



# **Illinois State Board of Education**

## **Special Education Services Department**

# **Assistive Technology**

# **Guidance Manual**

# **Frequently Asked Questions**

**This document is intended to provide non-regulatory guidance on the subject matter listed above. For specific questions, please contact the Illinois State Board of Education.**

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# Assistive Technology Guidance Manual Frequently Asked Questions

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## **Introduction**

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The information in the second edition of the [Illinois Assistive Technology Guidance Manual](#) is provided as a support to districts to clarify procedural questions and describe effective assistive technology (AT) practices. If current district practices are established and working, no part of this guidance should be interpreted as a need to change them *unless* the AT practices do not provide the child with a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). This advisory is presented for easy reference about the everyday problems practitioners and parents face when seeking to sort through the information available in the manual. At many points throughout this advisory, readers are guided toward additional information in the [Illinois Assistive Technology Guidance Manual](#). Potential questions may arise that are not addressed in this guidance. This guidance is published for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for legal advice. For legal advice or a legal opinion on a specific question, you should consult a lawyer.

### **A. Definitions Related to Assistive Technology**

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#### **A-1: Can you give a general definition of Assistive Technology (AT)?**

“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” (34 CFR 300.5).

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#### **A- 2: The IDEA definition of AT is very general. Can computers, screen enlargement for the visually impaired, and AAC devices all be considered AT?**

The purpose of AT is to increase a student’s functional capabilities. The IDEA definition of AT is very broad so that any item, piece of equipment, or product that a student needs to realize an academic or functional benefit or enables the child to access a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) can be considered AT.

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#### **A-3: Are items such as pencil grips, slant boards, and adapted seating that do not require electricity also considered AT?**

Simple items such as these may also be considered AT if they are needed to help a student achieve IEP goals, objectives, and benchmarks. These are considered examples of low-tech AT.

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**A-4: What kinds of AT devices are considered by the IEP team?**

A continuum of tools from low-tech to high-tech are deliberated during AT consideration. Many commonly used products can be used as AT supports for students with disabilities. Examples of low-tech solutions include calculators, laminated communication boards, tape recorders, pencil grips and spell checkers. In addition, there are thousands of specialized high-tech assistive technology devices which are specifically designed to enhance the functional skills of people with disabilities. A full range of AT devices from simple to high tech is considered for each individual in a specific domain.

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**A-5: What is meant by AT services?**

“Assistive technology service means any service that directly assists a child with a disability in the selection, acquisition, and 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, retaining, 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).

**B. Consideration of Special Factors for Assistive Technology**

**B-1: What factors does an IEP team take into consideration to determine an individual child’s need for AT?**

When a team considers a child’s need for AT, team members first review the child’s goals and the child’s ability to access the curriculum. If the team identifies an area of performance where progress will be difficult or impossible because of the child’s disability, the team could consider

AT along with other strategies such as modification of the task (e.g. shortened assignments, dictation of written work) or additional instruction.

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**B-2: Do you have to wait for the annual review to consider AT?**

No, if during instruction, a member of the student’s team feels that AT might be of benefit, that need should be addressed. AT could be addressed as a classroom assessment activity if there is technology available to try. It might also be addressed through an evaluation if additional expertise is needed. It would be a district and IEP team decision about how to handle the suspected need.

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**B-3: If the team is considering new AT during an IEP meeting, does it go on the considerations page even if the student has not actually tried it yet?**

The IEP team can complete as much information as they can on the Consideration of Special Factors page and then provide notice to “see Additional Notes.” In the Additional Notes section, the team can add any recommendations for follow-up that the team may do, including determination of the need for a domain meeting if an AT evaluation is warranted.

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**B-4: In a school environment where every student has technology with accessibility features, is the same level of data required for AT consideration even though students will have access to the technology no matter what?**

Yes, consideration of the need for AT is an IEP team activity. The data and information used for consideration should describe the student’s present levels of achievement and academic performance (PLAAFP) and establish the need for AT. This can be data that is already collected for all students or data beyond what is normally collected which describes the need of the individual student.

Even though tools are available through Universal Design Learning (UDL), AT that the student requires for FAPE should be specifically listed on the IEP. This is in part because some tools may not be readily available in another setting should the student move, change classes, graduate to the next level of education, or pursue postsecondary employment. The IEP is a record that remains with the student to make sure the student continues to have access to FAPE in new settings.

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**B-5: When deciding about AT as a special factor, what are the differences between AT consideration, AT assessment, and AT evaluation?**

AT consideration is the process that occurs during an IEP meeting when an IEP team considers whether a student needs AT to receive FAPE and documents the decision within the student's IEP. During a consideration discussion, the IEP team members present all available data regarding the student including data from AT assessments completed in the classroom.

