

introduction

What to Expect

Long ago in a galaxy far, far away, two lonely, overworked speech pathologists embarked on separate journeys—leading them, much to their surprise, to this book you hold in your hands.

We want to share our adventures with you to help you avoid obstacles as you build your assistive technology team. Whether you are beginning your journey alone or sharing your quest with others, we will provide insight and shortcuts to success. We have benefited from the wisdom of those who preceded us, and we intend to share the lessons we learned to provide a road map to a happy and productive assistive technology team. Oh, yeah—and we wrote it in a fun, engaging way so as not to bore the pants off you.

Assistive Technology

We figure you have heard the term “assistive technology,” or can infer its meaning, but still may have some questions. We’ll get into the legal definition of assistive technology in a bit, but when people at a party ask “What do you do for a living?” we usually tell them that we help other educators implement tools and strategies to assist students with special needs. In this book we try to minimize the legalese and maximize the informal dialogue to quickly and easily get you the information you need and want.

Assistive technology is a relatively new field, so we don’t claim to have all the answers. Indeed, those who have been on this journey for a long time continue to revise and review their practices and service delivery. We invite you to join those pioneers and welcome you to our continuing adventure. To some, assistive technology may not sound exciting, but we know that you, our reader, share our spirit. We welcome your curiosity and know that you will enjoy the trip. We have been fortunate to have wonderfully supportive mentors and are excited to offer you the guidance and innovations that have worked for us. It wasn’t until

we stepped out of our offices and began to visit colleagues from other states and districts that we recognized the growing interest in our innovative approach to the field.

This book offers tips, tricks, and strategies to those providing assistive technology services in U.S. public schools to students in preschool through high school. It is intended for any educator interested in creating or expanding the practice of assistive technology in public schools. We have come to the realization that assistive technology can offer solutions to learners in general and hope that you will see its relevance in meeting the needs of all students.

Providing assistive technology services in schools happens in a lot of different ways. Some states have small school districts based on townships and municipalities. Some have giant mega-huge countywide districts. Typically it is the school district, as a public agency, that must ensure that both assistive technology devices and services are provided if they're required for the student to receive a free, appropriate public education. We recognize that each district or education agency is going to have its own little twist on the provision of assistive technology services. It doesn't matter if you are an official who works in the state capital putting miles and miles on your car to help students across the state use assistive technology, one lonely volunteer in a district of two schools, or anyone in between. There is something in this book for each of you!

If you are sitting with a pile of requests for assistive technology on your desk and your head in your hands, then this book is for you! We appreciate your diligence, dedication, and curiosity and thank you for joining us on this wild ride. We invite you to use this book as a tool to help get the job of providing assistive technology services to students done without pulling your hair out. The book will:

- Help you get started when you are the only person for an entire school district charged with the task of providing assistive technology services
- Provide a fresh perspective on the assistive technology process in school settings
- Recommend strategies for how to consider assistive technology for every student

AT at a Minimum

The IEP team can reconvene at any time to give additional consideration to assistive technology. Minimally, the IEP team must consider assistive technology once a year at the annual IEP meeting, but it can be, and usually is, considered much more frequently. Consideration of assistive technology is a dynamically layered process. Unofficially, teachers are making decisions about assistive technology on a daily basis. Where to position a student to maximize attention, which writing implement and surface to use, which lessons will be hands-on and which will be strictly auditory-visual, and which sorts of visuals are needed for a student to understand the concepts being presented are all decisions related to assistive technology. In many cases, these decisions are made solely by the teacher and not by an IEP team. Assistive technology can also be considered by having discussions with other teachers and service professionals about strategies to try to address a learning difficulty. More officially, the IEP team can reconvene at anytime to reconsider any portion of the IEP, including assistive technology.

You Know It, Whether You Know You Know It or Not

Every member of every IEP team has the ability to brainstorm solutions for problems and come up with strategies to address concerns. Therefore every IEP team member has some working knowledge of assistive technology. It's true!

Some team members might have more experience working with certain types of devices, while others might have more generalized skills to provide practical solutions. Depending on the goals delineated for a student, some team members might have more expertise, but that should not negate or overshadow the contributions of others. For example, if a student has a communication goal, it is prudent to seek the advice and counsel of a speech-language pathologist, but the contributions of the general education teacher, based on her knowledge of communication, are also valuable.

