

Once Is Not Enough: AT and the IEP

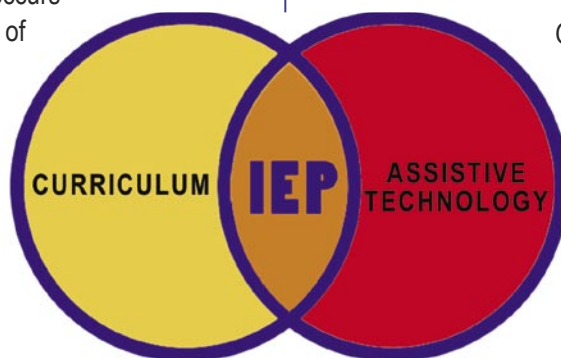


In this Issue...

Across the nation the school year draws to a close. Students squirm in seats, sniffing the freedom of the impending summer. Teachers, striving to rein in the students' urge to bolt, grow more impatient as well. These are the hallmarks of an academic year's recession into the torpor of summer. Yet as the familiar classroom rhythms play out, another annual event occurs that will determine the immediate futures of many hundreds of thousands of special education students nationwide: the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting, when teachers, administrators, other professionals and parents decide a child's academic goals and, importantly, consider whether or not that child is assistive technology-eligible.

This once-a-year ritual is often fraught with misperception and misapprehension. IEP team members, often beset by the tightening budgetary constraints of their school districts yet looking also to head off expensive fair-hearing litigation instigated by parents seeking AT for their children, are torn between prudent restraint and mollification. Parents, upon learning that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that AT be considered for each child with an IEP, sometimes appear with AT equipment catalogs in hand although

their knowledge of AT may be skimpy, at best. Looming in the background is the growing resentment among parents of general education students about the funding – much of directed toward AT acquisition -- made available to students in special education at the expense, in their eyes, of their children's needs.



Given the need to more efficiently match IEP-generated AT acquisition to a child's curriculum goals, there is a burgeoning belief among some educators that a paradigm shift in the IEP decision-making process may be necessary. The first nudge toward that paradigm shift, some feel, would be a change in the current once-a-year IEP meeting format to a more flexible arrangement in which IEP teams are provided with

regular updates during the school year on how effectively a child's AT is aiding him/her in meeting curriculum goals. That way, team members and parents can reformulate the AT/IEP equation for the child's benefit and, because such an arrangement would likely reduce the financial costs associated with AT abandonment, the district's benefit as well. This issue examines the challenges of effectively and efficiently integrating AT into a child's IEP and the resources currently able to facilitate it.

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Sherry Purcell & Debbie Grant Speak

Co-authors of *Using Assistive Technology to Meet Literacy Standards for Grades K-3 (2002)*, an *IEP Team Guide* and *Using Assistive Technology to Meet Literacy Standards for Grades 4-6 (2004)* – both books published by IEP Resources, Attainment Company, Inc. -- Sherry Purcell and Debbie Grant are regarded as passionate pioneers in urging an emphasis on connecting AT prescriptions to a child's IEP curriculum goals.

Dr. Purcell helped establish the AT and augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) programs for the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and served as the program's administrator for more than a decade. Currently she's the administrator for the LAUSD speech and language program.

Debbie Grant is the AT/AAC specialist for the Santa Barbara County (CA) Education Office. She and Dr. Purcell are currently working on the third book of their series, covering grades 7-12.

Explains Dr. Purcell, "Debbie and I recognized the need to connect AT with curriculum back in 1999 when we started writing our books together. Despite the exposure our concept has received thanks to our books and frequent conference presentations, individuals who hear our presentation for the first time are surprised by the content, and by our commitment to the concept. They tell us that that's not the way AT and the curriculum are connected through the IEP in their districts."

Says Ms. Grant, "AT is goal-driven; it's not the goal. AT should exist on an IEP to support the stated goals and to bridge the gap between what is expected of the student and what the student is capable of minus the AT."

There's sometimes a misperception on parents' part that a specific brand of software or AT can be written into an IEP, she says. "The AT itself is not written specifically into the goal, such as 'Johnny will use Co:Writer for writing a three-paragraph report with topic sentence.'" In their books, she adds, IEP goals are written with only generic references to AT. For example:

Goal: Capitalize names of newspapers, magazines, art, music, organizations and first word in quotations

Access issue: Motor

AT solutions: Key Word: Adapted writing implements, alternative writing instruments, adapted paper, writing stabilizer

IEP goal: Using adapted/alternative writing implements and paper, and a writing stabilizer, STUDENT will capitalize names of magazines, newspapers, works of art, music, organizations and first words in quotations with ___% accuracy ___/___ times.



Both Dr. Purcell and Ms. Grant emphasize that very often expensive high-tech AT solutions are not as effective as more common, far less expensive and more accessible low-tech implements that frequently are found in classroom closets and desk drawers, ignored in the rush for more expensive gear that ends up abandoned at a high rate. With funding controversies always in mind, both women urge IEP team members considering AT to keep their focus on the curriculum, thereby benefiting students with disabilities, who will gain access to the right devices, not only the most expensive, and school districts, whose collective eye must be fixed, out of necessity, on the bottom line.

Though now regarded as pioneers, Dr. Purcell and Ms. Grant discovered their career calling by accident. Recalls Dr. Purcell, "I was attending Elmira College, a small women's college in upstate New York where I was majoring in liberal studies, which means I had no clue as to what I wanted to do. A dorm friend told me that there was a speech clinic on campus that I might find interesting. I dropped by and was absolutely fascinated. I remembered that one of my sisters had seen a speech pathologist because she had difficulty pronouncing her r's. So I spent more and more time with people in the speech pathology program and ultimately chose it as a career."

Dr. Purcell went on to work for 20 years in Connecticut and California public schools. She's a graduate of Leadership and Technology Management, a California State Tech Act project. As a result of that training she was designated one of eight advanced technology leaders in the state of California. A frequent presenter with Ms. Grant at industry conferences nationwide, Dr. Purcell holds a certificate in assistive technology from the California State University, Northridge Center on Disabilities.