An AT assessment is a tool used to gather information on a student's performance in relation to any AT services and devices. Like all good teaching practices, this can include integration of a variety of instructional practices, reviews of delivery, trial of different instructional practices, or changes in instructional methodologies to improve student outcomes. An AT assessment could include an ongoing assessment of student performance in relation to any AT needs, review of AT instructional supports, or the need for specialized instruction using an AT device. An AT assessment may be conducted by those instructional staff that work with the student most often and are those most appropriate to assess a student's skills.

An AT evaluation is the formal process by which an IEP team collects information to determine a student's individual needs for AT and AT services. A request for an AT evaluation may be initiated by any member of the IEP team. An AT evaluation may be conducted by members of the IEP team who have knowledge about the student, AT technology, and AT services that could be beneficial to the student and does not have to be conducted by a specialist. Because an AT evaluation is an IDEA evaluation process, procedural safeguards and legal timelines will apply.

See the [Illinois Assistive Technology Guidance Manual](#), page 22, for additional information.

## **C. Evaluation and Assessment**

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**C-1: Who is qualified to complete an AT assessment or evaluation?**

AT assessment and AT evaluation are specific processes conducted to gather information to help an IEP team determine the need for AT and potentially the nature of AT needed by a student. Those person(s) involved in the process should understand the following:

- the student, including current performance, interests, disability
- impact of the student's disability on performance
- the curricula/tasks which the student is expected to understand/perform
- the scope of potential services (i.e., AT tools and services) which the student may need to be successful.

The responsibility for completing this assessment is assigned to the IEP team. In some cases, a member of the IEP team will have the requisite knowledge and skills for an AT assessment. In other cases, the IEP team may need assistance from other individuals with specific

knowledge/skills relevant to the process. Per 23 IAC 226.840, the qualification for an evaluator for assistive technology states, “To the extent that a test is used in performing this assessment, qualification for administering the test according to the instructions provided by the test publisher.”

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## **C-2: What activities could be part of an AT assessment or evaluation?**

### **Task-demand analysis**

Task-demand analysis is one aspect of AT assessment and/or evaluation. Using this strategy, IEP teams analyze the tasks necessary for the student to make reasonable progress. Tasks are defined as processes that the student must undertake to demonstrate an expected level of performance. Parette and Peterson-Karlan (2010) offered physical demands, cognitive demands, linguistic demands, and environmental variables as elements of task demands.

### **Feature-match analysis**

Features are the abilities or characteristics of a potential tool or system that a student must successfully operate to complete a task. A feature-match analysis starts with reviewing the barriers a student experiences on a particular task. The list of barriers can be used to formulate feature statements. For example, if a student demonstrates difficulty decoding grade-level text because of phonographic issues, a corresponding feature statement might read, “Provides student auditory access to the printed text.”

NOTE: Sample wording is provided as a guide and should not be copied and pasted into IEPs. IDEA requires that IEP content be written to address the needs of each individual student.

For additional information, see the [Illinois Assistive Technology Guidance Manual](#), pages 20-32.

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## **C-3: Does new AT presented within the course of teaching require a meeting for domain/evaluation?**

For a student who already has AT services, presenting new AT during teaching to determine whether it is of value to the student would be considered classroom assessment. If data about the student’s performance using AT that was used in teaching is considered by the IEP team, then it can be included with other student data and become a part of the consideration discussion. As long as the student has IEP goals in the applicable area and the trial is part of a classroom assessment, it would not be necessary to open a domain.

Example: “A student with a learning disability is in sixth grade and struggles with reading comprehension. He is currently working on no-tech reading strategies, but a teacher



would like to try a read-aloud computer to see if it increases comprehension of text. The teacher has knowledge pertaining to AT.

Considerations:

“The student tried a read-aloud option and his comprehension increased by 80%. AT did help.”

OR

“The student tried a read-aloud option and his behavioral disruptions increased by 80%. AT did not help.”

These are data that could inform the team’s consideration of AT during the IEP meeting. As a result of the AT consideration for the child who demonstrated improvement with the AT option, the following was decided.

Consideration Example: “Use of a formative assessment tool indicates that the child benefits from technology that reads text aloud for grade level textbooks. The team will determine which read-aloud option to use in the next 90 days and begin implementation.”

NOTE: Sample wording is provided as a guide and should not be copied and pasted into IEPs. IDEA requires that IEP content be written to address the needs of each individual student.

