



March 2008

State Support of Education-Related Assistive Technology

by Kimberly M. Sopko

INTRODUCTION

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that in developing each child's individualized education program (IEP), the need for assistive technology (AT) devices and services be considered. IDEA regulations provide the following definitions of AT device and AT service:

Assistive technology device means 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 capabilities of a child with a disability. The term does not include a medical device that is surgically implanted, or the replacement of such device. [34 CFR §300.5]

Assistive technology service means any service that directly assists a child with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device. The term includes—(a) The evaluation of the needs of a child with a disability, including a functional evaluation of the child in the child's customary environment; (b) Purchasing, leasing, or otherwise providing for the acquisition of assistive technology devices by children with disabilities; (c) Selecting, designing, fitting, customizing, adapting, applying, maintaining, repairing, or replacing assistive technology devices; (d) Coordinating and using 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 a child with a disability or, if appropriate, that child's family; and (f) Training or technical assistance for professionals (including individuals providing education or rehabilitation services), employers, or other individuals who provide services to, employ, or are otherwise substantially involved in the major life functions of that child. [34 CFR §300.6]

AT enhances functional independence for students with disabilities and supports their ability to perform academically and socially. This provision of the law facilitates access to the general

education curriculum for students with disabilities, contributes to effective learning based on educational needs and ensures a free appropriate public education.

METHODOLOGY

Project Forum conducted a survey of all state education agencies (SEAs) to collect information on SEA efforts to support local education agencies (LEAs) in the provision of education-related assistive technology for students with disabilities¹. The survey was distributed to state directors of special education with the option to respond via email or fax or use Zoomerang, an online survey provider. The state directors of special education forwarded the survey to other staff as needed in order to provide complete responses to the survey. Thirty-seven SEAs responded to Project Forum's survey distributed in December 2007.

This document does not address state AT programs that are supported by the Assistive Technology Act of 1998 (reauthorized in 2004), but rather it focuses solely on *education-related* AT. Project Forum at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) conducted the survey and produced this document as part of its collaborative agreement with the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

FINDINGS

AT Advisory Groups

Twenty of the 37 respondents reported having an education-related AT advisory group that is separate and different from the state AT Act Program Advisory Council. The most common members of the advisory group are SEA and LEA special education staff. More than half of the respondents reported that regional training center staff, SEA AT staff, a state AT Act program representative, LEA instructional technology leaders, special education teachers and/or parents serve on the advisory group. Seven or fewer respondents reported vocational rehabilitation personnel, general education teachers, workforce program representatives and independent- or community-living staff serve on the advisory group. Additional members may include institutions of higher education (IHE) faculty, related services personnel, AT or instructional technology coordinators or contracted staff. No students serve on the advisory groups in these twenty responding states.

All of the advisory groups give advice on providing AT training and technical assistance and disseminating information about AT while working to improve the acquisition of AT by students who need it. Additional goals reported by more than half of the respondents are to:

¹ Project Forum wishes to acknowledge Dave Edyburn, University of Wisconsin; Deborah Buck, Association of Assistive Technology Programs; and Jeff McCormick, Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALI) for their review and contributions to the survey protocol.

- improve procedures to evaluate AT needs;
- build and sustain capacity to make data-driven decisions regarding AT;
- improve access to AT device and demonstration loan programs;
- collaborate with other state advisory boards, agencies and/or the State Leaders of Assistive Technology (SLATE) organization; and/or
- develop cooperative interagency agreements for the provision of AT services.

Advisory groups in 10 states are also working to acquire funds to support AT services and programs.

Resources

Staffing

More than one person manages the education-related AT services in 15 of the surveyed states (e.g. SEA staff, AT center staff, contracted staff, regional leaders and/or LEA special education administrators). In states where there is one manager, the most commonly identified person was an SEA staff member with a designated responsibility or assignment to AT. Fewer than five respondents identified the state AT director, an AT center or project or contractor as the manager of AT services. The full-time equivalency (FTE) spent on education-related AT issues ranges from less than 0.5 to 25.0 FTE. Eleven respondents reported 4.0 FTE or more, 11 reported 1.0 FTE, four reported between 0.5 and 1.0 FTE, and 11 reported less than 0.5 FTE.

The manager of education-related AT issues reports to the state special education director in 17 states, to SEA division staff in seven states and to the superintendent in one state. In other states, the manager reports to more than one person or to other directors.

Education-related AT staff are available at some LEAs in 23 states, by state defined regions in 14 states and at some public schools in 11 states. Five states have AT staff only at the state level, four states have AT staff at all LEAs and three states have AT staff available through contracts or non-profit organizations. Two states have AT staff at all public schools and one state has no AT staff available at the school level.