Ms. Grant was an art major as an undergraduate and became fixated on her speech and language major roommates' animated nightly discussions. Soon she changed her major to speech

and language pathology, segued into AAC and, later, AT. Also a graduate of Leadership and Technology Management, Debbie Grant, too, was designated as one of California's eight advanced technology leaders. A veteran of two decades in private practice and the California public schools, Ms. Grant earned a Masters degree in speech-language pathology from Cal State Long Beach and a certificate in AT from Cal State, Northridge.

Both Ms. Grant and Dr. Purcell advocate a more flexible IEP approach to AT which features more frequent student AT updates for IEP team members. "Once a year is not enough," declares Dr. Purcell. "Same time next year is a great title for a play, but it's not the most effective approach for an IEP team, for parents or for children with disabilities in this day and age."

Supporting our interview with Sherry Purcell and Debbie Grant are resources to assist parents, teachers, administrators and AT professionals in learning more about the role of AT in the IEP. We also feature members of our Knowledge Network. The members spotlighted this month focus on the challenges of integrating AT in a child's IEP. We invite you to contact these members for further information.

Please share this newsletter with other organizations, families and professionals who may benefit from it. We invite you to contact us at <http://www.fctd.info>. We welcome feedback, new members and all who contribute to our growing knowledge base.



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and Disability**

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Integrating AT into the IEP: It's Not About the AT; It's About the Curriculum

**An Interview with Sherry Purcell, Ph.D.,
Administrator, Los Angeles Unified School District
and Debbie Grant, M.A.,
AAC Specialist, Santa Barbara (CA) County Education Office**

Too often, says Debbie Grant, the emphasis by IEP teams and parents is placed on the assistive technology. Instead, she insists, that emphasis should be placed on the curriculum, with AT serving as a tool to help meet a child's IEP goals.

Moving that emphasis, helping IEP teams and parents make that connection, adds Sherry Purcell, amounts to a paradigm change and is not accomplished overnight, nor even after their two books have been written and numerous co-presentations have been made. Nevertheless, Dr. Purcell says, "it is and will remain our passion."

Both women believe that success in convincing the field to change its emphasis to one that is curriculum centered, in which AT plays a strong supporting role, will, in both the short and long run, drain much of the contentiousness and resulting cost inefficiencies from the IEP process.

Both women have been instrumental in instigating an emphasis on curriculum-center AT planning in their respective districts. Says Sherry Purcell, "Is ours in Los Angeles a perfect system? Not when you're dealing with the more than 83,000 kids in special education. It's always a challenge to get the word out to everybody that AT must, by law, be part of the process and that it must be pegged to meeting the standards of a child's curriculum. But we are proud of the AT system we have put into place to increase knowledge and access to AT for our students with disabilities."

Adds Debbie Grant, "I'll ditto in Santa Barbara, which has 7,000 special education students. AT is on the IEP form and must be considered. There are key individuals in every school district who have been trained in AT. So, hopefully, AT is included in IEP discussions from the very beginning in reference to IEP goals."



Debbie Grant

In her role as her county's AAC/AT specialist, "I provide AT services to all of the county's 23 school districts. "When a district AT specialist's capabilities have been exhausted, I'm called in."

In their curriculum-centered IEP/AT models, explains Ms. Grant, IEP team members inevitably reach the point at which AT must be considered. "That is when the IEP team determines if AT has been considered to its fullest extent. If AT has not been addressed then a referral is made for my services. I then do an assessment. Then we have another IEP meeting."

No IEP Formula for AT

According to both women, no standardized formula exists to decide whether or not AT ought to be included in a child's IEP, nor is there a formalized, standardized assessment for determining the type of AT that should be included in an IEP. Those decisions, says, Dr. Purcell, are left up to the IEP team, whose members know the child and what that child needs to do but is unable to do because of his/her disability. "Making the AT judgment requires an intimate knowledge of what that child can/can't do and what the child's skill levels are."



In her district, she explains, the process begins when a teacher or parent expresses concern about a child's functioning in the classroom regarding his/her ability to speak, write, read or listen. The next step in the process involves a pre-referral student study team consisting of the child's teacher, an administrator, support personnel, a psychologist and a parent. The group

discusses what the child needs and then decides upon a possible remedy. Accommodations are then put into place, informally, to see if they will help. If that step proves unsuccessful, a referral is made for an AT assessment.

"In my district," Dr. Purcell adds, "that translates into a referral to the related services providers. AT comes under those services." For example, she explains, "if a child is non-verbal, then the speech and language pathologist (SLP) becomes involved. If there are motor problems, either an occupational therapist (OT) or a physical therapist (PT) are contacted. If a child's hearing or vision are in question, appropriate professionals are called in." "We have those providers available at each school and they are called in to do an evaluation as to how a child is functioning. If they don't feel that they have the expertise to satisfactorily address the problem, a centralized team can be summoned." The centralized team is made up of individuals who have been specifically trained in AT.



Sherry Purcell

"We're lucky because we have the Cal State University, Northridge (CSUN) Center on Disabilities nearby. All of our staff-related services professionals have gone through the AT Applications Certificate Program (ATACP) there. This team consists of general and special ed teachers, speech pathologists, occupational and physical therapists. And we can work with the vision and hearing program when we need to."

The team's role, Dr. Purcell notes, is to provide support to school site personnel, "but ultimately it's the school site personnel that have to take ownership of that child, identify the child's needs and provide the appropriate equipment."

There is no formula per se except for what fits into a needs analysis format. Both school districts include a selection of equipment in order to determine the most appropriate device. "The child can sample the equipment. Then it becomes trial and error. If the device fails to work we can swap it out and try something else." The key word in integrating AT into an IEP is team, declares Debbie Grant. "Achieving that integration requires an OT, PT, SLP, vision or hearing specialist (as appropriate) and an educator to be able to do a functional analysis of what a student is supposed to be capable of doing, what the student can and what he/she is unable to achieve, and what AT is available to help."

Simple Is Sometimes Best

When a student is experiencing difficulties, says Ms. Grant, the individuals on the student support team often are unaware of the simple devices that are available to support a student. "At the accommodations and modifications level, there are so many simple things that can be done to support a student – like raised line writing paper, a slant board, pencil grip or word prediction software for students with learning disabilities. Many of the AT remedies now are based on universal design. Those remedies benefit all students in a classroom, not only those with special needs."

