



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20202

**January 22, 2024**

Dear Colleagues,

High quality educational opportunities should be accessible to all learners, and emerging technologies hold promise to transform instruction and learning while reducing barriers. They can contribute to the reinforcement and progression of relationships between educators and students, reinvent approaches to learning and collaboration, reduce persistent disparities in equity and accessibility, and adapt learning experiences to meet the needs of all learners.

The Office of Educational Technology and the Office of Special Education Programs are pleased to share the attached guidance in support of children with disabilities who need assistive technology (AT) devices and services for meaningful access and engagement in education. This guidance aims to increase understanding of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act's (IDEA's) requirements regarding AT devices and services, and dispel common misconceptions regarding AT, while also providing examples of the use of AT devices and services for children with disabilities. The document is intended for a wide range of individuals including parents,<sup>1</sup> early intervention service providers, special educators, general educators, related services personnel, school and district administrators, technology specialists and directors, and employees at State lead agencies and educational agencies. AT devices and services can help improve outcomes for children, develop important skills and abilities, and prepare them for the workforce and life after high school. By providing children with disabilities with the tools they need to succeed, we can help break down barriers and create a more inclusive and equitable educational system for all.

In 2015, the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) and incorporated a renewed commitment to ensuring equal opportunities and introduced Universal Design for Learning in K-12 educational policy. This is echoed in the [U.S. Department of Education 2024 National Education Technology Plan \(NETP\)](#), which states institutions should, “[d]esign and sustain systems that support ongoing learning for new and veteran teachers and administrators, providing them with the time and space needed to design learning opportunities aligned with the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Framework.” A key understanding of universal design practices is that accessible and inclusive design benefits everyone, including children with disabilities.

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<sup>1</sup> IDEA broadly defines “parent” to include the biological or adoptive parent of the child, a foster parent (unless State law prohibits the foster parent from acting as a parent), a guardian authorized to act as the child’s parent or to make educational decisions for the child (but not the State if the child is a ward of the State), an individual acting in the place of a biological or adoptive parent (including a grandparent, stepparent, or other relative) with whom the child lives, an individual who is legally responsible for the child’s welfare, or a surrogate parent who has been appointed consistent with IDEA’s requirements in 34 C.F.R. § 300.519. For a complete definition, see 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.30 or 303.27.

In addition to the ESEA requirements that apply to all children and youth in grades K-12, the IDEA ensures that all children with disabilities are provided with equality of educational opportunity that leads to full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency. This means that beyond ensuring equitable access to technology and educational materials, children with an individualized family service plan (IFSP) or an individualized education program (IEP) may also need AT devices and services for meaningful access and engagement in education. In fact, when developing an IEP, teams are required to consider whether the child needs AT devices and services.<sup>2</sup>

Assistive technology devices and services can be used for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities as required in both IDEA Parts B and C. The use of AT devices and services is critically important for many children with disabilities as it can greatly improve their educational experience, improve their educational and post-school outcomes, and help develop important skills and abilities. These devices and services must be available, accessible, and appropriate for children with disabilities and their families. We all have a role to play in ensuring access to necessary AT devices and services for children with disabilities.

Consider these examples of AT devices for children with a variety of disabilities:

- Text-to-speech software to listen to digital materials, or captioning software to access videos. These tools can help children with disabilities access and understand course content more effectively, which can lead to better academic outcomes and a greater understanding of the material;
- Word prediction devices to assist with writing and communication. These AT devices allow children with disabilities to participate in class and complete assignments alongside their nondisabled peers, breaking down barriers that might otherwise prevent them from fully engaging in the educational process;
- Augmentative and alternative communication devices to assist children with disabilities to communicate with teachers, peers, and their families. This not only helps in developing communication skills, but also helps improve their self-esteem and confidence, which can have a positive impact on their overall wellbeing; and
- Visual schedules and visual timers to better understand daily routines and the passing of time. These AT devices allow children with disabilities to participate in daily activities in a timely manner and understand what is expected of them.

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<sup>2</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.324(a)(2)(v) and (b)(2).

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for Children with Disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

It is critical that IFSP and IEP Team members understand how to procure, implement, and evaluate AT devices and services for children with disabilities. We encourage you to read the attached guidance and thank you for supporting our nation’s children in obtaining the most out of their education.

Sincerely,

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Glenna Wright-Gallo  
Assistant Secretary  
Office of Special Education and  
Rehabilitative Services

/s/

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