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**C-4: If a student is already eligible for special education but the IEP team determines a possible need for AT in a previously unidentified domain area, can the team plan for an AT assessment instead of AT evaluation?**

Yes, a team can complete an AT assessment or collect classroom/related service data at any time to determine if any AT would benefit the student’s access to curriculum in any domain area (see previous question).

If the team determines they do not have enough information gathered from assessment and/or if the team determines they do not have sufficient knowledge or skills around AT, the team will open the domain of concern (i.e. reading, writing) and follow the 60-day timeline.

Example 1: “A 3rd grade student struggles with reading comprehension. His special education teacher tries text-to-speech functions on the student’s district device and based on the classroom data she collects, the teacher determines this AT accommodation is appropriate as it relates to his reading goals. A domain does not need to be opened. The student is now given the appropriate AT accommodation, which can be listed in the IEP.”

Example 2: “A team is considering an AAC device for a student in kindergarten who is nonverbal. The team does not have sufficient knowledge of AAC assessment or data collection, so they determine a full AT evaluation is necessary. The communication domain is opened, and the team completes the AT evaluation following the 60-day timeline.”

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**C-5: If the student does not already have AT supports, does the team need to open a domain for an AT evaluation?**

As in the previous question, members of a student’s IEP team can use classroom/related service data or AT assessment to determine if particular AT supports would benefit the student. These supports are then considered accommodations supporting domain areas like communication, academics, or functioning. If the team determines they do not have enough information gathered from assessment and/or if the team determines they do not have sufficient knowledge or skills around AT, the team will open the domain of concern.

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**C-6: What does the IEP team consider when determining whether AT is needed in the child’s home or other environments?**

The purpose of providing AT in the home is to make sure that the child can meet the specially designed goals developed by the IEP team. When considering the child’s need for AT in the home, the IEP team reviews the child’s IEP goals and objectives. If AT provided at school is needed at home for the child to make progress on those goals, the team makes arrangements for it to be used in the home. In some cases, the team may decide to provide an alternative AT device in the home setting or to provide additional opportunities for the child to complete assigned tasks at school as an alternative.

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**C-7: Can a family request an independent evaluation to address AT needs?**

School districts are required to evaluate a student in all areas of suspected disability including, if appropriate, an evaluation of the student’s need for assistive technology. A parent has the right to an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) at public expense if the parent disagrees with an evaluation obtained by the school. If a family requests an IEE, the agency must provide a list of qualified examiners. The party chosen to perform the IEE shall either be an individual whose name is included on the list of independent educational evaluators developed by the State Board of Education or another individual who possesses the credentials required. If the parent wishes an evaluator to have specific credentials, the parent and the school district shall agree on the qualifications of the examiner and the specific evaluations to be completed *prior* to the initiation

of the IEE at public expense. The family, in collaboration with the IEP team, chooses one of them to complete the AT evaluation. If agreement on the evaluator cannot be reached, the school district shall initiate a due process hearing. If the family of a student with a disability requests an IEE, IEP team members should refer the family to the agency's Director of Special Education. The school may, however, initiate a hearing to show that its evaluation is appropriate. If the evaluation is appropriate, the parent still has the right to an IEE but not at public expense. Individuals conducting the evaluation must be knowledgeable and have experience in conducting AT assessments. If the parent obtains an IEE at private expense, the results of the evaluation must be considered by the public agency in any decision made with respect to the provision of FAPE to the student.

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**C-8: When an outside expert recommends AT, must the education agency provide it?**

The IEP team is required to consider all available information when planning a child's specially designed instruction. If an outside expert recommends an AT device for a child, it is important that the team consider this recommendation along with all other available information about the child.

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**C-9: If parental permission is obtained for an AT evaluation by a non-regular member of the student's team, such as someone from a cooperative or an outside specialist, does this count as consent to evaluate, thus initiating the 60-day timeline?**

No, a domain meeting needs to be held by the IEP team in order to receive consent for evaluation in any domain. If a meeting is held and the team decides a full AT evaluation is needed to determine if the student needs AT in order to receive FAPE, the 60-day timeline applies once the parent gives written consent and the team must complete the evaluation.

If a parent has submitted a request for an AT evaluation, the team has 14 school days to respond to that request. If the IEP team agrees to conduct the evaluation, the team must follow the domains/evaluation procedures.

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## **D. Documentation of the Need for Assistive Technology in the IEP/IFSP**

### **D-1: Where is AT documented in a student's IEP?**

Chapter 5 in the Illinois Assistive Technology Guidance Manual addresses consideration and inclusion of AT in the IEP. In summary, AT may be mentioned in any one of the following IEP sections:

- Present Levels of Academic and Functional Performance
- IEP Goals and Objectives
- Consideration of Special Factors
- Related Services
- Accommodations and Modifications
- Additional Information
- Support for School Personnel

For a more detailed answer to this question, please refer to Chapter 5 in the Illinois Assistive Technology Guidance Manual.

