The Assistive Technology Decision-Making Tool

Considering the Need for Assistive Technology and Accessible Educational Materials

Introduction

This AT Decision-Making Tool (ATDMT) guides and supports the educational team in considering the need for assistive technology (AT) and accessible educational materials (AEM) for their students. Completion of the ATDMT does not result in identifying specific AT and/or AEM. However, the tool provides guidance when an assessment is needed to gather more information for AT, AEM, and/or accessible formats. A glossary of terms is located at the end as well as additional resources to support steps of the tool.

As outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the local educational agency (LEA) must provide for the specific needs of students with disabilities through a team process, including the consideration of the need for assistive technology (AT) and supporting accessible educational materials (AEM). To assist educational teams in considering the need for AT devices and services, the Ohio AT&AEM Network with representatives from OCALI, regional state support teams (SST), and the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce developed the following tool.

Overview

The technology used by students with disabilities often includes the supports provided by universal tools. Universal tools range from low-tech to high-tech and can offer sufficient support to some students with disabilities. However, other students will need different tools or specialized tools known as AT. If a student with a disability needs universal tools or more specialized tools to receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), it then becomes AT and needs to be incorporated into the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). For example, a laptop, mobile device, or even a low-tech pencil grip might be considered AT when a student with a disability needs it to receive a FAPE, even if it is available to all students.

Students who need AT may also need accessible educational materials (AEM). Accessible educational materials (AEM) are print- and technology-based educational materials, including printed and electronic textbooks and materials that are designed or enhanced in a way that makes them usable across the widest range of learner variability, regardless of format. Accessible formats provide the same information in another form to address the barriers text-based materials can present for some learners. Examples of accessible formats include audio, braille, large print, tactile graphics, and digital text conforming with accessibility standards.

Both AT and AEM may require services such as setup and training to help the student and team learn how to use the devices or formats so the student can be successful in completing the task or goal. These services also need to be documented in the IEP. General AT and AEM Resources are available at the end of this document to assist the team in their understanding of the continuum of technology supports including AT and AEM.

Instructions

The AT Decision-Making Tool can help IEP teams with the AT consideration process that requires the contribution of all IEP team members for each area of consideration. AT consideration is required and documented through completion of Special Instructional Factors as part of the annual IEP process. The ATDMT can also support identifying the need for AT and/or AEM whenever a new need arises or whenever the current AT and/or AEM is not effective. The team may find using the tool beneficial at various points of the IEP process:

- **Planning for an IEP meeting** - teams should be thinking about AT and/or AEM prior to the IEP meeting, using current data, as part of the IEP planning process and reviewing the steps of the ATDMT.
- **During an IEP meeting** - teams are required to consider AT during Special Instructional Factors by answering the question, "Does the child need assistive technology devices and/or services?" The ATDMT can support teams with this question. If the team has not reviewed the ATDMT prior to this point, it may require a longer amount of time to complete the process.
- **Outside of the IEP meeting** - if the team determined that additional assessment was needed in completing the ATDMT, the team will follow the assessment process and then reconvene after the assessment(s) are completed to review results.

This tool is divided into six steps; however, teams may not need to go through all steps depending upon the specific needs of the student:

1. Identify the Task
2. Current Use of AT
3. Universal Tools
4. AT Assessment*
5. Accessible Educational Materials*
6. Additional Areas of Focus

The team then documents the decision of this process in the Summary section.

*These areas may require further investigation, in which case, the team would document the need for further AT and/or AEM assessment in the IEP.

The Assistive Technology Decision-Making Tool

Considering the Need for Assistive Technology and Accessible Educational Materials

Student:_____ Grade:_____ Date:_____

Step 1: Identify the Task

The team should identify a task keeping in mind that it will often impact several areas of AT. For example, if a student has communication concerns, seating and positioning may affect their ability to access a communication tool. Teams may need to prioritize needs and determine which area to consider first. In this example, seating and positioning may be a priority for students with complex needs before selecting a communication system.

***Note:** Ensure all team members are present to contribute to each area of consideration.

1. What specific task or educational goal does the student need to do that is currently difficult or impossible? Think of an activity and all its related tasks. What specific task do you want to focus on?

   Task: _____

2. With this task in mind, select one area the team has decided to focus on first. The AT Domains document may help the team to learn more about the descriptions of the various areas of AT and examples.