Funding Mechanism

The majority of funding for education-related AT comes from IDEA funds. Twenty-three respondents indicated all of the funds come from IDEA. One respondent indicated receiving an equal distribution of funds from IDEA and the state. Two states indicated all of the funds come from other sources (e.g., the federal AT grant or the Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM) consortium grant funded by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs). Four respondents indicated the majority of funds come from the state or another source with less than 20% of the funds from IDEA. Two respondents indicated funds are split between IDEA, the state and other sources. One state indicated that funds are made available as needed.

Resource Priorities

There was great diversity in the priorities for resources across the states. The most common priority for 21 states was professional development, including training for all personnel, recruiting AT specialists and coordinating professional development opportunities. The second most common priority for 16 states was collaborating with the state AT Act program and its advisory council, parents, specific disability groups or advisory boards and participating in national AT meetings. Nine respondents indicated that maintaining databases of AT services, loan or rental programs, AT equipment and refurbishing programs in the state or maintaining AT equipment was not applicable to their states. Seven indicated managing requests for AT equipment, repairs and loans or overseeing AT centers or assessment teams was not applicable, and four indicated distribution of funds and grant opportunities was not applicable.

State Guidance or Procedures

Twenty-seven respondents indicated that, while evaluation and service needs are the responsibility of the IEP team, their state provides guidance or procedures to LEAs to determine whether a student needs an evaluation for AT services (see Appendix for web links). More than half of those respondents provide guidance on using teacher or parent report and the type of student information including performance data needed for evaluation purposes. Ten respondents provide guidance on the amount of student performance data needed.

Twenty-three respondents indicated their state provides guidance or procedures to LEAs to determine the specific AT services needed by a student. The guidance generally delineates a process for information gathering, decision making, trial use of AT and review and re-evaluation of AT use. In most of the states that provide guidance, it also explains how the IEP should link the accommodations for participation in state assessments documented in the IEP with needs for AT, provides procedural guidelines for assessing specific AT needs, explains how to perform a functional analysis of students' abilities, and/or discusses an activity-based implementation/evaluation plan for the use of AT.

Professional Development

Personnel, primarily LEA special education staff and special education teachers, in all responding (37) states receive training about education-related AT services and programs. Parents, general education teachers, SEA special education staff, LEA instructional technology leaders and students receive training in at least 24 states. Regional training center staff, vocational rehabilitation staff and SEA AT staff receive training in at least 17 states. Independent or community living staff and workforce program representatives receive training in at least eight states. Other personnel such as AT Act staff, IHE professors and related service providers also receive training in some states.

Training predominantly focuses on general AT information, how to use, program and maintain AT devices and equipment and AT evaluation information and procedures. An AT technical assistance document is provided in 26 states, student-specific AT orientation and training in 24 states. In 23 states training is provided on how to monitor outcomes and determine effectiveness of AT.

Training is provided through conferences and workshops in all responding states. Videotapes or CD and web-based courses or online interactions are provided in 17 states. Interactive video distance learning (IVDL) is provided in 10 states. Less than 10 states use webcasts, satellite television or podcasts. Two states described specific unique professional development programs: *Ohio* conducts a state technology conference and uses a study blog focused on Universal Design for Learning that incorporates AT for training purposes; *Virginia* identified a statewide initiative that serves as an online technical assistance delivery vehicle.

AT Certificate Program

An AT certificate program is available in seven states, primarily offered through an IHE. For example:

- A certificate is available through a state AT program in *New York*;
- A program endorsement certificate was recently approved in *Pennsylvania*; and
- State scholarships for an AT certification program are provided in *Arizona*.

A minimum of 11 hours of coursework is required for a certificate in most states with *Iowa* requiring 11-20 hours of coursework and *New York and Pennsylvania* requiring more than 30 hours of coursework.

IHEs offer a Master's level AT specialty or minor in seven states, an undergraduate AT specialty or minor in six states and a doctorate level AT specialty or minor in five states. IHEs also offer an AT graduate certificate in four states, a Master's level AT degree in two states and a Doctorate level AT degree in two states. IHEs in 19 states do not offer any AT specialty, minor, degree or certificate.