"I've had students who have benefited from the use of a pencil grip, but refuse to use it because they did not want to be seen as different. As a result, the teacher will purchase an entire bucket of these grips, enough for an entire class. Look at the pens that exist now that are fatter, with rubber grips, cushioned grips. Those are AT. We've been using that kind of AT for years to help students with fine motor problems. Now, it's universal design. Everyone is finding that it's a benefit." In the field today, Ms. Grant adds, "we are finding that much of the software that has been created for students with learning dis-



abilities is being used across the curriculum. Look at the work that Don Johnston is doing with Write: Outloud, Co:Writer and Draft: Builder. My assistants went to a training and each purchased Draft:Builder for their general ed children.”

This is the same principle that held true for equipment that was created by NASA for the astronauts but also proved useful in many other areas, she points out.

Moving Toward a More Comprehensive Technological Approach?

Dr. Purcell and Ms. Grant agree that the ongoing convergence of education technology, AT and universal design is creating a more comprehensive technological approach for all children, not just those with disabilities.

Says Dr. Purcell, “It used to be that you needed to have a computer in a classroom, and the ratio of kids to that computer was ridiculous. Now you see technology all over schools, at least in our district. We have at least two computers in every classroom now. That in itself is a big change.

“Our teachers are coming out of their training institutions now with courses in educational technology. Speech pathologists and OTs are emerging with AT training. The professionals coming into the system now understand and appreciate technology in a different way than the earlier generations.”

“Yet we continue to face the challenge of making certain that AT relates to curriculum and is not there just as an isolated tool. That’s why Debbie and I got involved in writing our books. We were trying to link the two. We said, ‘Here’s the AT. It ranges from low-tech to high-tech and it falls into the following areas.’ Those areas have to relate together and should not exist in isolation. That’s been the challenge from the beginning, and it remains a challenge – and our passion.”

The professionals coming into the system now understand and appreciate technology in a different way than the earlier generations.

The Curriculum/AT Connection: Pockets of Understanding

“We recognized the need to make that connection back in 1999 and started writing our books together,” Sherry Purcell remarks. “Despite the number of years that have passed and the exposure our ideas have gained, individuals who hear our presentation at conferences remain surprised about our concept. They tell us that that’s not the way it is in their district in terms of linking AT and curriculum. Yet they are very grateful for the work we’ve done in bringing the two together. To gain even more widespread exposure it’s just a matter of us staying the course and getting the

message out that it’s not just about the tools, it’s about helping a child function in the classroom and finding out what is needed to make that happen. The IEP teams in my district support our concept. Across the nation, however, I’m not sure what kind of impact we’ve made, if any. It’s hard to tell.”

Debbie Grant sees pockets of understanding nationwide and acceptance on a state-by-state basis. “It appears that states that implemented Technology Act Programs earliest are ahead in their understanding and implementation of our concept. There are states that have established the linkage between AT and curriculum standards as set forth in an IEP long ago and others that still do not get it.” Both agreed that Wisconsin and Pennsylvania are far ahead of the field in making that link.

Funding, or its lack, is a major reason why this concept is only slowly catching on.

“In California, there’s money in the pot for low-incidence students, for vision and hearing and severe orthopedic impairments. Some districts may not have enough money for other kids who need AT,” Dr. Purcell claims.



Inevitably, they agree, AT funding for children with high-incidence disabilities devolves to the school districts. That result, says Ms. Grant, “gets the parents of regular ed kids up in arms because too much of the money appears to be going to special ed children. Much of the cost associated with special ed, she concedes, is generated by fair hearings and consequent litigation. A misperception as old as the initial IDEA legislation has contributed to the ferocity of the current district-level funding battle nationwide, she notes. AT consideration in an IEP, to many parents and educators, connoted computers and other expensive high-tech equipment, she asserts. “There was an initial financial backlash based on that misperception. Some school districts have blocked AT out entirely because of the funding issue or ignorance.”

A solution benefiting all parties, she hopes, may lie in wider acceptance and implementation of universal design.

Says Dr. Purcell, “Growing acceptance and implementation of universal design by school districts across the country will make a big difference. When AT devices, and the tying of AT to the curriculum, become more mainstream, very specialized equip-

A solution benefiting all parties may lie in wider acceptance and implementation of universal design.

ment will still be needed by certain kids. In terms of high-tech, I agree that universal design will pretty quickly erode the boundaries between assistive and educational technology.”

The Handwriting on the Wall

Dr. Purcell and Ms. Grant see those boundaries perhaps disintegrating in a decade or less, depending on the speed of technological evolution.

As an example of the blending of the two technologies, Debbie Grant points to West Coast-based IntelliTools, which has long been focused on AT for special ed use. “Now, however, the company’s new Classroom Suite, which came out a couple of years ago, is also focused on regular ed. At the CSUN conference, IntelliTools made no bones about the change. ‘We’re in regular ed now,’ company representatives said.

“It would seem,” say Grant and Purcell, “that IntelliTools and other AT vendors ‘see the handwriting on the wall.’ Many of their products are being developed as mainstream products to support students enrolled in general education as well as those who are enrolled in special education.”

Given the current realities of AT funding, how can districts meet this challenge while trying to link AT to the curriculum?

Replies Debbie Grant, “They need to educate their teachers about what AT is – and it isn’t always high-tech. It is also the raised-line paper and the slant boards. A lot of accommodations can be made way before the IEP meeting. The needs of many of these kids can be met before the IEP team is called in. It’s a matter of looking at the standards. What is this child expected to do?”

“Often, when I work with teachers, the teachers will say, ‘The child can’t do this worksheet because he lacks the motor ability.’ I’ll respond by asking, ‘What is the standard that this work sheet is based on? What are you, the teacher, trying to assess and determine, whether or not the student has acquired this piece of knowledge?’ If that can be expressed verbally, then that’s OK. If the child can tell the teacher which words have a long A in them, for example, versus circling or underlining each word that has the long A in it, you know that he understands. He’s expressing to you that he has mastered the standard. That’s okay if he’s meeting the standard in an alternative format. That’s acceptable.”

