



What is Assistive Technology?

Overview

“Assistive Technology (AT) is any item, piece of equipment, software program, or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of persons with disabilities.” (source: [What is AT?](#)) For example, students may need tools in order to access the curriculum, beyond what is already provided to all students. They may have a learning disability and need access to printed materials, supports for taking notes during a lecture, or software to assist with written expression or math.

They may have Executive Functioning weaknesses and need to utilize technology in order to be more independent with their organization of materials, schedules, etc. These tools include a great number of options, devices and strategies, ranging from "low tech" (such as a guide to stay on the line to help a student read), or "high tech" (such as software, a laptop, etc.).

For individuals who have communication needs, an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) device may be needed. Depending on a person's needs, Assistive Technology (AT) offers many solutions.

The process for obtaining Assistive Technology in school

In order to explore the possibilities, email the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team (or the school guidance counselor if the student has a 504 plan; for more information see [What Is a 504 Plan](#)) to request an AT assessment. The district would then contact the Intermediate Unit (IU) to have an AT consultant do an assessment, trial various strategies and tools, and present a report to the IEP team. The team would next discuss the report's recommendations and determine follow-up steps to acquire a device, if appropriate.

Documentation of the proposed AT Action Plan can go into an IEP under the following sections

- Present Levels of Academic and Functional Performance- the AT Action plan can be added here.
- IEP Goals- If appropriate, a goal can be developed for the student to learn to develop proficiency with their AT.
- Specially Designed Instruction- If appropriate, accommodations or modifications necessary for the student to access their curriculum via AT can be listed here.

Notes

- If the student has a 504 Plan, then the AT can be listed under the Accommodations.
- If a student is able to have their needs met via technology that is already offered to all students (for example, some school districts issue laptops or tablets to all students), then this is not considered to be a special education service.
 - AT can be considered if a student's needs cannot be met by the general education curriculum and materials.

Useful resources- School-age individuals

PaTTAN

[Assistive Technology](#)

[AT for Organization of Writing](#)

The process to get AT through systems outside of the Special Education process

Insurance - Contact the individual's Special Needs Unit (SNU) at the Medicaid Managed Care Organization (MCO) or Health Plan for Medicaid/Medicare beneficiaries. The SNU or Health Plan service coordinator will explain the process to obtain an AT device or service. If you have private insurance, contact Customer Services to obtain information about what the insurance will cover.

Medicaid Waivers - Ensure that the individual is registered for services through the county Department of Human Services. For individuals with an Intellectual Disability or Autism, discuss the need for AT with the individual's Supports Coordinator (SC), and ensure that the need is documented in the person's Individual Support Plan (ISP). Your SC will explain the process of obtaining AT through a waiver.

Centers for Independent Living - For people with a disability other than an Intellectual Disability or Autism, contact the [PA Centers for Independent Living](#)

Grant programs - [Achieva Family Trust Charitable Residual Account](#) or [Variety Pittsburgh – Helping Kids, Be Kids](#)

The process to obtain AT for Adult Employment or Educational programs

Work with your Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) counselor, Supports Coordinator, and/or Employment/Education provider to schedule an assessment and begin the process to trial AT devices.

If attending a post-secondary educational program, meet with that college or university's Office of Student Services office to learn what supports and accommodations are available to students with disabilities.

Useful resources

[Assistive Technology process with OVR](#)

[Job Accommodation Network](#)

[AAC institute](#)

[Everyone Has Something to Say fact sheet](#)

[Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Foundation](#)

[Pennsylvania Technology | Institute on Disabilities](#)

[Wrights Law](#)

Achieva disability advocates provide information, technical assistance and individual advocacy on issues that impact children and adults with intellectual disabilities and autism and their families. We also work with state and federal legislators and policy makers to ensure that the human, civil and legal rights of people with disabilities are protected and that they are afforded services to assist them to be included in their communities. We will provide guidance, information and technical assistance to the best of our ability. Achieva advocates are available to answer questions specific to your situation. Please contact us at 412.995.5000 x486, 888.272.7229 x 486 (Toll-Free) or log onto www.achieva.info/contact-advocacy.