- ☐ Reading
- ☐ Writing: Composition
- ☐ Writing: Motor Aspects
- ☐ Math
- ☐ Organization and Study Skills
- ☐ Communication
- ☐ Access to Electronic Devices
- ☐ Mobility
- ☐ Seating and Positioning
- ☐ Vision
- ☐ Hearing
- ☐ Activities of Daily Living
- ☐ Recreation, Leisure, and Play
- ☐ Transportation

Step 2: Current Use of AT

Current AT may be documented in the student's IEP for this identified task. However, if it is not meeting the needs of the student for the identified task, they will require different or additional tools.

If the student's IEP includes AT, please list it here: _____

Proceed to **Step 3** to consider universal tools.

Step 3: Universal Tools

Universal tools such as a calculator, laptop/mobile device, highlighter, pencil grip, digital text, and built-in accessibility features are examples of supports that can assist all students, including students who are struggling or have disabilities. At times, universal tools may be considered AT and/or AEM.

Is the student able to use universal tools at the same level and time to complete school tasks/activities in the focused area like grade-level peers?			
☐ Yes, the student can use universal tools at the same level and time. The student **is not dependent on the tools** and could complete the task without them. These tools are not considered AT.	☐ Yes, the student can use universal tools at the same level and time. The student **is dependent on the tools** and can only complete the task with them. These tools are now AT.	☐ No, the student cannot use universal tools at the same level and time. The student will **need additional tools and/or services.**	☐ No, the student cannot use universal tools. The student will **need different or specialized tools and/or services.**
Return to **Step 1** for other areas of need. If there are no other areas of need, proceed to the **Summary** section.	Proceed to **Step 5** to consider accessible formats.	Proceed to **Step 4** to document and obtain consent for AT assessment.	Proceed to **Step 4** to document and obtain consent for AT assessment.

Step 4: AT Assessment

The team has determined the student requires new or additional AT or a combination of both universal tools and AT. The need for an AT assessment must be documented in the IEP.

The district will obtain informed parental consent to assess for assistive technology and follow the evaluation process to determine the specific assistive technology needs.

Please refer to AT Assessment Resources for guidance on the AT assessment process.

Proceed to **Step 5** to consider AEM.

Step 5: Accessible Educational Materials

Following the identification of AT or appropriate universal tools, ***if the task requires reading or access to text-based materials,*** consider whether the student requires accessible formats such as audio, braille, large print, tactile graphics, and digital text conforming with accessibility standards to access text-based materials due to one of the following.

Please note that the student may need multiple accessible formats, so additional AT may be needed. The student (eligible person) is an individual who regardless of any other disability:

1. is blind (also see braille provision in IDEA).
2. has a visual impairment, or perceptual or reading disability that cannot be improved to the same degree as a student without an impairment or disability.
3. is otherwise unable, through a physical disability, to hold or manipulate a book or to focus or move the eyes to the extent acceptable for reading.

Accessible Educational Materials Resources

To complete the identified task in the focused area, will the student require accessible formats to read and access text-based materials?		
☐ Yes, and the accessible formats have already been determined. Proceed to **Step 6**.	☐ Yes, but the accessible formats have not been determined. Action Step: Please refer to Determining Accessible Formats resources for assistance with determination. Proceed to **Step 6**.	☐ No, the student does not need accessible formats for the identified task. Proceed to **Step 6**.

Step 6: Additional Areas of Focus

The team has determined that the student needs AT and/or AEM and/or additional information is needed. Does the student have an additional area of focus the team would like to consider?	
☐ Yes, there is an **additional area of focus** that should be considered for this student. Return to **Step 1** to consider additional educational goals and tasks which may be supported by AT or AEM.	☐ No, there are **no additional areas of focus** to consider currently. Proceed to **Summary.**

Summary of Need for AT and AEM

Student:_____ Grade:_____ Date:_____

Based on the review of the identified task(s), the team has determined the student:

- ☐ Does not need AT or AEM. **Mark "No"** for the AT question in Special Instructional Factors of the IEP.
- ☐ Needs AT devices and/or services. **Mark "Yes"** for the AT question in the Special Instructional Factors of the IEP.
- ☐ Needs AEM. **Mark "Yes"** for the AT question in Special Instructional Factors of the IEP.
- ☐ Needs further assessment to identify the potential AT features, services, or accessible formats. **Mark "Yes"** for the AT question in the Special Instructional Factors of the IEP.

Consideration has been documented in the student's IEP by marking yes or no for the AT question in Special Instructional Factors. A Prior Written Notice has also been completed, **including whether there is a need for further assessment**. For more information, see the AT Resource Guide Section 5: Documenting AT in the IEP.

