

## **Assistive Technology in Schools**

### **Assistive Technology (AT) Devices**

An AT device is any item, piece of equipment, or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. The items may be modified, customized, or simply purchased off the shelf. They can include classroom modifications, picture cards, a TTY, software, adapted clothing, hearing aids, wheelchairs, etc.

### **Assistive Technology (AT) Services**

An AT service is any service that directly assists an individual with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an AT device. AT services include the following:

- Evaluating the needs of an individual with a disability, including a functional evaluation in his or her customary environment;
- Purchasing, leasing, or otherwise providing for the acquisition of AT devices;
- Selecting, designing, fitting, customizing, adapting, applying, maintaining, repairing, or replacing AT devices;
- Coordinating and using other therapies, interventions, or services with AT devices;
- Training or providing technical assistance to an individual with disabilities and/or family members, guardians, advocates, or other authorized representatives; and
- Training or providing technical assistance for professionals, employers, or other individuals who provide services to, employ, or are substantially involved in the major life functions of individuals with disabilities.

### **Eligibility for AT**

To qualify for AT, a student must need the AT to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE), which is guaranteed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). If an evaluation determines the student needs an AT device to receive FAPE, the school must provide it. The school cannot refuse to provide AT because of the cost or because it does not have that device. The school can refuse to provide AT that is medical, such as a cochlear implant.

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The need for AT must be determined on a case-by-case basis through an evaluation that considers the unique needs of the student. The AT evaluation looks at the student's functional capabilities and whether those capabilities may be increased, maintained, or improved through the use of AT devices or services. AT may be considered either as special education and related services or as supplementary aids and services that maintain a student in the least restrictive environment.

The manner in which assistive technology evaluations and decisions are made is at the discretion of the school district and, in particular, a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team. The IEP Team, including the parents, must be involved in determining whether the student needs AT and, if so, what kind of AT.

Many school systems provide in-house assistive technology evaluations. If the parent disagrees with the evaluation obtained by the school, the parent has the right to an independent AT evaluation.

AT devices must be provided for your child's use at home if the IEP Team determines that the child needs that AT to continue making progress on IEP goals.

### **Private Insurance and Medicaid**

IDEA authorizes the use of public insurance, such as Medicaid, or private insurance to pay for the purchase of AT devices. However, this use must be voluntary. Services cannot be denied if parents refuse to authorize the use of Medicaid or private insurance. A school may use parents' private insurance only with the parents' informed consent.

### **Resources for More Information**

- NC Assistive Technology Program (NCATP): 919-850-2787 or [www.ncatp.org](http://www.ncatp.org)
- Exceptional Children's Assistance Center (ECAC): 1-800-962-6817 or [www.ecac-parentcenter.org](http://www.ecac-parentcenter.org)

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Disability Rights North Carolina is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization headquartered in Raleigh. It is a federally mandated protection and advocacy system with funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Department of Education, and the Social Security Administration.

Contact us for assistance or to request this information in an alternate format.

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