RESOURCES

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Students and Assistive Technology:
Helpful Hints
for Parents and Consumers

No matter how we travel, we are all on the same journey.

UATP

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Close to a million children were not allowed to attend their neighborhood school in the past because of their disabilities. In 1975 a law passed that guaranteed a free and appropriate education to all children. That law, now called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA, greatly changed the lives of children with disabilities for the better. Because of IDEA, children with disabilities are learning and achieving at levels once thought impossible. Many students with disabilities are graduating from high school, going to college, working full-time, and living on their own.

Technology has also vastly improved the quality of life for students with disabilities. Assistive devices help students read, hear, speak, write, learn, complete homework, and participate in society. Federal rules state that school districts must provide assistive technology devices and services for students with disabilities if required as part of their special education program. Assistive technology must be considered as an option for every Individualized Education Program (IEP).

What is Assistive Technology?

An assistive technology device is any piece of equipment or product system that makes it easier for people with disabilities to function in their daily lives. Assistive technology helps maintain or improve abilities. A device may be purchased from a catalog or store, or may be designed or altered for for an individual student.

An assistive technology service is defined as any service that directly assists a student with a disability in selecting, buying, or using an assistive technology device. Services may include all of the following:

- Evaluating technology needs
- Purchasing or leasing assistive technology
- Selecting, designing, fitting, adapting, maintaining, repairing, or replacing assistive technology devices
- Coordinating and using other therapies, interventions, or services
- Training or providing technical assistance for a student, their family, and professionals

There are thousands of devices and solutions that improve a student's ability to learn, study, produce, work, and communicate with others. Some examples of assistive technology include:

- Magnifiers
- Computer screen readers
- Easy grip pencils
- Text enlargement programs
- Alternative computer keyboards
- Adapted toys
- Assistive listening systems (FM systems, hearing aids, telephone amplifiers, etc.)
- Manual and power wheelchairs
- Augmentative communication devices with work prediction
- Speech synthesizers
- Environmental cues (flashing lights for fire, phone, etc.)
- Screen reader programs
- Switches
- Eating systems
- Paper stabilizers
- Walkers
- Talking calculators/computers
- Telecaption decoders (closed captioning)
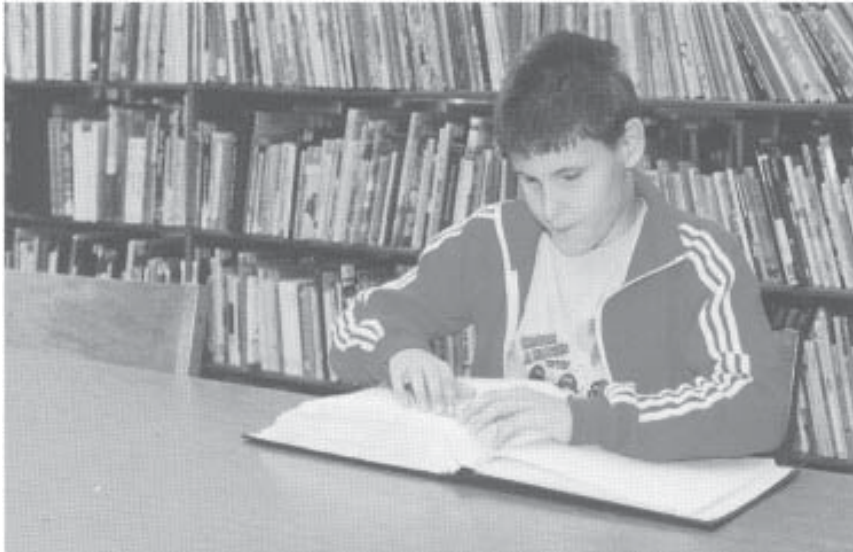- Speech recognition programs

Why use Assistive Technology?

Research studies demostrate that assistive technology helps students with disabilities succeed in the classroom. Students are more independent, self-confident, and productive. Technology enables students with disabilities to compete with peers. Research also shows that students with disabilities achieve more in school and improve their social skills when integrated in regular classrooms. This helps prepare students to go on for more education, obtain higher paying jobs, and live independently. Assistive technology makes it possible for students with disabilities to fully participate in the mainstream of school and society.

How can Your Child obtain Assistive Technology?

Parents need to be their children's best advocates. In order to be most effective, parents should learn how to get assistive technology into their child's IEP or educational plan. As parent Cory Moore states, "We need to participate, not merely be involved. It is, after all, the parent who knew the child first and who knows the child best. Our relationship with our sons and daughters is personal and spans a lifetime." Knowing what your student's abilities and needs are makes it easier to find the best technology solutions.

If you believe your student may benefit from assistive technology, request an assistive technology evaluation. You have the same right to have your student evaluated for assistive technology as for any other special education service. You may also ask for an additional or independent evaluation.

If your student qualifies for special education, and you feel an assistive technology device or service is needed for your child to receive the most benefits from school, ask for assistive technology to be included in the Individualized Education Program (IEP). Assistive technology can be included in several places in the IEP. It can be listed as part of the student's annual goals and short term objectives, as a supplementary aid or service to support placement in the least restrictive environment, or in the list of related services necessary for the student to benefit from his or her education.

If assistive technology is part of the IEP, the document should state the specifics of what, when, and where the assistive technology will be used. Make sure that all parties (including yourself), involved in the IEP are trained in using the assistive technology. Find out who is responsible for repair of the equipment if it is broken and how "backup" technology will be provided. If you are not satisfied, remember you have rights. Parents have the right to an impartial due process hearing to challenge school districts' decisions regarding special education services for their child.

If your student has a disability but does not qualify for special education services, or if you choose not to use special education services, you may be able to obtain assistive technology devices or services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 or the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

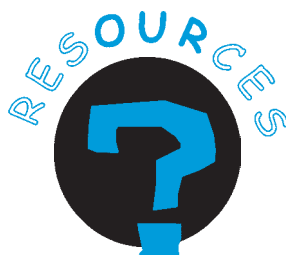## For more information about assistive technology:

Access Utah Network
155 South 300 West #100
Salt Lake City, Utah 84102
801/533-4636 (V/TTY)
E-mail: accessut@state.ut.us
Web: www.accessut.state.ut.us

Utah Center for Assistive Technology
1595 West 500 South
Salt Lake City, Utah 84104
888/866-5550
E-mail: tjackson@usor.state.ut.us
Web: www.usor.state.ut.us/ucat/index.htm

For more information on your rights and assistive technology:

Utah Parent Center
2290 East 4500 South, Suite 110
Salt Lake City, Utah 84117
800/468-1160 (V/TTY)
E-mail: katie@utahparentcenter.org
Web: www.utahparentcenter.org

Disability Law Center
205 North 400 West
Salt Lake City, Utah 84103
800/662-9080 (V/TTY)
E-mail: info@disabilitylawcenter.org
Web: www.disabilitylawcenter.org

Also available in Braille, large print, audiotape, and disk formats.

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Making a Difference