Outcomes

Twenty-two respondents reported their state evaluates and/or monitors education-related AT services or programs. The data collected and analyzed vary widely and may include data based on the percentage of teachers trained in AT, the number of inquiries from LEAs or schools for AT services, the number of AT evaluations completed, the percentage of students with disabilities using AT, the amount and type of AT used, parent or teacher satisfaction with the use of AT and/or demonstrated student progress with the use of AT. Four respondents indicated AT evaluation/monitoring is included in another monitoring process implemented in the state. *Nevada* uses Quality Indicators of Assistive Technology (QIAT) for evaluation and monitoring purposes. QIAT were developed by a nationwide consortium of individuals and serve as a tool to

support school districts in developing and providing quality AT as well as evaluating, monitoring and researching AT services.

Additional Information

Respondents who provided additional information commented on the state's collaborative efforts with the state AT Act program, the existence of regional AT centers or consortiums and creative projects with IHEs regarding AT. For example, *Virginia* established an Accessible Instructional Materials Center² in partnership with George Mason University and *Maryland* contracts with the Center for Technology in Education at Johns Hopkins University to maintain an AT network. *South Carolina* recently started an AT Regional Services program and plans to have improved services across the state within the next two years. Two respondents added comments about Universal Design for Learning (UDL) indicating that UDL is included in the state vision. *New York* and *Louisiana* strive to coordinate statewide activity for AT with UDL. In addition, *Ohio* provides a newsletter, informational resources and professional development on AT as well as UDL through the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALI).

A few respondents identified a technical assistance center or coalition in their state that supports education-related AT services and programs. *New York* established a technical assistance center (see Appendix for website) that provides services, information and training on AT and is developing strategies to implement UDL. *Kansas* identified a coalition (see Appendix for website) that allows LEAs to register and pay a membership fee to receive training, use a durable medical equipment database and receive reduced prices on AT software. It allows the LEAs to pool their AT resources while expanding resources since two states share AT resources through this coalition.

SUMMARY

Twenty-seven responding states provide guidance and support to LEAs regarding the need for AT evaluations and 23 states address student-specific AT needs, with many identifying the IEP team as responsible for decisions regarding AT services and programs for students. Twenty responding states have an education-related AT advisory group with identified goals. All responding states provide at least general training about AT services and programs using conferences or workshops to train special education staff primarily. Most states do not provide an AT certificate or degree program at this time. While many states use IDEA funds for education-related AT, states vary in the priorities for use of funds with most states allocating funds to professional development and collaboration. While more than half of the responding states evaluate or monitor AT programs and services, there is variability in the types of data collected and used. There are also commonalities among states regarding professional development, but again there is variability among them regarding other support for education-related AT services and programs.

⁴ <http://www.AIMVA.org>

APPENDIX

State Websites for Guidance, Procedures and Technical Assistance for Education-related AT Programs and Services

Arkansas

<http://arksped.k12.ar.us>

Colorado

<http://www.uchsc.edu/atp/swaaac.html>

Hawaii

<http://doe.k12.hi.us/specialeducation/chapter56/appendix.htm>

Idaho

<http://itcnew.idahotc.com/DNN?Default.aspx?alias=itcnew.idahotc.com/DNN/at>

Iowa

<http://www.iowa.gov/educate/content/view/572/1063/>

Kansas

www.myinfinitec.org

Louisiana

www.doe.state.la.us/lde/eia/1538.html

Accessibility Task Force: <http://www.doe.state.la.us/lde/lcet/2389.html>

Maryland

<http://cte.jhu.edu/MATN>

Maryland AT Network: <http://www.matcoop.org/about.htm>

Minnesota

TA document at

http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Learning_Support/Special_Education/Evaluation_Program_Planning_Supports/Assistive_Technology/AT_Resources/index.html

Mississippi

http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/special_education/policies.html

Nebraska

<http://www.atp.ne.gov/>

Nevada

<http://www.NSETAP.com>

New York

http://trecenter.org/atds.html#guide_on_use and
www.trecenter.org

North Dakota

<http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/speced/guide/assist.pdf>

Pennsylvania

www.pattan.net

Virginia

Initiatives: www.TTAOnline.org and www.AIMVA.org

Wisconsin

<http://www.wati.org>

Wyoming

www.k12.wy.us

This report was supported by the U.S. Department of Education (Cooperative Agreement No. H326F050001). However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position of the U.S. Department of Education and no official endorsement by the Department should be inferred.

Note: There are no copyright restrictions on this document; however, please credit the source and support of federal funds when copying all or part of this material.



This document, along with many other Forum publications, can be downloaded from the Project Forum at NASDSE:

<http://www.projectforum.org>

To order a hard copy of this document or any other Forum publications, please contact Nancy Tucker at
NASDSE, 1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 320, Alexandria, VA 22314
Ph: 703-519-3800 ext. 326 or Email: nancy.tucker@nasde.org