Adds, Dr. Purcell, “That’s what our books try to pinpoint and emphasize: doing a task analysis of the skills the child would have to possess to meet a specific standard and then offer some solutions from a low-tech to a high-tech range. We’ve tried to write our books so that they are teacher friendly, so a teacher who asserts that a child cannot meet a standard can then go to our book and

find possible solutions.”

Can the same principle be applied on standardized tests?

Replies Sherry Purcell, “Within each of those tests there are certain accommodations that can be made. The child can proceed with the test and be graded on it in the same way as other students. But if the accommodations get at the core of what is being tested they cannot be permitted.

She reminds that on the IEP the child’s technology use must be documented. That documentation must be in place in order for the accommodations to be justified on a standardized test.

Buying the Appropriate AT

A solution reaching to the heart of the funding controversy, says Dr. Purcell, consists of locating the most appropriate AT to help students meet their curriculum goals. “Because dollars are scarce we must be certain that the equipment we’re buying is appropriate. So often money is thrown at equipment without an appropriate assessment. As a result, the equipment is abandoned, which offends – and should offend -- cost-conscious school districts.” She continues, “It comes back to an appropriate assessment for the child, monitoring and [creating] a system in which there is an inventory of that equipment that can be circulated and rotated.” Her district employs such a system, she says. “We have a central inventory of basic equipment that we can use as part of the assessment for trials to see which device is best for a child. Then we can loan the equipment out on a short-term basis and re-circulate it if the equipment fails to meet that child’s needs.”

Any school district that wants to do well by its children in terms of AT has to think along those lines, she declares. “If a district is unable to afford to establish its own inventory sometimes vendors will allow the district to rent equipment for a short period to facilitate a trial period.”

According to Dr. Purcell and Ms. Grant, the problem is that parents and teachers often simply open a catalogue and select a device that turns out to be inappropriate and a waste of money. “That scenario is frequently reported to us by participants in our trainings,” says Dr. Purcell.

Predicts Ms. Grant, “Unfortunately, many school districts will continue to throw equipment at a family in order to stay out of fair hearing. The equipment may not be appropriate for the child. It may be beyond the child’s ability to use. The result is a negative experience for all involved, including those who are trying to support the child. We see that a lot as well.”

She adds, “Parents say, ‘I want this computer’ or ‘I want this state-

of-the-art AAC device.' And the equipment is inappropriate. The scenario is a waste of everyone's time, especially the child's. The key is training, an appropriate assessment and monitoring the AT's use and usability and an inventory that allows for AT devices to be circulated."

Open Your Closets

Any school district in the nation can implement these cost-saving measures that also help make sure that a child gains access to the most appropriate assistive technology, Ms. Grant asserts. "In a small district you identify the professionals who have the related services degrees. Then you make certain that these individuals have the appropriate training within their discipline," Dr. Purcell points out.

"It's amazing how much equipment schools have that is not used. In some schools you can find AT equipment stuffed in the closet. What I say to schools that call me is, 'Open your closets and pull out everything you have and see what's still working and try to use it! That's your inventory. You've got inventory whether or not you even realize it.'" Start there and build from that with the help of consultants or other experts, she advises.

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"Some of these old computers are still fine for a lot of kids to use. They're basic tools. These kids don't need all the latest bells and whistles and memory."

"I found the same thing years ago when Sherry and I went through the state Tech Act training here in California," Debbie Grant adds. "It was my community outreach project, because I saw so many abandoned pieces of equipment that I wanted to bring them into a central data base so that if someone opened a catalogue and said, 'That looks cool,' he or she could go to the database and learn that teacher A over in the neighboring school district had one. Then you can call teacher A and ask her about the equipment's performance, and about borrowing the device."

Hoarded Equipment

"I was so frustrated because I'd go to classrooms and be working with a student and recommend a device. The student will say, 'Oh, sure, I've got one of those!' Then he'd open a cupboard and it's full of equipment. The equipment is just sitting there. It's equipment that students used at one time before moving on, but

the teachers aren't willing to share. Then if the equipment doesn't work, the teachers will send it to me."

Declares Dr. Purcell, "What we're talking about here is a sense of leadership around this issue in school so that someone is recognizing these issues, which are not unique to my schools or to Debbie's schools. Hoarding is an issue common to many schools everywhere."

"There are wonderful AT lending libraries across the country that can serve as examples for every school district looking to solve the problem of hoarded AT equipment," Ms. Grant notes.

"Administrators at the school site level need to take ownership of the issue of AT, recognize what it is and what it is not and have an idea within their building in terms of what's available for the children at their school," Dr. Purcell says. "As the student study team members are considering the AT needs of the children at their school the team needs to find out what is available on their premises that can be used for individual children, and then try it."

She recalls, "Someone phoned me and said, 'This child needs a calculator.' I asked, 'Don't you have calculators at your school?' The caller said yes. I replied, 'Then give the child one!' Start at the school. Check your resources there. If the needed AT is unavailable on the school site, call in a consultant. In my district, we have expertise at the school sites and we have our core group that is specially trained to provide support at the school site and make recommendations. I am convinced that there is more technology out there that is available immediately for children that could be put into place without spending new dollars."

"Education is key," Ms. Grant adds. "There was a mother in one district who heard about a high-tech Eyegaze system via TV. She wanted this Eyegaze system for her daughter. We called an AT team and went in. Using discussion and modeling, we educated the mother. She was very agreeable that an acrylic Eyegaze board was more appropriate and a logical starting point for her daughter's needs rather than the full \$15,000 computerized Eyegaze system because of its ease of use and versatility." What happens, she points out, "is that parents open catalogues, they see specials on TV and they think that what they're seeing will cure their kid and solve their problems. But if we have professionals with training and expertise to work with them, we can obtain the appropriate devices for them."

The Parents' Role

According to Sherry Purcell, "Parents need to educate themselves by taking an active role in their child's education in general, but when it comes to AT and an IEP, they need to be extra involved. They need to talk to the people at their child's school and get

a sense of whether or not they, as parents, have confidence in how the school is dealing with their child's AT and IEP issues. They need to ask questions about the AT training and expertise of school and district personnel. Primarily, however, they should consider what the child needs to do but is unable to do because of the child's disability."

