will communicate when she wants to change activities during play time on three out of five opportunities on three consecutive days.

STO 2: Mary will use the single message device to interact with others during games, such as Peek-a-Boo on three out of five opportunities on three consecutive days.

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STO 3: Mary will initiate communication by “calling” someone using a preprogrammed message on a single message voice output device on three out of three opportunities on three consecutive days.

STO 4: Mary will “lead” singing during circle time by activating a preprogrammed single message voice output device on three out of three opportunities when it is her turn.

Example 5:

Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance: Sarah can use eye gaze fairly successfully to indicate her wants and needs when items are appropriately displayed so that her communication partner can tell what she is gazing at. She currently makes a grunting sound to greet others, to get attention, and to represent both yes and no. She has recently been using a four-message output device and is having some success at making choices. Sarah travels independently about the school in her power chair.

Annual Goal: Sarah will interact with others in the school environment in four out of five opportunities to indicate her preferences and needs using voice output devices and eye gaze strategies.

STO 1: When provided with a single message voice output device on her wheel chair, Sarah will use it to greet peers in the hallways, lunchroom and classroom 100% of the time.

STO 2: Using an eye gaze frame mounted on her wheelchair, Sarah will indicate her preference between four choices 80% of the time on five random trials.

STO 3: When asked “yes/no” questions, Sarah will indicate “yes” with a smile and eye contact with communication partner, and “no” by looking down at her wheelchair tray for at least three seconds 90% of the time on 10 random trials.

STO 4: When provided with a preprogrammed four message voice output device, Sarah will participate in story time by using repetitive phrases, requests to “hear more”, “turn the pages” etc., appropriately 80% of the time during five random trials.

Example 6:

Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance: Andy uses a variety of sounds, gestures, signs, and picture/symbols to communicate with his family. He is very social and enjoys parallel play. Andy does not communicate vocally in the classroom, but does use some gestures. At school Andy will sign, but only with prompts.

Annual Goal: Andy will increase expressive language production by using a variety of communication methods in the classroom, including sign language, gestures, communication boards, pictures, and simple voice output devices during four out of five opportunities.

Example 7:

Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance: Brandon communicates by using unintelligible vocalizations. He will physically obtain desired items independently and indicates refusal by pushing objects/people away. Brandon currently understands cause/effect relationships and will activate a switch with voice output to obtain a desired activity. It is questionable whether he understands the specific meaning of the utterance he has produced or if he simply knows that pressing the switch earns him an activity.

Annual Goal: Brandon will select activities and interact with peers/adults within those activities four out of five times when provided with voice output devices.

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STO 1: Given a choice of two activities, Brandon will use a single message voice output device to choose a desired activity three out of five times on three consecutive days.

STO 2: Brandon will participate within play activities where an adult is using aided language stimulation on a phrase-based communication board five times per day.

STO 3: Brandon will use single message voice output devices to interact at appropriate times with peers/adults on 8 of 10 communicative attempts in play activities on three consecutive days.

STO 4: Brandon will use a four message voice output device to interact at appropriate times with peers/adults on 8 of 10 communicative attempts in a play activity on three consecutive days.

Example 8:

Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance: Michael is in the second grade classroom for most of the school day. He is interested in the material being presented by the teacher and wants to participate. He has a full time paraprofessional who assists him. He has difficulty being an active participant in academics because he uses a voice output AAC device and frequently does not have the “right” answer. The teacher is concerned at the amount of time it currently takes while Michael struggles to answer questions. The teacher is interested in finding ways for Michael to more actively participate.

Annual Goal: Michael will use eye gaze and prerecorded messages to respond to appropriately phrased questions in four subject area classes, mathematics, reading, science and social studies in three out of five opportunities.

Example 9:

Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance: Joey is a 20 month old with developmental delays. He is beginning to respond to visual and auditory action toys and laughs or makes sounds when a toy is activated. He will sometimes reach out to attempt to make the toy move again. Joey’s parents are happy to see him responding to toys and beginning to make sounds, but would like to see him making more attempts at communicating his wants and participating in turn taking games with the family.