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### **D-2: If the team decides during the consideration portion of the meeting to complete an evaluation, is it appropriate to indicate that in the consideration of special factors box? Would we then have to hold another IEP meeting or could the IEP be changed with a minor amendment form?**

If, in the course of a meeting, the team decides a full AT evaluation is needed, the team can note that in the consideration of special factors box and then plan to hold a domain meeting. The team will hold the domain meeting and then complete the evaluation following the 60-day timeline. After 60 days, the team will reconvene to discuss the results of the AT evaluation and make any changes to the IEP.

If changes are proposed following an AT assessment, the team may use an amendment form.

. (See questions C-4 and C-5 above for more information.)

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### **D-3: Is there an expectation that the team will be able to describe the features that the child needs, or must they decide the exact tool the student would need within the 60 days?**

Neither IDEA nor Illinois' special education rules address this issue directly, but the prevailing thinking, noted by both Wojcik (2011) and the focus groups used in developing this manual, is to give the specific name in the Present Levels of Academic and Functional Performance section of the IEP and general descriptive terms in all other areas of the IEP. This practice documents sufficient information about the AT and AT services used by a student while affording the schools

flexibility in providing the AT and AT services identified by the IEP team for the student to receive FAPE. ([Illinois Assistive Technology Guidance Manual](#), page 28)

Use **Present Level of Academic and Functional Performance Example:** “Nathan uses an iPad with TouchChat HD for all communication in group settings. He can use his voice with people who are familiar with his speech.”

**Consideration Example:** “Nathan needs a speech generating device which has a dynamic display and offers minimum of 20 picture/word choices per page. It should be portable and include a carrying case.”

NOTE: Sample wording is provided as a guide and should not be copied and pasted into IEPs. IDEA requires that IEP content be written to address the needs of each individual student.

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#### **D-4: Can AT be used on statewide assessments?**

AT tools and systems may be permitted on statewide assessments; however, the AT must be appropriately documented in the student’s IEP. It is important to read the sections on accommodations in the administrator’s manual for the assessment to determine what AT tools or systems may be used in each assessment component. In Illinois, information on accommodation procedures for statewide testing may be found at:

Illinois Assessment of Readiness — <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/IAR.aspx>

Illinois Science Assessment — <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Illinois-Science-Assessment.aspx>

SAT, PSAT 10 and PSAT 8/9L — <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/sat-psat.aspx>

Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment — <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/DLM-AA.aspx>

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#### **D-5: Are there criteria for students to use read-aloud options on state assessments?**

The state’s testing accommodations manuals will specify who would qualify for the read-aloud for ELA. The read-aloud accommodation should be documented in the IEP to specifically address the need for the accommodation. For math, students who meet the criteria are allowed to have the test read to them.

“Therefore, it is important to note that, for a student to use AT in permitted sections of statewide tests, AT must be documented in the accommodations and modifications section of the student’s IEP. A description of the need for the accommodation or the use of AT during statewide tests describes which accommodations will be needed for each state assessment and when the accommodations are needed.

A description of the conditions under which an accommodation will be used should be specific. For instance, the use of keyboarding for written assignments may be needed for any assignment more than two sentences in length. In another example, the use of audio files for reading comprehension may be needed when the grade level of the passage is above the student's instructional level. It is not acceptable to say simply that an accommodation is used 'as needed'" ([Illinois Assistive Technology Guidance Manual](#), p. 30).

Teams should refer to the accommodations requirements for each state assessment as some options may already be embedded in the assessment.

## **E. Provision of Assistive Technology**

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### **E-1: What is the responsibility of the school district regarding AT?**

According to IDEA in 34 CFR 300.6, school districts must ensure that AT devices and services are made available to a child with a disability if required as part of a child's special education and related services as stated in the child's IEP.

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### **E-2: If an IEP team decides that a child needs AT, who is responsible for purchasing it?**

The Local Education Agency (LEA) has final responsibility to provide all parts of a child's educational program as listed on the IEP. In some cases, LEAs make agreements with other programs (e.g. special education cooperatives or outplacement facilities) to help provide the AT that a child needs. LEAs may also look to other sources of funding such as insurance, charitable organizations, and grants to help provide the AT a child needs.