Parents need to educate themselves by taking an active role in their child's education in general, but when it comes to AT and an IEP, they need to be extra involved.

"That's not to say that many children don't need high-tech, Dr. Purcell notes, "but high-tech is not the only AT resource out there." She adds that as part of the parents' increasingly active and informed role in the selection and use of their child's AT, they should also learn to help program the device. "Parents support kids in other areas, like sports training or doing homework or going to the dentist. This is something they really do need to get involved in."

Too often, she adds, "parents believe that this is the school's responsibility." That is true, she admits, to a point. "However, the child progresses much further if the parent is involved in learning how to use and program a child's AT device. Parents have every right to ask for training and orientation and help with how to use equipment so that they can then support their child in the use of that equipment. If they get that orientation and training, if they provide that support, they will be able to see whether or not a child's AT device is actually effective and can then contribute their opinion to the IEP team."

"I Want AT"

Unfortunately, Dr. Purcell continues, "some parents look at the IEP and, when they get to the section that asks, 'Has assistive technology been considered?' they decide then that they want AT for their child. They want it largely just because that question is there." When asked why, Debbie Grant says, "There is often no response at all. They often have no clue. Many don't even know for sure what AT is. They just know that it is their legal right to ask for it."

Then we have to back up and say, 'Let's look at your child's IEP. Let's look at his goals and objectives. Which of these goals is it that you feel he cannot accomplish on his own? Which goal will he fail to achieve without the use of AT?' It all comes back to how AT will help a child achieve his/her goals."

Once a Year Is Not Enough

With all the complexity and considerations that comprise an IEP, and with a child's evolution as a student, one IEP meeting is not

enough, especially at the hectic conclusion of the school year. Says Dr. Purcell, "We talk about the IEP team, but often what that translates to is a meeting."

According to her, the IEP team should be ongoing process unfolding throughout a school year, not a one-time meeting. "The intent of the law was to assemble a group of professionals who know the child, who care about the child, who want to see the child succeed academically. The team members come together once a year, yes, but they know each other and they have conversations during the year. An IEP team meeting is not a gathering of strangers."



Her hope is that the IEP process can make use of a working continuous relationship among the team members in order to meet the ongoing and evolving needs of the children.

Is this approach doable? Debbie Grant insists that it is.

"The law requires that special educators send home report cards at the same time as regular ed. In most districts, that's quarterly, or on a trimester basis. That would mean touching base if only in writing, or via the daily log that teachers and parents send back and forth. In classrooms where I feel that my teachers have a successful relationship with the parents, I see that interaction going back and forth in those daily logs.

Dr. Purcell states, "I don't think you can legislate this approach, but to bring it to life we have to revert to the days when we worked with kids, parents and teachers because it was our job – and still what we like to do."

"We've built those relationships. Now, we're dealing with [regulations] and IEP imperatives so that the process has been reduced to crossing Ts and dotting Is on every document to void a lawsuit. That's wrong. That's not what it's about. It's not what the intent was. It behooves the district leadership and the leadership at the school site to take ownership of our children with disabilities and recognize the need to work with the child and the family so that the child is academically successful, regardless of what curriculum he/she is involved in."

Her hope, she adds, is that the trend toward litigation and a

formalized IEP process will ebb. "Yet I know we have to have this contract and I am not suggesting that it not be there but it may be time to have a paradigm shift about what constitutes an IEP. It's time for that to occur."

Anything Is Doable

"Anything is doable if your heart is in the right place. Is this paradigm shift going to happen? I don't know. Unfortunately, with the way the U.S. legal system works, I think we'll instead see a continuation of what I call 'litigation education,' not special education. We must look at the IEP process and try to open it up and make it more flexible."

Espousing such an approach, she concludes, goes hand-in-hand with the Purcell-Grant team's persistence in continuing to make a strong link between a child's curriculum and assistive technology. "For our part," she predicts, "Debbie and I will continue to push this rock uphill. No one will ever accuse us of being shy about what we believe or our determination to turn those beliefs into a new way of looking at the entire IEP process and AT's role in it. That, after all, is our passion."

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FCTD tiene una nueva sección de recursos en Español.

Se pueden encontrar recursos sobre la tecnología asistencial incluyendo:

- La Guía Familiar sobre la Tecnología Asistencial
- Informativos sobre la Tecnología Asistencial
- Historias de Éxito

Visite:

http://www.fctd.info/resources/index_es.php



The FCTD website (www.fctd.info) has a new SPANISH section.

Many AT Resources are available in Spanish including:

- The Family Information Guide to Assistive Technology
- AT Fact Sheets
- AT Success Stories

Visit:

http://www.fctd.info/resources/index_es.php

RESOURCES

Articles

Assistive Technology in the Individualized Education Plan

By Kursten Dubbles

Neighborhood Legal Services (NLS) - 1999

Cost: No charge

The author outlines the process through which AT is integrated into a child's IEP. Though seven years old, the article remains rich in relevant and useful information for parents, teachers and administrators. Ms. Dubbles urges parents to become familiar with AT before the selection process: "Successful integration of assistive devices into the student's life can be achieved only if the parent(s) are invested in the process of selection, training, and use." Her discussion of a child's present level of performance (PLEP) includes: the areas of the PLEP that need to be addressed; information that should be included in the PLEP; the assessments comprising the PLEP; the student needs the IEP team ought to prioritize; goals, objectives and benchmarks; a description of supplemental aids and services in general and special education; classroom placement. Ms. Dubbles notes that a school district is obligated to provide AT to a student with disabilities if the following questions are answered in the affirmative:

- 1.) Is the provision of an assistive technology device or service essential for the student to receive a fair and appropriate education (FAPE)?
- 2.) Is an AT device or service necessary to be educated within the least restrictive environment?
- 3.) Given the AT device or service, will the person with disabilities have access to school programs and activities?
- 4.) Are the AT devices or services necessary related services?