Annual Goal: Joey will use a switch or voice output device to actively participate in play experiences to communicate interests to his parents or other caregivers in four out of five opportunities.

STO 1: Joey will use a switch to activate a mechanical toy, after being shown how in a turn-taking situation with his parents, with 80% success as observed during three random observations.

STO 2: Using a single message voice output device, Joey will request “more” or “do it again” when playing simple interactive games, like Peek-a-Boo or tickling that his family knows he is enjoying 80% of the time on three random samples.

STO 3: Using a voice output device with two options, Joey will indicate wanting to play a game or not play a game, “do it again” or “not do it again” during three out of three opportunities as observed on three of four random samples.

Example 10:

Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance: Jeff likes to interact with his family. He enjoys eating and being involved in meal time and other functional activities in the home. He has not been able to participate in cooking or cleaning except to

look toward the item that is needed next, or make a sound when his mother purposely “forgets” something.

Annual Goal: Jeff will use a single switch to activate adapted utensils and appliances to assist family members in targeted functional household tasks during three out of four opportunities.

STO 1: Jeff will activate the blender and mixer with a single switch at appropriate times to participate in preparing meals in three out of four opportunities on three consecutive trials.

STO 2: Jeff will activate the vacuum cleaner using a single switch at appropriate times when cued by his mother to participate in vacuuming in three out of four opportunities on three consecutive trials.

Example 11:

Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance: Kelly is in the third grade classroom for most of his day. He has a full time paraprofessional who assists him. He is unable to use a standard keyboard because of his physical limitations. Additionally, his speech is frequently unintelligible. He currently uses single message and multiple message voice output devices, eye gaze, and limited direct selection to complete his academic work. Kelly is functioning at about the second grade level in most curricular areas.

Annual Goal: Kelly will use an adapted keyboard with custom overlays and a computer with talking word processing to complete all academic work.

STO 1: Using an adapted keyboard with a custom spelling template, Kelly will complete a 10 word weekly spelling test taken from second grade curriculum and his current reading materials, with 80% accuracy once a week.

STO 2: Using an adapted keyboard with a custom overlay with three character names and facts or characteristics about them from a current reading selection, Kelly will generate three sentences describing a character or their actions with 100% accuracy on three out of four opportunities.

STO 3: After participating in a cooperative group science project, Kelly will use an adapted keyboard with a custom overlay that randomly lists three to five steps involved in the science project to sequence the steps in proper order with 80% accuracy and “read” them to his group as the “recorder” on three out of four opportunities.

STO 4: Using a basic numbers overlay on an adapted keyboard, Kelly will complete his adjusted daily math assignment with 100% accuracy on four out of five opportunities.

Example 12:

Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance: Steven is a four-year-old boy diagnosed with pervasive developmental disorder. His placement is in an Early Childhood classroom. He is able to understand and comprehend when spoken to, but does not communicate his needs consistently. When choices are simplified and broken into steps, Steven will try to communicate wants and needs. Peer interactions are limited.

Annual goal: Steven will use a picture board or voice output device to express wants and needs to adults and peers in both home and school at least four times each day.

STO 1: During meal times at school and at home, Steven will use a picture board to point to at least three of six foods he wants to eat, two of three meals each day.

STO 2: Using a voice output device, Steven will make a choice of a “center” he wishes to participate in during choice/work time three or four days per week.

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STO 3: During group story time, Steven will use a single message voice output device to complete a repeated story line with peers 90% of the time as observed on 10 random trials.

Example 13:

Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance: Barb is a 15-year old girl. She uses a modified wheelchair with a specialized insert. She is medically fragile and has no speech, because her vocal cords were damaged as an infant. She does have mood swings that are triggered by various situations that result in self abusive behaviors. She enjoys music and being talked to. She has difficulty in large rooms. She cannot tolerate loud sounds. She has limited experience in integrated settings.