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### **E-3: If an education agency purchases AT for a specific child, who does the technology belong to?**

If an education agency purchases assistive technology, the technology is the property of that agency. If a child moves to another district and needs the same technology, districts can collaborate to facilitate the transfer of AT ownership from one agency to another. It also may be desirable for a child's technology be the property of the child and family so that the technology can stay with the child. When this is the case, LEAs may assist the family in obtaining funding from a source such as medical insurance or a charitable organization if such funding is available.

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### **E-4: Who is responsible for maintaining AT devices? What if the device belongs to the child?**

If AT is included on a child's IEP, the education agency must ensure that it is available to the child. If AT requires repair or maintenance and is not available to the child, the LEA must ensure that

an alternative device is made available as described in the IEP. This is true even when the device belongs to the child's family. In some cases, the LEA may choose to repair a device belonging to the child as an alternative to the purchase of a duplicate device.

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**E-5: Are students who have plans under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act eligible for AT? If so, who is responsible for providing this technology?**

Students who have Section 504 Plans may be eligible for AT devices and services if they are needed for the student's access to the general curriculum. When a student's 504 Plan includes AT, it is the responsibility of the 504 coordinator and the student's general education team to make sure that these devices and services are provided.

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**E-6: How is 'timely manner' defined regarding obtaining an AT device?**

Once an AT device is determined necessary for the student, the district must implement procedures necessary for obtaining the device without unnecessary delay. When a delay is anticipated (e.g., equipment is on backorder from the company), the school should inform the parent and implement procedures to ensure that the student has access to the instructional program. It may be possible for the district to rent, borrow, or lease an appropriate device in the interim.

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**E-7: Must a student have access to AT aids and services if the student is eligible for extended school year services?**

Yes, if the IEP team determines that the AT is needed as part of the extended school year services, then the student needs access to the AT.

## **F. Progress Monitoring**

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**F-1: Once AT is included in a child's educational program, what actions should be taken to make sure that AT use is successful?**

As with any other educational activity, the inclusion of AT in a child's IEP is only the beginning. The educational team which serves the child should consider the necessary training of the child the child's family, and educators who will all need to know how the technology works. Plans must also be developed for ensuring the child's regular use of the technology as indicated in the IEP. Refer to 34 CFR 300.6: Assistive technology service.

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**F-2: What are the potential outcomes of progress monitoring of AT use?**

1. AT is working and continues to be needed.
2. AT is not working but continues to be needed.
3. AT is no longer needed.

Please go to Chapter 8 in the [Illinois Assistive Technology Guidance Manual](#) for more information.

## **G. Transition from School to Community**

### **G-1: If a student requires the use of an AT device, what happens to the device when the student graduates?**

Transition planning for technology users is particularly challenging because there is no legal requirement for the transfer of ownership for an AT device from the school district to the individual student or to an adult agency upon graduation. Under state and federal law, public schools assume financial responsibility for the AT device and services, but as a student transitions to adult life, the financial responsibility ends, and possession of the device is retained by the school district. As a result, if the school district purchased the device, the device is the property of the school district. The school district could keep the device for use by other students in the special education program, sell it, or otherwise dispose of the device according to Illinois inventory rules.

One strategy to consider is collaboration with an adult agency to purchase the technology from the school district upon graduation. This could include transferring the ownership of the device to the student's new agency or district.

If the family purchased the device for their student, it is the property of the student and family.

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### **G-2: Do you recommend describing concerns and providing supports to the receiving district that relate to an incoming student's use of an AT device?**

Transition planning, just as any other planning activity that the IEP does, is individualized and should address the student's current AT devices and services as well as the anticipated needs in the new environment. The plan the team develops should be comprehensive and based on knowledge of the student's interests, skills, and abilities.

Example: "Student will make a transition from fourth grade to fifth grade. He uses a computer with speech to text for written assignments of more than one paragraph. Staff in the new classroom will need to know how the device operates and when the student will use it. They should also assign equipment management activities to an adult in the environment."



Information could also be documented in the Supports for School Personnel section of the student's IEP. During transitions between different schools and/or districts, this section could be used to describe what the receiving district staff will need to know about or do with the AT.

NOTE: Sample wording is provided as a guide and should not be copied and pasted into IEPs. IDEA requires that IEP content be written to address the needs of each individual student.

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**G-3: When a student is 22 and no longer a student of the district, who provides AT services in the adult world? If it is planned for in a transition plan, how is the cost for such services handled?**

When an individual transitions to adulthood and is no longer enrolled in public school, the individual may access adult services, but these services are based on eligibility and the individual must ask for them. This includes asking for funding for AT devices and funding for services. The nature of the individual's disability will determine the funding sources available. Because of this it is important to begin transition planning well before the student leaves the school environment to ensure that all devices and services will be available after leaving public education.

## H. References

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