Because everyone on the team has some knowledge of assistive technology, it is not necessary to have someone with “assistive technology” in his or her job title present at every IEP meeting. Heck, it isn't necessary to have someone with

Contact Lenses: Keep Track of Your Hard Work

It is crucial to have some collection method for recording consultations, evaluations, and trainings conducted by the assistive technology team. Tracking every contact every team member has with a student or educator will provide a way of analyzing how many people have been influenced by assistive technology. When attempting to promote the expansion of the team (or promote the very idea of creating a team), you can be ready with data about how many educators and students benefited from the services provided by the assistive technology team.

A caseload tracking system, just like an inventory system, must be both user-friendly and reliable. It is also essential that it be accessible to every trainer on a daily basis. The system might be something as simple as a color-coded Excel spreadsheet (Fig. 7.6) or as sophisticated as a web-based interface with back-end database with multitiered user roles. Assistive technology trainers should be able to enter basic data about a student as well as information about what transpired during the contact. If a teacher stops an assistive technology trainer in the hall and inquires about a student, the system should have a place to note this. The system should be able to document evaluations and differentiate them from consultations. Dates of every contact should be collected and catalogued within the system. Furthermore, the system should have a way of differentiating contacts the team has recently served from contacts that have not received services in a long time. Any system can be used as long as data can be sorted and extracted in an efficient manner.

Student Name	School Name	Grade Level	District	Case Manager	Backup Trainer	Consultation Date(s)	Date Evaluation Requested	Date Evaluation Received	Date Eval Reviewed	Date Eval Reviewed By	Month Of Last Contact
Student 1	MS	6	AUTISM	Teacher A	Moe	3/24	4/3	4/6	4/15	4/24	May
Student 2	MS	7	LD	Teacher B		5/15					Jan
Student 3	MS	7	LD	Teacher B		5/15					Jan
Student 4	MS	7	SLI	Teacher C	Curly	6/6	8/15	8/17	10/1	10/15	Nov
Student 5	ES			Teacher D		10/2					Oct
Student 6	ES			Teacher E	Larry	6/1	8/18	8/15	10/2	10/16	Dec
Student 7	ES			Teacher F	Larry	4/22	5/2	5/15	TBD		Mar
Student 8	ES			Teacher G	Shemp	11/16	12/7	12/8	1/10	1/16	Jan
Student 9	MS			Teacher H	Moe	8/6	11/7	11/8	12/1	12/15	Jan
Student 10	MS			Teacher H	Moe	12/18	12/19	12/20	1/15	2/2	Mar
Student 11	MS			Teacher I		8/23					Aug
Student 12	MS	10	MR	Teacher J	Moe	2/18					Mar
Student 13	MS	12	MR	Teacher J	Curly	3/1					May
Student 14	MS	11	SD	Teacher K		6/8					Sept

Student names may be hyperlinked to a file containing information about the assistive technology team.

Rows are color coded to quickly distinguish among students who have had consultations, past evaluations, and current evaluations.

Eval On File
Left The School District
Eval In Progress
Consultation Only

Figure 7.6 Sample caseload tracking system

odds but still makes an incredible escape, so goes the assistive technology consultation. The assistive technology trainer should never leave a consultation without providing at least one strategy that can be tried, even if it isn't *the* strategy that will ultimately help meet the outlined goal.



the parent trap: when to keep parents in the loop

"Geez, I really liked Mrs. Nurky before that meeting. She's always been so helpful and communicative but, whoa ... after that meeting I'm starting to think twice," said Jason's mom to Jason's dad as they pulled out of the school parking lot. They had just met with Jason's teacher and the AT trainer to discuss Jason's writing.

"I know what you mean. She's always good about writing in Jason's homework journal, and she always returns our calls—but that meeting, I have to admit, filled me with doubt," agreed Jason's dad as he adjusted his bottom in the passenger seat.

"I just don't understand how you could have four computers in your classroom and not know what software is on them. At least two of those software titles could already have been helping Jason with his writing. If it wasn't for that AT lady, Mrs. Nurky still wouldn't have known about them." Jason's mom huffed. "I mean, isn't it a teacher's job to know that stuff?"

"I did like those suggestions that AT lady came up with, though," Jason's dad offered, trying to steer the conversation to a more positive note. He knew when his wife was getting revved up and ready to go on a tear. Usually, he tried to dissuade her from ranting, but after tonight's meeting he was almost ready to hear it ... almost.

"Yeah, I know. Don't get me wrong. The meeting went well. That AT lady had lots of good suggestions. I think Jason will take to those tools to help him write better, like the three-ring binder turned horizontally so he is writing on a slanted surface," said Jason's mom.