Annual goal: Barb will use a voice output device to respond in Life Skills class on three out of five opportunities.

STO 1: Barb will activate a single message output device during two of three life skills classes to answer one prearranged question. She will progress from a level of physical prompt at the elbow to no physical assist by the end of the semester. Given the verbal cue from the life skills instructor “Barb can you tell me what you think?”

STO 2: Barb will use a multiple message device to call on three of her cooperative group members to give their report during review day session. Moving from a level of full physical assistance to activate the switch to a level of slight physical cue and verbal prompt, three out of five review sessions.

STO 3: Barb will activate a switch connected to a pouring device. Barb will comply from a level of slight physical assist and three verbal prompts, to slight physical assist and one verbal prompt, on three of the last five cooking classes.

STO 4: Barb will activate a single message voice output device to be excused from an over stimulating environment rather than exhibiting inappropriate behaviors. She will increase use of this method from a level of zero uses to a level of three uses during the first quarter.

2. AT as a Related Service

A related service means transportation and such developmental, corrective, and other supportive services that are required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education and includes assistive technology services. Examples of AT as a related service include walkers, wheelchairs, and various positioning devices. Augmentative communication devices and computers are also sometimes listed there. When AT is to be included in the IEP as a related service, it will appear in the chart of related services. If Assistive Technology is not one of the choices under Related Services on the district’s IEP form, it can be written in under “Other”. Since Related Services must have the Amount/Frequency, Duration, and Location specified. That information must be filled in.

Example:

Stephanie is in the third grade. She has cerebral palsy, which makes it difficult for her to walk long distances. It is so fatiguing that she does not recover from the exertion for 30 to 45 minutes and is not able to concentrate on school activities if long walks are required. She is able to walk short distances with no ill effects if enough time is provided.

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Related Services	Frequency	Duration	Location
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other: (Specify): Walker	daily during lunch	entire school year	classroom and lunchroom

It is the specificity of frequency, duration, and location that may account for the fact that parents frequently request that the assistive technology being provided be documented as a Related Service. However, the provision of AT is equally binding when it is described under Supplementary Aids and Services or in the Short Term Objectives. Note: IDEA does not automatically **require** that an IEP include separate annual goals and short-term objectives for related services. For example, while typically there are not goals for things like transportation, there could be if the student is learning to access public transportation to get to a work site during transition. The determination of whether annual goals and short-term objectives are needed is **contingent upon the related services. If the related services includes the learning of new skills which are not already part of, or incorporated in, an existing annual goal or short term objective, and some type of instruction is being provided, then there would need to be goals and objectives in addition to the statement under Related Services.**

3. AT as Supplementary Aids and Services

Supplementary Aids and Services are those aids, services, and other supports which are provided to enhance or allow the student's placement in the least restrictive environment (LRE), especially when an LRE is the regular education classroom. Assistive Technology may be a Supplementary Aid or Service. Assistive technology is most logically included in the IEP as a Supplementary Aid when it provides more independence and requires little instruction in order to be used effectively. Items such as portable word processors, talking spell checkers, and other small, portable devices are often included under Supplementary Aids and Services.

Example 1: Jacob is in kindergarten. He likes to do the coloring and writing activities with the other children. He has difficulty with these activities because he is subject to the symmetric tonic neck reflex (STNR) which causes him to round his shoulders and flex his arms whenever he bends his head down to look at the paper. It is very fatiguing for him to look down and back up at the teacher. It is important to Jacob to participate in the same way as the rest of the students.

Supplementary Aids & Services	Frequency	Duration	Location
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Slant top table for all writing, coloring, drawing, and painting	daily	entire school year	kindergarten and art room activities

Example 2: Carl uses his personal hearing aid to good advantage in quiet environments. However, he is confused when the background noise is elevated, as often occurs in active classroom situations and large group activities. He has therefore not been able to effectively participate in many important school activities.

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Supplementary Aids & Services	Frequency	Duration	Location
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No FM classroom amplification system to assist with auditory discrimination	daily	entire school year	5th grade classroom