List IEP team members that participated in this decision-making process for AT and AEM:

School District Representative: _____

Intervention Specialist: _____

General Education Teacher: _____

Parent/Guardian: _____

Other: _____

Resources

AT and AEM Resources

- AT Domains document
- Assistive Technology Internet Modules (ATIM) – AT Essentials for Schools
  – Overview of AT
  – AT for Administrators
  – AT Consideration in the IEP Process
  – AT Assessment Process in the School Environment
  – Navigating Accessible Educational Materials (AEM): Accessible Formats
- Overview of AT (short video)
- AEM: An All Access Pass to Success
- AT Resource Guide – Section 1: AT, AEM, and Other Educational Initiatives
- Ohio's Accessibility Manual for Ohio's State Tests
- Center on Inclusive Technologies and Education Systems (CITES)
- National Center on Accessible Digital Educational Materials & Instruction (NCADEMI) Addressing AEM in the AT Guidance
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Myths and Facts Surrounding Assistive Technology Devices and Services

AT Assessment Resources

The AT assessment process begins with identifying the assessment team. The assessment team will likely be the student's IEP team but may include others who are significant in the student's service provision (private service providers, medical staff, community members, etc.). Once team members have been identified, the following are additional steps in the assessment process that should be systematically completed by the team within the student's customary environment(s):

1. Data collection of student, environment, tasks, and other relevant information
2. Feature-matching: Match student needs to device features
3. Identify tools with needed features for trials
4. Conduct trials, collect and analyze data, provide recommendation
5. Investigate and secure funding and acquire needed technology
6. Document findings in the required forms
7. Implement the selected AT and follow-up to monitor changes or new AT needs

In summary, once the district has assessed for assistive technology, the assessment team will:

- Review the results of the data and determine if the student needs assistive technology.
- If the team identifies that the student requires assistive technology, the IEP team will follow the process to complete an IEP amendment with the updated information.

The following are resources to help with the AT assessment process.

- AT Resource Guide – Section 3: AT Assessment Process
- The SETT Framework: Resources to learn more about the SETT Framework - Student, Environment, Tasks, and Tools
- WATI Student Information Guide
- ATIM Modules:
  - AT Assessment Process in the School Environment
  - AT Consideration in the IEP Process
  - AT Assessment Tools
  - The WATI AT Assessment Process
- OCALI lending library
  - AT device trials
  - AT assessments
- SIFTS: online AT feature-matching tool

For more information on evaluation procedures:

- Ohio Department of Education and Workforce Operating Standards and Guidance
  - Office for Exceptional Children Law and Policy Memorandum 2015-1 Adding and Removing a Related Service to an IEP

Accessible Educational Materials Resources

The following are resources to help determine the need for AEM and identify types of accessible formats.

- CAST AEM Center Decision-Making & Accessible Formats
- Related ATIM modules to support AEM
  - Navigating Accessible **Educational** Materials **(AEM): Accessible Formats**
  - Reading – WATI - Part I
  - Reading - WATI-Part II
  - Vision - WATI - Part I
  - Vision - WATI - Part II
  - Vision - WATI - Part III

Determining Accessible Formats

- CAST AEM Center Decision-Making & Accessible Formats
- CAST AEM Center: Personalizing the Reading Experience
- CAST AEM Center: AEM Navigator
- Functional Vision Learning Media Assessment
- National Reading Media Assessment
- Protocol for Accommodations in Reading (PAR)
- Listenwise

Glossary

Assistive Technology: Assistive technology (AT) is 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 a child with a disability. AT includes both services and devices. Retrieved March 28, 2024 from https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statute-chapter-33/subchapter-i/1401

Assistive Technology Assessment: The AT Assessment process is a comprehensive assessment of the student's needs, their environments, the tasks or goals they want to achieve and the possible AT tools that may help facilitate these goals. The AT process does not end with tool selection, but also includes follow-up and ongoing assessment as tasks and environments change and new tools are developed. https://ataem.org/at-assessment

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 the functional abilities of a child with a disability. The term does not include a medical device that is surgically implanted, or the replacement of such device. Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004). https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/a/300.5

Assistive Technology Service: Any service that directly assists a child with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device. Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004). https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/a/300.6