To obtain this article, contact:

National Advocacy Project
Neighborhood Legal Services
295 Main Street, Ste. 495
Buffalo, NY 14203
Phone: (716) 847-0650 (Voice); (716) -847-1322 (TDD)
<http://www.nls.org/atiep.htm>

The Provision of Assistive Technology for Students with Disabilities

By John Copenhaver

Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center - 2002

Cost: No charge

The author aims to inform parents and educators about the basics of AT in the education evaluation process. The content is especially useful in planning for and participating in IEPs because it closely defines AT and discusses issues such as

AT ownership, repair responsibility, whether a child can bring AT home – and the integration of AT into the curriculum and independent evaluations. The article's topics include: the IEP, IEP implementation, IEP review, legal responsibilities, evaluation, multidisciplinary team meetings, training, funding, Q&A regarding school district responsibility for providing AT.

To obtain this article, contact:

Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center
1780 North Research Parkway, Suite 112
Logan, Utah 84341
Phone: TDD (435) 753-9750 (TDD)
Fax: (435) 752-0238

<http://www1.usu.edu/mprcc/infoserv/pubs/ProvisionofAT.html>

Guides

Special Needs Technologies: an Administrator's Guide

By Terry Lankutis

Tech-Learning - 2004

Cost: No charge

The author describes the composition of an IEP team and how team members can most effectively collaborate to design an IEP in which AT is incorporated. She explains the difference between low- and high-tech AT and why that difference is important to AT's inclusion in an IEP. According to Ms. Lankutis: "IDEA requires IEP teams — which generally include the classroom teacher, parents, principal, student, special needs educator, and possibly technology coordinator — to determine whether a student needs assistive technology. But many team members commonly assume that only special educators or occupational, physical, and speech therapists have the knowledge and expertise to choose assistive technologies. With this assumption, teams often make the mistake of leaving the decision up to one individual.

"Instead, encourage your teams to rely not on one expert, but on the team's collective expertise when determining appropriate assistive technologies. For example, parents might have valuable input on their child's best learning style, comfort level with certain technologies, and feelings toward specific classroom activities, while the administrator can shed light on the resources the district and individual staff members have to offer. Let the expert act as a consultant, guiding and informing the decision making process, but emphasize that every team member must participate in choosing appropriate solutions."

In order to access this article electronically via the Tech-Learning website, the reader must formulate a user name and password. This process takes seconds only. <http://www.techlearning.com/story/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=47204593>

Considering Assistive Technology in the IEP Process: The Texas Four-Step Model

Texas Assistive Technology Network - 2005

This guide matches the skills a child must master – writing, spelling, reading, math, study organizational skills, listening, oral communication, pre-vocational and vocational and seating/positioning/mobility – with the low- and high-tech AT tools necessary to master them that ought to be included in an IEP. In addition, the guide provides a compendium of relevant web resources. The IEP training module and resource guide may be downloaded from the Texas Assistive Technology Network (TATN) at <http://www.texasat.net> as well as the Texas Technology Access Project at <http://techaccess.edb.utexas.edu> <http://www.texasat.net/docs/Consid.Resource.Guide%2004-05.pdf>

A Student's Guide to the IEP

By Marcy McGahee

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHY) - 2002

Cost: No charge

This package, which includes an online booklet and an audio program, serves as a road map for students participating in the development of their own IEPs and features an online booklet for students, a technical assistance guide for parents and transition specialists. The author pays special attention to how AT can be successfully written into a student's IEP.

To obtain this package, contact:

National Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHY)

P.O. Box 1492

Washington, DC 20013

Phone: (800) 695-0285 (Voice/TTY)

Fax: (202) 884-8441

<http://www.nichcy.org/pubs/stuguide/st1.pdf>

Commonly Asked Questions about Assistive Technology Devices and Services: An Educators', Parents' and Educators' Guide

Maine CITE Project - 2001

In discussing AT comprehensively, the author describes AT devices and the role of IDEA, the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 in formulating an IEP. The author also recommends ways to integrate AT into an IEP. While specific to Maine, the guide is generally applicable.

To obtain the guide:

Phone: (207) 621-3195 (Voice); (207) 621-3482 (TTY)

Fax: (207) 621-3193

<http://www.mecite.doe.k12.me.us/caq/index.htm>

Fact Sheets

Assistive Technology for All Individuals with Disabilities

California Department of Education - 2005

Cost: No charge

This sheet clarifies basic requirements regarding the consideration and provision of AT and services to individuals with disabilities and also provides clarification and assistance to local education agencies, particularly members of IEP teams in effectively addressing these requirements in California. In addition to defining AT, this fact sheet specifies the AT to be considered by IEP teams and explains the process for considering whether a child requires AT.

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/sr/astvtech.asp>

Assistive Technology in Education

South Carolina Assistive Technology Project - 2000

Cost: No charge

Developing an IEP that includes assistive technology can be a daunting experience for parents and those involved in the IEP process. This fact sheet explains in eight parts the development and implementation of an IEP. It also identifies the technology used in the IEP and the funding process. An appeals process is described in case the parties involved in IEP formulation fail to agree.

<http://www.sc.edu/scatp/educationfact.htm>

Assistive Technology for the Blind and the IEP

By Sharon Nichols

Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired - 2005

This information sheet asks and answers the following questions regarding AT and its inclusion in a child's IEP:

- What is assistive technology?
- How can AT help my child learn?
- How do I get AT in my child's IEP?
- Who pays for the AT?
- Can my child take AT devices home?
- What happens when my child finishes school?
- What if my child can't get AT through the IEP?

<http://www.tsbvi.edu/technology/tech-institute/at-iep.htm>

Books

Using Assistive Technology to Meet Literacy Standards (Grades K-3; 4-6)

By Sherry L Purcell, Ph.D. and Debbie Grant, M.A.

IEP Resources, Attainment Company, Inc.

2002 (K-3), 2004 (4-6)

Cost: \$49 per volume

Previously entitled Assistive Technology Solutions for IEP

Teams, this two-volume set aids in writing AT into an IEP. The first volume analyzes K-3 curriculum standards. The second volume looks at grades 4-6 curriculum standards. Both volumes provide AT solutions and sample IEP goals while covering a wide range of AT options, from high-tech digital talkers to low-tech slide-on pencil grips. Curriculum areas addressed include reading, writing, written and oral composition, listening and speaking. The books are spiral bound and include a Mac/Win CD containing the books as a PDF file.

<http://store.intellitools.com/usastetomeli.html>

Better IEPs

By Barbara Bateman, Ph.D and Mary Anne Linden.

Attainment Company, Inc. - 006

Cost: \$35

Authored by Barbara Bateman, attorney and professor emeritus at the University of Oregon, this updated edition of her 2002 book seeks to help readers understand IEPs from a legal perspective. Better IEPs presents a focused three-step process aimed at the individual student and dismisses the one-size-fits-all approach.

http://www.attainmentcompany.com/AB1031005/showdetl.cfm?DID=11&Product_ID=1646&DS_ID=2

KNOWLEDGE NETWORK MEMBERS

Illinois Assistive Technology Program (IATP)

An umbrella organization that helps families of children with disabilities connect with technology resources, IATP, through Tech Connect, offers an online course entitled, "Educational Technology and the IEP or 504 Plan." The two-hour course explains what a school district owes a child with disabilities in terms of technology access. The session examines relevant provisions of IDEA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and how and when families and IEP/504 teams should consider educational technologies. Guides are available for school district personnel and parents of children with disabilities.



For further information, contact:

Illinois Assistive Technology Program (IATP)

1 West Old State Capitol Plaza

Springfield, IL 62701

<http://www.itech.org/workshops.asp>

Phone: (217) 522-7985 / Toll-free (IL): 1-(800) 852-5110

TTY: (217) 522-9966 Fax: (217) 522-8067

Contact: Wilhelmina Gunther, Executive Director

Email: iatp@itech.org

Information Avenue Archives

Information Archives consists of articles on aspects of special education and AT. One article, entitled "Assistive Technology," features an IEP component that traces the evolution of federal legislation mandating consideration of AT by IEP teams. According to the article, "Assistive technology should be incorporated into his/her Individualized Education Plan (IEP). When your child has a traditional assessment/evaluation, Public Law 94-142, Section 300.352 says that '...the child is assessed in all areas related to the suspected disability, including, where appropriate, health, vision, hearing, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communication status, and motor abilities.' The article continues, "In order to ensure that your child has received a comprehensive evaluation, assistive technology should be included in each one of the above areas. So, for example, if your child has a vision problem, use of technology such as magnified computer screens, should be evaluated for your child. Or, if your child has a communication disorder, the use of a communications device can be imperative to your child's educational and functional success. The goal, therefore, of including assistive technology in the child's IEP is to take advantage of all options available to your child and ensure that your child is receiving everything possible to reach his or her full potential."

<http://www.specialchild.com/archives/ia-004.html>



**Order your
Free 2005
AT Resources CD
Today!**

<http://www.fctd.info/resources/orderCD.php>

Assistive Technology of Alaska (ATLA)



A statewide AT program, ATLA contains a significant component that emphasizes integration of AT into a child's IEP. ATLA cautions, "One special factor that the Individual Education Plan (IEP) team

must consider during the IEP meeting is whether the student requires AT devices and services. While this is stated in the IEP paperwork there is little guidance from the State of Alaska in determining a student's AT needs."

The advisory continues, "When a student uses AT it is imperative that it also be noted in the accommodation section on the IEP that speaks to Statewide and District Assessments. In the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development's Participation Guidelines for Alaska Students in State Assessments dated June 2005 it is stated that 'Any list of accommodations will be incomplete because of the unique needs of each individual child. In addition, advances in the technology of adaptive and assistive devices will lead to new accommodations.'"

To learn more ATLA's IEP/AT perspective, contact:

Assistive Technology of Alaska (ATLA)
2217 East Tudor Road, Suite 4
Anchorage, AK 99507

www.atla.biz

Phone: (907) 563-2599 / TTY: (907) 561-2592

Toll-free: 1-(800) 723-2852

Fax: (907) 563-0699

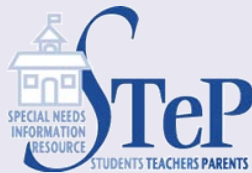
Contact: Kathy Privratsky, Executive Director

Email: kathy@atla.biz

STeP Center

Part of the Anchorage (AK) School District (ASD) Special Education Department, the center links families of children with disabilities and

educators by providing information on topics that include AT and the IEP process. SteP Center collaborates with community agencies and the Anchorage School District (ASD) and ASD development professionals to offer monthly educational opportunities via min-conference events, including Parent Teacher Institutes. The center features an extensive lending library and large website.



For additional information on the SteP Center, contact:

Boniface Education Center
5530 E. Northern Lights #8
Anchorage, AK 99504

<http://www.asdk12.org/depts/step/>

Phone: (907) 742-3872 Fax: (907) 742-3867

Email: step@asdk12.org

The Ohio Center for Autism and Low-Incidence (OCALI)



OCALI is a statewide clearinghouse for autism spectrum disorders and low incidence disabilities. The center provides extensive orientation information on AT, IDEA and the integration of AT into a child's IEP. OCALI serves parents and educators of students with autism and low-incidence disabilities, including autism spectrum disorders, deaf-blindness, deafness and hearing impairments, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairments, traumatic brain injuries and vision impairments.

OCALI provides the following services to parents and educators: professional development activities, tech assistance, product development and information dissemination, online resources for loan, AT devices for training and evaluation, a computer lab for training and AT.

The center coordinates the Ohio AT Distance Learning Project, which offers web-based coursework for students with autism and low-incidence disabilities. The course, provided through Bowling Green State University, offers graduate credit or professional development hours to teachers, related service personnel, administrators, paraprofessionals, and parents.

For more information on OCALI, contact:

Ohio Center for Autism and Low-Incidence (OCALI)
5220 North High Street
Columbus, OH 43214

http://www.ocali.org/at_about.html

Phone: (614) 410-0321 / TTY: (614) 410-1076

Fax: (614) 410-1090

Email: ocali@ocali.org

Council for Exceptional Children; Technology and Media Division (TAM)

TAM now offers The Assistive Technology Planner: From IEP Consideration to Classroom Implementation, an information kit to help IEP team members effectively integrate AT into students' IEPs.