Accessible Educational Materials (AEM): print- and technology-based educational materials, including printed and electronic textbooks and related core materials that are required by State Education Agencies (SEAs) and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) for use by all students, produced or rendered in accessible media, written and published primarily for use in early learning programs, elementary, or secondary schools to support teaching and learning. Retrieved February 6, 2025 from https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2014-05-09/pdf/2014-10646.pdf

Accessible Formats: an alternative manner or form that gives an eligible person access to the text-based material in which the accessible format is used to permit access as feasibly and comfortably as a person without such disability. Examples of accessible formats include audio, braille, large print, tactile graphics, and digital text conforming with accessibility standards. Retrieved February 6, 2025 from https://www.loc.gov/nls/who-we-are/laws-regulations/copyright-law-amendment-1996-pl-104-197/

Accommodations: Changes made to how a student accesses learning content, communication, environments, materials, or assessments. They provide access to course content but do not alter the scope or complexity of the information taught to the student. Accommodations do not reduce the learning or performance expectations of what is being taught or tested. Ohio Department of Education and Workforce. (2023). Ohio Accessibility Manual for Ohio's State Tests. https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Testing/Accommodations-on-State-Assessments

Built-In Accessibility Features: Accessibility features are built-in to the computer or mobile device operating system to help people with disabilities use technology more easily. For example, text-to-speech, read text aloud or voice recognition to dictate written work are now often built-in accessibility features. Magnifiers and audio supports are also part of most operating systems. https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/computerbasics/using-accessibility-features/1/

Educational Team: The student's educational team may include the IEP team, ETR team, and any variety of stakeholders such as professionals with AT knowledge, educators, related service providers, medical professionals, parents, and others as identified by the IEP team who may be able to provide insight to the student's assistive technology needs.

Eligible Person: "an individual who, regardless of any other disability-- (A) is blind; (B) has a visual impairment or perceptual or reading disability that cannot be improved to give visual function substantially equivalent to that of a person who has no such impairment or disability and so is unable to read printed works to substantially the same degree as a person without an impairment or disability; or (C) is otherwise unable, through physical disability, to hold or manipulate a book or to focus or move the eyes to the extent that would be normally acceptable for reading." (17 U.S.C. 121(d)(3). Retrieved February 6, 2025, from https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2020-05-26/pdf/2020-09273.pdf

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): A free appropriate public education is a requirement of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), which guarantees special education rights for children with disabilities. Once a child is qualified, FAPE requires a school district to provide special education for the child's specific needs, related services (e.g., transportation), accommodations (e.g., audiobooks), an Individualized Education Program (IEP), and teach the child in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/b/300.101

Individualized Education Program (IEP): A written statement for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with rule 3301-51-07 of the Administrative Code. The IEP must include a statement that discusses the child's future and a statement of measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals and benchmarks or short-term objectives. Benchmarks or short-term objectives shall be included for all children with disabilities and not only for children with disabilities who take alternate assessments aligned to alternative achievement standards. Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004). Retrieved February 28, 2023, from https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/d/300.320 and Ohio Administrative Code Chapter 3301-51-07. Retrieved February 28, 2023, from https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-administrative-code/rule-3301-51-07

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): A law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children. Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004). Retrieved February 28, 2023, from https://sites.ed.gov/idea/

Local Educational Agency (LEA): A public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within a State for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of a State, or for a combination of school districts or counties as are recognized in a State as an administrative agency for its public elementary schools or secondary schools. https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/c/a/303.23

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): Each school district shall ensure that to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or nonpublic institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled. Ohio Administrative Code Chapter 3301-51-09(A). https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-administrative-code/rule-3301-51-09

Ohio AT&AEM Network: The Ohio AT&AEM Network consists of members from the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce: Office of Exceptional Children; OCALI; and State Support Teams. The purpose of the Ohio AT&AEM Network is to develop best practices for AT and AEM while building capacity within the regions.

Universal Tools: Universal tools range from low-tech to high-tech and are usable by all individuals, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design (e.g., calculator, tablet computer, global notes, highlighter, pencil grips, text-to-speech, built-in accessibility features, etc.).

State Support Teams (SST): The Ohio Department of Education and Workforce coordinates 16 regional teams throughout Ohio. As a part of the Statewide System of Support, the State Support Team collaborates with schools, families, regional partners, and the Department through a continuous improvement process to ensure each child in Ohio has access to a high-quality education. State Support Team consultants assist districts and schools in improving outcomes for each child with a focus on leadership, team development and inclusive instructional practices. Retrieved April 2, 2024, from https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/School-and-District-Improvement/State-Support-Teams