The kit includes a user's guide, AT implementation planning tool, and three individual planners tailored for classroom teachers, families, and administrators.

The Assistive Technology Planner is an outgrowth of successful practices used in more than 60 school districts in 10 states and is based upon research funded by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). The kit (\$35 plus shipping) can be ordered from TAM.

<http://www.tamcec.org/products.htm>

Urban Pride



In supporting underserved multicultural families with disabilities and young adults with disabilities, age birth-22, Urban Pride prepares them to participate more fully in IEP planning meetings. The organization provides training and information on their rights and roles

as IEP team members and as advocates under the special education laws. Urban Pride also conducts parent support groups and provides an array of resources and information.

Urban Pride's overall objective is to provide better access to and improved support from typical community resources and disability related services, including early intervention and early childhood education programs, regular and special education programs, transition/post-school planning, after-school and summer programs, health care, social/recreational and independent living resources.

For further information on Urban PRIDE please contact:

Urban PRIDE c/o the Boston Foundation
75 Arlington Street, 10th Floor
Boston, MA 02116

www.urbanpride.org

Phone: (617) 338-4508

Fax: (617) 338-1608

Contact: Charlotte "Dee" Spinkston, Executive Director

Email: c.spinkston@urbanpride.org

info@urbanpride.org

Parents Reaching Out (PRO)

A New Mexico-based organization that seeks to help families that are isolated make informed decisions about their children's education, PRO provides parents with training, guidance and information on the state's special education system in general and the IEP specifically in order to make parents more effective advocates for their children. PRO-sponsored workshops are available in Spanish and English.



For additional information on PRO, contact:

Parents Reaching Out
1920 B Columbia Drive SE
Albuquerque, NM 87106

<http://www.parentsreachingout.org>

Phone: (505) 247-0192 / Toll-free: (800) 524-5176

info@parentsreachingout.org

Special Education Action Committee, Inc. (SEAC)

The Special Education Action Committee (SEAC) was founded as a non-profit coalition of parents of children with disabilities, concerned citizens, and organizations of parents and professionals serving



Alabama's children with disabilities. SEAC operates a parent training and information center (PTI) that is funded through a grant from the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS).

SEAC helps parents of children with disabilities to become full participants in their child's IEP and trains parents to train other parents so that all children with disabilities will have the opportunity to receive the rights and benefits guaranteed to them under the IDEA legislation.

SEAC also operates a Parent Information Resource Center (PIRC). The PIRC program is designed to help parents of children in regular and special programs to better understand their educational needs. At the Center, parents can learn how to work with educators in order to plan successful learning programs for their children and how to follow up to see that the plan is working. PIRC seeks to identify and train parents of children at risk educationally.

For more information on SEAC, please contact:

Special Education Action Committee, Inc.

PO Box 161274

Mobile, AL 36616-2274

Voice/TDD: (251) 478-1208 / Toll-Free (AL): (800) 222-7322

Fax: (251) 473-7877

<http://home.hiwaay.net/~seachsv/>

Email: seacofmobile@zebra.net

Saint Paul Public Schools: Special Education Services

The Special Education Department of the Saint Paul Public Schools recognizes and supports the importance of individualizing the educational experience to meet the



unique needs of each student. The Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team, of which the parents are the most important members, strives to foster the student's development of a positive self-concept and identity within the larger community. The focus is to provide the student with the tools to become self-sufficient, contributing members of society.

For more information on the Special Education Services in this school district, please contact:

Saint Paul Public Schools

Special Education Department
360 Colborne Street
St. Paul, MN 55102
Phone: (651) 767-8321 Fax: (651) 228-3626

<http://www.specialed.spps.org/%5C>

Contact: Patricia Fernandez, Program Director

Email: patricia.fernandez@spps.org

Nebraska Parents Center (PTI Nebraska)

PTI Nebraska is a statewide resource for families of children with disabilities and special health care needs. The mission of PTI Nebraska is to provide training, information and support to parents in Nebraska who have a child birth through twenty-six with special needs. Resources are provided for parents, other family members, school personnel and other interested parties.

PTI Nebraska is staffed by parents and professionals who are available to talk to other parents and professionals about the special education system or other services and disability specific information. They conduct workshops across the state where parents and professionals are encouraged to attend at no cost. This organization also makes available printed and electronic resources at no cost.

Two of the training sessions they offer provide information on both the Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) and the IEP. The IFSP workshop provides information on how the IFSP works for families who have infants and toddlers with special needs. Families can learn how their family routines fit into the development of the IFSP and become a part of the goals for their child's plan to learn and grow. The IEP training provides tips for preparing for the meetings and how to make sure your child receives the education they lawfully deserve.

For more information on the Nebraska Parents Center, please contact:

Nebraska Parents Center

3135 North 93rd Street
Omaha, NE 68134-4717
Phone: (402) 346-0525
Toll-free: 1-(800) 284-8520

<http://www.pti-nebraska.org/>

Contact: Glenda Davis, Executive Director

Email: gdavis@pti-nebraska.org



Challenged Family Resource Center

Parent-to-parent support is the main aspect of the Challenged Family Resource Center's mission. The Center's staff is comprised of parents and those who have family members with disabilities. The Center believes that this parent-to-parent interaction helps parents develop confidence and become better prepared to understand their child's disability. The interaction between parents can create a unique bonding that may establish immediate rapport and sharing of common feelings and experiences.

In addition to parent/family support, the Challenged Family Resource Center provides a variety of services, including a toy lending library, a video and book library, a computer lab, play groups, support groups, IEP trainings, crisis meals, parent and day care provider education, sibling support, adoption support, mental health support, and more.

For more information on the Challenged Family Resource Center, please contact:

Challenged Family Resource Center

827 West 20th Street

Merced, CA 95340

Phone: (209) 385-5314

Fax: (209) 385-5317

<http://www.challengedfrc.com/>

Contact: Judy Rehling, Executive Director

Email: jrehling@mcoe.org

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1825 Connecticut Avenue, NW

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fctd@aed.org

www.fctd.info